

VOTE 2014: Risk management is one thing, but one can't be afraid to be bold, says candidate Greg Cook



By Brock Weir

After serving on multiple boards and advisory committees in and around Aurora, seeking a Council seat was the "next logical progression" for candidate Greg Cook.

A civil engineer by trade, he was first inspired to get involved in his community after moving here 18 years ago. In that time, he continues to serve on Aurora's Public Library Board and, until Aurora's Citizen Advisory Committees wrapped up this year in anticipation of this municipal election, put in his time as a member of the Environmental and Trails Advisory Committees.

"I thought I was able to bring my perspective and offer value too from an engineer's view of the word," he explains. "Basically, I thought it was timely to throw my hat in the ring and I had my enthusiasm for it. It is about helping others and caring about our community.

Obviously we have to, or we wouldn't consider it in the first place."

Over the years, Mr. Cook says he has been actively following the development of Aurora's Promenade Study, a blueprint on how to improve the Town's Yonge Street and Wellington Street corridors. Downtown revitalization is something he says is particularly important, and something that should continue to gain momentum in the next term of Council.

"I feel that I have been [supporting it] in a behind-the-scenes way, but I would like to try my hand at doing it in more of a policy and strategic role too," he says. "Sometimes it is better to steer the ship than simply plotting the course the captain has ordered."

To this end, he is not necessarily prepared to hang his electoral hat on a ship that has already sailed. Issues like controlling growth to be productive and effective, and stressing the importance of parks, parking, and infrastructure is something he believes all candidates can agree on "the bread and butter issues."

"Anyone who is on Council, whoever is elected mayor, they are all going to have to deal with those things almost as background noise," he explains. "That is all baseline stuff."

Not so baseline is the first plank in his platform, which he dubs "invoking the Spirit of Kaizen", building on the philosophy of "continuous improvement and formal strategic policy to enhance everything we do."

"Everything we do is going to change next year, in five years, and in 10 years," he says. "A lot of legislation already anticipates that

kind of regular updating, but a commitment to a broader initiative in that direction speaks to sustainability and it speaks to proper government, but what it really is about is change.?

The environment is his second primary platform plank, particularly in how it relates to parks, development, and growth. Aurora needs to focus on more 'green' buildings, being 'smarter' about infrastructure as well as 'our expectations' in relation to the things Aurora can do by itself and in relation to other stakeholders like the Region and the Province.

'It is about the environment and we are a subset of the environment,' he says. 'God and nature made the earth, there is the human system within it, and within that human system is a small part of it called the Town of Aurora, and that is really where we're trying to focus our efforts [in] being elected to Council.'

Technological investments form the third part of his plank, something that fits into his engineer's wheelhouse. A move towards LED lighting on streets is a 'fantastic' initiative, he says, that can have a huge payoff, but there is room to be creative. Aurora is not going to have a university or college, or even a satellite campus in the foreseeable future, but other 'niche opportunities' can be explored, such as a Fab Lab.

'It might be a payoff, but we have to recognize it might not,' he says. 'Sometimes things don't work out and we have to recognize that is a risk. Aurora, as a Council, has to recognize we are risk managers, risk mitigators, but we can't be perfect and we can't be expected to be perfect. We have to do the best we can for the constituency and based upon the information available at the time.'

As the October 27 election draws closer, Mr. Cook says he is looking forward to getting a better sense of who his fellow candidates are, see how they perform under stress, and getting a sense of himself. The process, he adds, has also given him perspective on who he would not be comfortable sharing the Council table with, although he is not going to name names.

'[Coming forward] with anything less than a spirit of humility, hard work and honesty is, I think, a recipe for disaster for any of us putting our names forward and I think it is most important that we all realise it is the idea of service above self. You go forward in the day thinking, 'Why am I doing this? Why am I asking to be elected? If all you want to do is have a high stress, less than minimum wage type of opportunity where a lot of people are going to get to know you and a lot of people might not be happy with you, you may as well go to work in fast food and not do a good job in that context because this is a whole other level. Quality is one's commitment to grow and change. Without that, you're going to have trouble in this environment of continuous change.'