

?We stand with Greta? ? Local activists, lawmakers send climate change message



By Brock Weir

Just a few days ago, Yvonne Kelly's son took her aside and said he wasn't going to have children. It wasn't a statement of ability or even, necessarily, desire. To him, it was a reasoned statement of fact.

?He said, ?It just makes no sense,?' she recalls. ?That really hurt my heart.?

And it is spurring action.

The reason it didn't make sense, she says, is what kind of world would her son be welcoming a child of his own to?

That weighed heavily on the minds of about a dozen or so Aurora residents who gathered intermittently at Fleury Park on Friday afternoon to stand with the thousands marching in Toronto, Montreal, and in cities around the world for the Global Climate Strike, a movement led by 16-year-old Swedish activist Greta Thunberg in her fight against climate change, a movement in which her voice has captured the world's attention.

Aurora's efforts did not have the numbers they had hoped for, but what they lacked in numbers, participants ? including Councillor Rachel Gilliland ? made up for in passion.

While Ms. Kelly is currently standing as Newmarket-Aurora's NDP candidate in this month's Federal

election, she said the fight against climate change ? and, indeed, Greta's message ? is one that transcends partisan boundaries.

?The changes that need to be made are astronomical and they are at a much bigger level,? she said. ?We need to hold our governments, who are our spokespeople, accountable to make sure that they don't just stand up strongly to emitters and those who are benefiting from climate change. This doesn't just happen. This is something that was done to the earth and it was done to all of us. This is an issue we can't be divided on. This one crosses all those lines and there is a power in that.?

This was a view shared by members of the group, who were organized by local activist Heidi Stoecklin.

?All of us are here for reasons and we realize climate change is very real and we want to support the work of Greta and the youth,? said Ms. Stocklin. ?We are just really wishing to keep this movement going within our Town. I feel Aurora really cares and we can come together to show that. I wish to say I'm with Greta, we're with Greta, and maybe one day we can all say ?Aurora is with Greta! loud and proud.?

Greta Thunberg's efforts to highlight the immediacy of climate change captured the public's attention almost immediately, but hit fever pitch over the week leading up to the Global Climate Strike with her passionate and provocative plea for action at the United Nations and her challenge to U.S. President Donald Trump.

Her remarks won legions of new supporters, but also emboldened her detractors, an issue which caught the attention of Heather Lambert who attended Friday's rally in Aurora.

?I have heard some discouraging remarks about Greta from different individuals, even in the media. I think that it is going to require the passion of youth and idealism in order to make the changes that need to be changed and need to happen in this world,? said Ms. Lambert. ?I don't know if we can even turn back the damage we have done already and if we're going to start, we have to start right now and hope that we can make things better for our children, our grandchildren, their children and so on because it is not just about us and it is certainly not just about the corporate world.

?The corporate world has money and they will take care of themselves when they need to, but the common individual is the one that is going to suffer here and that is why it is so important to get behind that passion and idealism of youth and bring in the youth for something that is going to benefit us all.?

The words were not taken lightly by Councillor Rachel Gilliland, who was told by activist Teresa Porter that Aurora should declare a climate emergency.

?I agree with the strike and I am here supporting not just my family, my community and the world,? said Councillor Gilliland. ?This is so important. Governments really need to step up. We are the loud voices and I stand with you guys and our community. My daughter is in Queen's doing the same thing, I have another daughter at McMaster doing the same thing, and they are so super-concerned about their future and this next Federal election is really important to them because they look at their future like, ?Am I going to be able to have a family? Are we going to be able to survive?' They are really paying attention and we need to pay attention too.

?Being on Council and being a part of the community and being with you guys right now, I am standing here and saying with a strong voice that we need to pay attention, we need to wake up. Climate change is real and we need to do something about it now.?

The Councillor added she is currently preparing a notice of motion which will call on Council to declare a climate emergency in the coming weeks.

The purpose of this declaration, she says, is to "allow informed decision making around the Council table to help weigh in on the carbon impact along with other considerations in its decisions, public education, and publicly reporting on the progress of our Town's climate action."