

Boosting local business key to community's success

By Mark Pavilons

King Township has the distinction of being unique in many ways.

The largest geographic municipality in York Region has to juggle a small population, development pressures, limited revenues and still protect the environment.

The ultimate catch-22 is attracting and retaining business while maintaining the small town charm.

The King Chamber of Commerce challenged all municipal candidates to show how they would support business if elected. They gathered at Nobleton Lakes for a breakfast debate last Thursday morning.

Chamber president Tom Allen noted the "magic" of democracy is choice. He praised all candidates, newcomers and incumbents alike, for vying for office in this true public service.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini said he was humbled by his acclamation.

The past term has been a fruitful one and a host of strategic plans have laid the groundwork. The Township has a good working relationship with the Chamber, which had input into the recently approved CIP and Economic Development strategy.

"It's a testament to what happens when we work together," he said.

We can't sit on our laurels and the coming term will be a time to implement various strategies.

Ward 1 councillor Cleve Mortelliti has also been acclaimed.

The resident since 1972 uses his engineering and knowledge of the development industry to King's benefit, helping to make King City (in particular) a place to work, live and play.

The strategies that impact King's economic future drew praise from all the candidates, but local business people wanted action, as soon as possible, to make the business climate more inviting.

John Ciarallo, owner of John's No Frills in Nobleton, pointed out he's made a substantial investment in the community and he has a payroll in excess of \$1 million annually. Business needs roughly 2% to 3% growth annually to survive and he's concerned that once Nobleton is built out, there area will stagnate.

The entrance to the plaza presents challenges to south-bound drivers and there have been several accidents along Highway 27. While the development is finished, he'd like to see some traffic calming measures to address this short-sighted design flaw.

"As a business owner I need action now," he said.

Ward 2 incumbent Peter Grandilli said he's been lobbying York Region for years about improvements to Nobleton's core.

Anna Roberts, Ward 5 candidate, said local concerns have to be addressed quickly.

Schomberg's Greg Locke, Ward 4 candidate, said we need to help facilitate a strong retail base.

David Boyd, Ward 2 candidate, said we need to be proactive in implementing some of the action items in the CIP to build a strong retail base. "Let's not wait," he urged. As a firefighter, Boyd has responded to accidents on Highway 27, so he suggests taking the concern to the Region and asking it be looked at.

Incumbent Ward 6 councillor Avia Eek admitted that reports and strategies sitting on the shelf do nothing unless we take action. She said every year at budget time, staff asks each councillor what their top ward priorities are - their proverbial wish list. This is a great time for residents to lobby their councillors and tell them what the local priorities are.

Ward 5 incumbent Debbie Schaefer said council always has to find and balance priorities and come up with efficient ways of getting things done. They need to hear from residents about local issues and they need to secure funds from upper-tier levels of government.

Nobleton's Joe Buscema said they need a strong voice at the Region and he would work with Mayor Pellegrini to bring such concerns to the regional council table.

Veteran Ward 3 councillor Linda Pabst said the situation in front of No Frills needs to be addressed, and she vowed to put pressure on the Region in the coming term.

The Township is currently reviewing its development charges bylaw, which is out of date, and staff have presented preliminary data to council, noting hefty increases are warranted.

Allen wanted to know the impacts on attracting business if DCs are too high.

Schaefer noted that money from DCs goes to pay for future infrastructure and without this revenue source, local services would suffer.

Ward 5 challenger Chris Gafoor noted huge increases in DCs would be a major deterrent to new business and they must be fair and competitive.

Incumbent Bill Cober said the municipality has to review its DC bylaw every few years and the process has begun. To be fiscally responsible, the Township has to look at increases but they will look at neighbouring municipalities for competitive rates. Mayor Pellegrini said King's DCs are really low and they are merely catching up. The reason the recommendations from staff seem so high is the huge discrepancy between King's rates and the current ones being charged elsewhere. But it's a vital revenue stream for the municipality.

Patty Fleetwood, Chamber member and head of the Nobleton Village Association, said there's a bit of a disconnect between the Chamber and Township regarding new business support. She often fields inquiries from prospective businesses and directs them to the Township. But it's inefficient and she'd prefer to see a sort of 'business centre' to help facilitate those wanting to set up shop in King.

Roberts agreed more needs to be done in respect to outreach.

Buscema said the ward councillor could be the point of first contact.

Schaefer said this could be looked at during the 2015 budget talks at the Township.

Locke said the Township's Economic Development office is the 'right place to be' for prospective investors.

A Chamber member wanted to know whether tax incentives or breaks would help draw businesses to the area.

Roberts agreed the Township should provide some sort of incentive.

Locke said he would be careful about 'throwing money around.' While large-scale businesses tend to leverage taxes, he said making communities attractive to employers is key.

Ward 2 candidate Jim Streb said King is attractive to business but offering exemptions is not a logical approach.

Gafoor stressed incentives are not a long-term strategy, adding the top draws for business location include rent, parks, restaurants and schools. Businesses look for quality of life, he said.

Buscema said tax breaks should be looked at on a case-by-case basis.

Cober cited the example of when large auto parts manufacturer Showa located in Schomberg. King worked with the provincial government to offer various incentives.