

Mario Russo running for Regional Councillor, Wards 4, 5 and 6

Russo has most recently worked at the Ontario Land Tribunal By Zachary Roman

Mario Russo says his resume makes him a good candidate for Regional Councillor, Wards 4, 5 and 6.

Russo resigned from his job at the Ontario Land Tribunal, where he adjudicated on planning decisions, to focus full time on his Council run. He's lived in Mississauga, Brampton, and now Caledon, and says this would benefit him if elected to the Regional position.?

While he lives in Ward 2, Russo says one of the reasons he's running for Regional Councillor in Wards 4, 5 and 6 is his skill set and desire to be involved in important land planning decisions in the area.

He says while Caledon cannot fight the growth that's been mandated by the Province ? an estimated population increase to 300,000 by 2051 ? it can guide where and how the growth is implemented.

Russo says Caledon's new Official Plan, which will be voted on by next term's Mayor and Council, is an extremely strong tool for doing just that.

?For me, what I'd love to see is good, sustainable, quality growth. I do not want Caledon to become a ?Brampton 2.0' ? and that's not a knock to Brampton,? says Russo. ?Brampton has grown to 700,000 people now, and we very likely are never going to get there, nor should we get there. We're 80 per cent protected in Caledon; what's important to us is how we grow in that 20 per cent.?

Russo says it's important for people to not become disengaged or disenfranchised from municipal politics. He says if they do, and don't vote, their distaste for it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy as nothing will change.

Russo wants to get more people out voting, and is dedicating himself to his campaign full-time during election season. He says he's going to be door knocking and trying to meet as many people as possible, trying to get them invested in the election.

Russo says he's asking people to be their voice at council, and that, if elected, it's going to be his responsibility to ?do the homework? and vote in his constituents' best interests. He says he doesn't see the boundaries of Wards 4, 5, and 6 as the limit of where he'll stop advocating, and that he wants to see the ?silo approach? to politics taken away.

A major goal for Russo is getting Caledon a GO Train station, and he says while it may not happen right away, the Town needs to continue planning and advocating for it. Russo says Caledon can learn from the positive ways Brampton and Mississauga have grown, while getting rid of the negative aspects of growth in those municipalities.

?You cannot have this rapid growth that has occurred in Peel, and then infrastructure built afterwards,? says Russo. Timing matters when it comes to housing development too, Russo says, giving the example of how he'd like to see larger five to 10 storey housing developments in Ward 6 ? once there's a GO station there. He says building a big tower in one of Caledon's small villages makes no sense, but that intensified housing developments will not just be needed, but necessary, in Caledon's urban growth areas.

?One of the biggest concerns environmentally throughout the province, and everybody complains about it and rightfully so, is urban sprawl,? says Russo. ?You cannot deviate or eliminate urban sprawl unless you increase your intensification in the appropriate areas.?

Russo says he is not one to make promises that he can't keep, and that he thinks it's an obligation for elected officials to be honest with people when they don't know the answer to a question.

'The only thing I can promise, and this is what I stand behind, is that if you ever need it, I'll be open and be at your door to hear your concern and do my best to get the results,' says Russo. 'Because if I'm already promising something before understanding the issue, before understanding the dynamic of who's going to be there at Council, both at the municipal and the regional level? you're doing a disservice to that person by saying 'I'm going to take care of it.'?'

One of Russo's goals, if elected, is to continue the revitalization of Downtown Bolton, and he used this to demonstrate his philosophy. He says it's not a promise, but a goal and a plan.

'It's something that we need to work on collaboratively. And what my definition of revitalization is may not be your definition, so let's have that dialogue,' says Russo.

Russo says chairing Brampton's committee of adjustment for four years was great experience in the world of zoning and planning. He says he brings a well-rounded approach to the table, and that he's just as comfortable talking to someone in the trades as he is to someone with a PhD.

In addition to the work already mentioned here, Russo has been a massage therapist, ran a cafe and dessert shop, and been a property manager during his working life. He has a university degree in biology and psychology.

'I understand the whole aspect of dealing with staff and dealing with the public, having chaired the Committee of Adjustment, having sat at the Ontario Land Tribunal. But I also understand the guy who has a small business that can't keep the lights on,' says Russo. 'I think that's something that's vital and is an asset to me.'

Russo says he'd like to bring a proactive, rather than reactionary, approach to politics. He says the Town needs to think far ahead, giving the example of bringing higher education to Caledon.

While it may not yet make sense to have a university or college here, he says the conversations about it must begin so that when Caledon is ready to support it, the wheels are already in motion.

'I want to be your voice, and I believe I have the tools to be your voice. There's a lot of people that are vying in these elections that I think are great people. And I think they're there for genuine reasons. I think that's the most important thing? but then the second part of that, is do you have the skillset in order to deliver? I'm not arrogant to say that I'm going to deliver on everything, but at least I know the avenues to try and get there,' says Russo. 'This is a job interview, and I'm asking for people's vote. And I'm telling them, this is my background: I've run small businesses, I've been in the private sector, I've been in the public sector, and this is how I want to advocate for you. And I'm a tireless worker ? when people are asleep, I'm still reading.'