

VOTE 2014 -- Public service is a "very worthwhile endeavour": Buck

By Brock Weir

When Councillor Evelyn Buck looks back on her decades in public service, she says she feels people have come to "trust her."

Serving in multiple capacities since her first successful election in Canada's Centennial Year, including two stints as Aurora's mayor, Councillor Buck says it is always gratifying when people come to her with the sense that she can get things done.

"I don't make promises when I am a candidate for office," she says. "All I ask is for people to trust me to do what I think is in their interest and whatever issue needs to be dealt with. I come forward with issues I think have a priority."

As such, she says she believes her work is far from over and intends to once again seek re-election this year for the 2014-2018 term of Council.

"At my age, I always think of that George Burns line that 'at my age, I don't buy green bananas'," she says with a laugh. "I take it day by day and that has been my habit, but by September 12, I believe my name will be on that candidates' list."

"What makes me come back for more is I believe that people like to have me there and it means a lot to them. I recognize that I am very often a solitary voice, but I believe it means a lot to people in Aurora to have that voice. As long as I am able, I will do it because I enjoy doing it. Never mind about 'like' it. Like is a very trivial word. I think this is a very worthwhile endeavour."

At the end of the day, Councillor Buck questions how some people discount the civic process and the freedom residents' have to govern themselves. In her role as Councillor, she says she wants people to "understand how precious [the process] is."

Looking back at the last three years or so of the incumbent Council, Councillor Buck expresses a degree of disappointment. There was much to achieve, she says, but it didn't quite hit the mark. Considering the previous Council, there was, from her perspective, much to undo, and although they made some headway, too much was left undone. A particular issue, she says, is Council not flexing its collective muscle as strongly as she believes it should.

"I don't think this Council understands, and I don't think the last Council understood that they are the authority," she says, noting she believes too much is being left in the hands of municipal staff. "They have repeatedly made themselves subject to the administration."

Additional concerns she noted include the planned Joint Operations Centre on Industrial Parkway North, the location of which she says is a poor choice due to the traffic coming in and out of the building onto a busy traffic artery on a bend in the road, Aurora's fledgling new Customer Service Strategy, and her ongoing opposition to the Aurora Cultural Centre's operations, along with Council's new role in sitting on the board.

The fact that the Aurora Cultural Board can still discuss things behind closed doors under their new agreement with the Town still rankles, but she counts the new agreement as one of the positives of this Council.

"[The agreement] is still not what it should be, but it is better than what it was," she said. "That took a lot of effort on staff's part to get it there. It is still a problem for me that they can make decisions behind closed doors."

But, as the Centre is largely funded by tax dollars, she says she believes everything should be discussed out in the open. Were they funded privately or completely through their own fundraising, things would be different as far as she is concerned.

The new agreement between the Town and the Board also enshrines the use of the second floor Aurora Room as exhibit space for the Aurora Collection, another plus in her book.

As she looks ahead to the next 10 months of Council before the October 27 Municipal Election will determine just who will be sitting at that table, Councillor Buck says she looks forward to seeing that museum through.

'I am glad that we have a foot in the door with the museum and have established ownership of the collection,' she says, adding that there still needs to be more done in allocating resources to provide 'stewardship' of the artefacts. 'It is not quite the space that was envisaged, but we're moving forward.'

At the end of the day, when she looks at the rest of her goals for the remainder of this term, it loops back to the issue of trust and underscoring the importance of civic engagement as well as ensuring tax payers get the best bang for their, if you pardon the expression, buck.

'Participation is a highly worthwhile endeavour and hopefully after this new election, we will have maybe a little bit more [engagement],' she says. 'Maybe someone else of a similar mind to myself will be elected and there will be a little more support for my ideas. I continue to believe my ideas are on a solid base for good government in a small town like Aurora.'

Next week, The Auroran checks in with Councillors Sandra Humfryes and Paul Pirri.