

Incoming and expanding businesses touted by Mayor



By Brock Weir

As he prepared to step in front of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce this week to deliver his annual address, Mayor Geoff Dawe had one key message in mind? "We are doing really well here in Aurora, thank you very much!?"

When he looks at what it means to be "well", Mayor Dawe looks at the number of people actively participating in the community, whether it is through organized sports, leisure activities, or activities in general but, of course, the state of the economy in Town is a major factor as well.

"The common perception always is governments are bloated and there are too many people sitting around doing nothing, which is certainly not the case," says Mayor Dawe. "Is there room for efficiencies? Always, but there is not a host of people hanging around doing nothing looking for things to do. I don't know how you get that message across, but it is an important one we need to get across."

Case in point, a recent trip Mayor Dawe took to North Carolina, along with Anthony Ierullo, Aurora's Manager of Long Range Planning, to woo PreGel, one of the leading businesses in the gelato industry which focuses on providing equipment, resources and training to businesses looking to break into the market, small or large.

"They have been looking in and around York Region for quite a while as to where to locate and we pursued them pretty aggressively to the point of Anthony and I going to North Carolina and making the pitch," says Mayor Dawe. "They will be locating here this March. That is pretty exciting because they will be bringing people into Town."

They take possession of lands in Leslie Street's business corridor next 1 month and are just one of a number of businesses set to move into the area. More deals are soon to be finalized, but the area is now close to being 80 per cent sold out.

The area is not only attracting new businesses to the area, but also businesses already in Aurora looking for expansion opportunities, such as Axiom, a plastic moulding company for the automotive industry based on Mary Street, which is set for an expansion into the business park, creating new jobs along the way.

?I think that is a great indicator,? said Mayor Dawe of Aurora's economic health. ?We have been marketing those lands on Leslie for 12 or 15 years. We first got them in the early 2000s, but with Bulk Barn coming in, it managed to tip the balance in terms of moving forward on those.?

While Bulk Barn might have tipped the balance in favour of concrete action over the last 15 years, the same cannot be said for a couple of the priorities Mayor Dawe outlined in his 2015 speech to the Chamber, namely a firm decision on the future of Library Square as well as a vision for what to do with proceeds from the sale of Aurora Hydro.

These still remain top priorities, he says, but now under the banner of the Cultural Precinct.

?We are actually moving to some kind of resolution on what we're going to do in that area,? says Mayor Dawe of recent debates around the Council table, and within the community, on a draft vision for the Precinct. ?If we all agreed on what it was we wanted to do, I think dealing with the Hydro Funds would be a much easier decision.?

Should the draft vision be adopted as is, hypothetically, the proposed parking garage envisioned to be built between the Church Street School and the Aurora Public Library would be a ?good use? of that money, he says.

?The Hydro Money came from selling a significant Town asset, so I think it should go into acquiring a significant Town asset and, quite frankly, [that money] is not doing anything for us sitting in the bank,? says Mayor Dawe. ?Notwithstanding the fact there are people in the area who are not keen on it, I think it is an opportunity to really create something in that area. [The biggest challenge] will be getting people to agree on what it is we do. There are people who have completely different ideas.?

Should the Cultural Precinct plan be delayed beyond 2016, his Plan B, as far as top priorities for the year ahead go, is a re-thinking of parking along Yonge Street's historic core.

Mayor Dawe outlined his vision for on-street parking, which would have limited through traffic between Wellington and Kennedy Streets to one lane in each direction with the rest of the space dedicated to parking. Although the concept for a pilot project was initially greenlit by Council, it received a less-than-warm response when the report for implementation came forward earlier this year.

?It disappointed me,? said Mayor Dawe of the reaction around the table. ?It has been out there for a while and I never heard anybody pushing back on it. All we're talking about is a pilot. A pilot [is something] you can do very easily and inexpensively.

?We are doing really well here in Aurora, thank you very much. I do think [that] sometimes gets lost in the shuffle. We tend to focus on things that affect us directly the most and not look at the overall [picture]. From an overall perspective, we're doing really well.?