

VOTE 2014: Gallo launches mayoral campaign with bid to give power back to the people?



By Brock Weir

Get ready to see a lot more of John Gallo.

Gallo officially launched his mayoral bid before a packed fundraising dinner at The Mansion on Saturday night. Joined by his family, he said Aurorans are feeling the "winds of change" and he wanted to "put the power of Town Hall" back into the hands of "the people."

"For the past six years as a municipal Councillor and 18 years as a resident, I have heard Aurorans say loud and clear that they want more from their local government," he said. "They want a mayor with a long-term vision. They want open, transparent government that encourages participation and does not fight accountability."

According to Gallo, this latter attitude is typified by the current Council and, in particular, incumbent Mayor Geoffrey Dawe. Dawe, said Gallo, "stops effective participation" in municipal decisions.

"Change is now necessary because for too long we have disarmed people," said Gallo, referring to a quote from Machiavelli that when you "disarm" people you show "you distrust them either through cowardice or a lack of confidence."

"Aurorans are ready for this change, [and] I am ready to bring this change to Aurora so Aurorans have a strong voice in civic decisions, and they feel they have a part in helping shape the future of Aurora."

Giving people a further say in municipal affairs was the first pillar introduced in what he says will be a "10-Point Plan" under the banner of his "Imagine Aurora 2030 Movement", something he said was "developed with the ongoing input of thousands of residents."

To this end, one of his top priorities, he said is establishing a "Citizen's Task Force" to ensure residents "are engaged, included, and their voices are heard" in the areas of land use and transportation, housing and neighbourhoods, Town Facilities and Services, and Creativity and Innovation.

"I envision this Task Force to be an incubation for great ideas," he said. "It will be citizen-centred and not staff-driven, as are all of our other committees."

The second point of the 10-point plan was bringing a "quality hotel and convention centre" to Aurora. This is something Gallo said

residents have said they want, and he is ready to deliver.

“Over the past year, I have been working with two international convention centre developers, and they have both come to me and declared their interest,” he said. “As Mayor, I will lead the charge to bring a new Aurora convention centre and hotel to this Town, [and] I am very, very excited about the opportunity.”

The other eight points of his 10-point plan would be rolled out in due course, particularly in conjunction with his initiative dubbed the “Gallo: Voice of the People Backyard Party,” where supporters will host the candidate to meet with residents to provide input and to discuss “the future of Aurora.”

“I have a vibrant, passionate belief that residents should be more in the know, more engaged, more active, and I believe citizens deserve more from their local government and representatives,” he said. “I am a seasoned civic leader with a more inclusive approach and a powerful, intriguing and distinctive vision for Aurora. Whether it is representing the best interests of the taxpayers, being fiscally responsible and getting the best value for every tax dollar, being in touch with Aurora family needs and creating balance between the traditional and the contemporary Aurora, I believe I am the right mayor at the right time. I have a vision for Aurora 2030 and I want to take the power of Town Hall and give it back to the people.”

Among the people in attendance at Saturday's campaign launch were several former members of Council, along with new Council candidates Jim Abram, Alice Lalas and Anthony Pullano. Councillor Chris Ballard, now running as the Liberal candidate in the 2014 Provincial Election, was also on hand to lend his support for the campaign.

“I am really passionate about Aurora,” said Ballard. “I am worried about its financial future. I am glad John has put his name forward to be involved and I am convinced that with John at the helm, Aurora will be in good hands. I like John Gallo. I would like him to be my Mayor. Get behind him. Aurora needs him.”

Looking out into the room of people, Gallo said people are looking for “change” on a variety of fronts including “residents angry over the way the jazz festival was kicked out of this Town” or volunteers who have resigned from Town Committees because their voices weren't being heard.”

“Together, we can do better,” said Gallo. “When more feedback is collected from Aurorans, it allows them a newfound sense of empowerment. When collecting more feedback from Aurorans, new ideas can be found. When Aurorans can be heard, they have more interest in their community. When more feedback is collected, Council can make more informed decisions.”