

VOTE 2014: After over 40 years in public life, Buck stands on record of 'getting things done' for residents



By Brock Weir

There are few certainties in life, but for Evelyn Buck one thing always rings particularly true - you can't make any assumptions until after the votes are counted.

Not taking anything for granted is a philosophy Ms. Buck says she has lived by in her over 40 years of public service in Aurora, serving in multiple capacities, including time as Aurora's mayor, and several terms as a Town Councillor. While the vote counts have often gone her way, there have also been times she has not fared as successful, but she says she has always felt she can make a difference, and that is why she has put her name forward once again for a fourth consecutive term on Council.

'I feel I have a contribution to make, and I think I can make a difference,' she says. 'That contribution comes out of my many years of experience, my knowledge of the Town, and my understanding of what people want and how to represent people.'

'[Residents] feel I am the only one who cares about the burden of taxes, what it does to people, and I am the only one who speaks for them and has the courage to say the things that need to be said, that they want to hear said.'

While she says she stands on her record of being able to get things done for the residents, she admits that these feelings are not universally held across Aurora, something she counts as her biggest challenge in this campaign.

'I think there are a number of groups in Town that would like to see the back of me,' she says with a chuckle. 'I have opposed a number of projects, and I am still opposed to funnelling half-a-million dollars into the Cultural Centre. I don't think we're getting value and I think we should not be giving any outside group money like that to spend.'

Ms. Buck says she is still not satisfied that all decisions related to the Cultural Centre are being made out in the open and says she sees little 'advantage' to the Town stemming from extensive renegotiations of Aurora's Cultural Services Agreement with the Centre which took place over a great deal of this Council term. She stresses, however, that she does not critique what the Cultural Centre is doing, or suggest that they are doing anything 'improper' with the money, but it is a matter of the elected body's 'responsibility' to be accountable for how taxpayers' dollars are spent.

To this end, Ms. Buck says she counts 'bringing the public's attentions to various schemes and projects' suggested at the Council table, ones she says 'lack business planning' as some of her most effective contributions to the most recent Council term. Case in point, she says, was the proposed heritage park for a large swath of land on Yonge Street stretching from Irwin Avenue in the south

to the northern boundary of Hillary House.

Spending over \$10 million for real estate out of Aurora's Hydro Funds could not be justified, in her opinion, but looking ahead to the next four years a decision will have to be made on what to do with that approximately \$34 million in reserves, and she has a few initiatives she would like to bring forward.

'I would like to see a decision made on how we are going to use that asset,' she says. 'If Council doesn't make a decision on how that money is going to be used, and used for something we would never dream of taxing people for, if we don't use it, it will be frittered away so there is never anything to show for it.'

'I wasn't happy about having to sell Aurora Hydro. It wasn't an easy decision to make, but it was forced upon us by the Province. They didn't want to deal with small hydro utilities and they wanted us to amalgamate. We lost something very valuable, a very valuable asset, when we sold it and I think it should be replaced with an asset of equal value that would make as big a difference in people's lives as having our own Hydro utility did.'

Over the past four years as councillor, Ms. Buck has advocated that this money be used for a multipurpose facility in what has become known as Library Square on Victoria Street, currently occupied by the former homes of the Aurora Public Library and Aurora Seniors' Centre. Looking ahead over the next four years, she says a chief concern will be to ensure residents are getting the best value for their money, and the services they need.

'I think our biggest challenge is in making our investments sensibly and being sure that there will be a benefit,' she concludes. 'We have funds to invest. Four years is long enough to get something done and accomplished, and show people what has been accomplished in that length of time. I don't like four year terms of office, but that is one advantage of having a four year term of office, that you can have a chance at starting something and completing it within that time period and you can go to the people with something to show for it.'