

Schaefer seeks re-election; honoured to serve

Mark Pavilons

Debbie Schaefer loves her job as Ward 5 councillor.

In fact, she sees it as an honour to serve.

Her enthusiasm for King Township continues to grow and that's why she's seeking re-election in this fall's municipal election.

She believes she can c



ontinue to be a positive influence on King's evolution. She admitted she's invested a lot of time and effort 'learning the ropes' in her first time and she would like four more years to use that insight for the benefit of King residents.

'I felt privileged to have the opportunity to make my home in King when I retired in 2003. There are so many opportunities for creative living here in this unique landscape and wonderful geography. King is a growing community with easy access to Canada's largest business and cultural centre, and it has its own deep historical roots that must be honoured. King is where the urban and the rural meet. This interface, in addition to our growth, creates a tremendous tension and energy. '

Schaefer is quite proud of the creation of King's Sustainability Plan. She was the task force chair, a highlight for her.

'The committee itself was energetic and so committed to developing our sustainability plan. Our engagement with more than 3,000 people including youth, parents, seniors and business owners was both enjoyable and important. And our end product, the Sustainability Plan, is valuable as it influences the priorities of staff and the desired outcomes of projects. Along with the four ambassadors of the task force, I joined the Sustainability Committee which formed in the fall 2012. Our work is focused on outreach to the community to influence individuals and groups to make choices which will make King sustainable.'

Keeping connected with constituents, Schaefer is pleased with her blog 'debbieschaefer.ca'. It serves to increase public awareness of issues within King and the opportunities for individuals to engage in the process.

She often provides her own perspective on the topics and she follows up with reporting the outcomes and final decisions. She also highlights special events occurring in the Township.

Her other objective is to tell her constituents just where she stands on important issues.

'I am proud of how the development application at Keele and McClure has evolved. A forecast based on the first public meeting would have been resolution only with an acrimonious fight at the OMB. But, instead constructive discussions and negotiations between the established community adjacent to the site and the developer ended up in a proposal where both parties are satisfied and there are no expensive legal fees. And very importantly we have a subdivision plan which is definitely different than what was built 20 years ago, but is respectful of what predates it.'

This, she said, needs to be the template for other developments, and indeed it is being re-applied in another development on Dew Street.

Generally, she feels good about the past term, but she does wish she had started with the insight and knowledge that she now has. There are some critical strategic opportunities ahead of council in the coming term.

First, there is the review of the Official Plan and updating King's zoning bylaw.

'I do see these as planning tools to influence our growth and change so that there is respect for the qualities which has made King a great place to live. I don't believe it will be productive to try and stand in the way of evolution by automatically saying no to anything that alters the structure of the present situation. I do believe though that we need to guide and manage the growth and

change with imaginative bold plans.?

A hot topic for those concerned about the environment are the 2015 reviews of the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt plans. King also needs to execute and deliver the Sustainability Plan and the Economic Development Strategy. In the fall, King will have full control again of the Museum space, and Schaefer would like it to become a cultural hub as expressed in the Museum Strategy. There are important developments to be executed in King City, such as King City Corporate Centre.

?We need to be more effective in leveraging our cultural heritage which includes protecting it. Finally, there are numerous opportunities to leverage partnerships we have established in the last four years.?

She really enjoys the diversity of topics and issues that she continues to learn from.

She appreciates the extent to which she can help select priority focus areas.

Even though there has not been a serious illegal fill issue in King, it's happening in nearby jurisdictions. This, she said, represents a significant risk to our aquifers and drinking water.

?Rather than waiting for a crisis I researched it and attended several a multi stakeholder meetings; then I introduced a resolution requesting a specific regulatory change at the federal level. It was gratifying to see our resolution adopted by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and I am more optimistic about achieving our goal with FCM working on it.?

The ?King Team??is outstanding to work with, Schaefer pointed out. She lauded her colleagues for ?coaching??her and making her first experience a really enjoyable one.

?I am very pleased to hear feedback that the public is comfortable to come to council and make deputations. I also want to credit the Township staff for their consistently professional response to my questions about background to specific issues and underlying policies.?

Schaefer pointed to change in the municipality.

When she ran in 2010 she was ?acutely aware that King was entering a period of significant change.?

The last four years has shown her what this growth means: more youth wanting to play soccer, hockey etc. and hence the need for more recreational infrastructure; higher volume of traffic in our villages creating concern about safety and the call for traffic calming; frequency of older housing stock in established sections of our villages being replaced with much larger houses; increasing interest in severances within the villages; new residents living in close proximity to valuable natural heritage features without an understanding of the stewardship responsibility; more people asking for better sidewalks and roads within the villages.

?I have also seen how tough but doable it is to create strategic plans with meaningful public input; plans like our Integrated Community Sustainability Plan, the Economic Development Plan are two good examples of this. I have also seen that the growth creates unique opportunities.?

She pointed to two examples ? the partnership with a developer allowing use of the Museum in exchange for much needed infrastructure repair and expansion; the building of a skateboard park popular with our youth was largely funded by development. Schaefer carries out her role with honour and enthusiasm, even though it's sometimes tough when there's seldom unanimity among constituents. There is also the reality of ?fiscal constraint.?

Schaefer points out that no councillor acts alone and final decisions are made by the entire council.

?All I can promise and deliver is that I will act with integrity and will seek to make good decisions.?

Schaefer enjoys the closeness to the public that municipal politics bring.

?One has the opportunity to help an individual manage a specific issue. And one addresses challenges affecting the whole community. ?

?I can help with issues which are really in the domain of the upper levels. Sometimes the help is simply informing the public of what is being debated. Or I can be of value by ensuring that the local impact of a Regional project is truly appreciated and taken into account as there is power in having the local councillor demand attention as opposed to the lone citizen asking for consideration of their issues.?