

Mayoral candidate Annette Groves wants to make Caledon healthier

Groves says community events and engagement are top priorities

By Zachary Roman

Annette Groves has years of experience working with the Town of Caledon. First elected 2000, she's been elected every term since, with the exception of the term beginning in 2010 when she first ran for mayor.

Still, those years off from being an elected official were beneficial to her, she explained. It put her back in the perspective of a Caledon resident not in public service, and allowed her to understand what the challenges and frustrations are that can come along with that, she said.

Groves said she's worked with residents all across Caledon, not just in Ward 5 (Bolton).

"I believe that I have a very good understanding of what the Town of Caledon's needs are, what our residents' needs are, and certainly my experience I believe is something that is significant when looking at running a town," said Groves.

She's lived in Caledon for 30 years and said when she crosses north of Mayfield Road after being away from Caledon, she feels like she can breathe again.

"That's what Caledon is. It's a place with lots of green spaces. It's a place with different villages, hamlets, rural, urban. It's a wonderful community. It's a community where I just breathe," she said.

That's why it is such a priority for her to preserve Caledon's green spaces and farmland. She said she doesn't approve of Ministerial Zoning Orders, Highway 413, or big warehousing and distribution centres.

"One of the things that's most important to me is when we are developing and when we grow, the community needs to be a part of that. The community must be engaged. The community must have a say because this is going to impact their quality of life," said Groves.

She said the Town could be doing better in terms of communicating to its residents about important issues. She believes in hosting more town halls and community meetings, as well as trying to find creative ways to let people know when important decisions are coming up – such as by making an announcement at a community event. Not everyone reads the newspaper or social media, but Groves said she wants to reach and involve as many people as she can.

Health care is a passion for Groves and she said it's absolutely critical that people have the resources to stay healthy, both for their own sake and for the good of society and the economy.

She said creating a stable tax base in Caledon is a priority, explaining at present, too much of the burden is placed on Caledon residents. She hopes to attract businesses in the technology sector to the town, such as robotics businesses.

Groves also said Caledon would benefit from a skilled trades school, college, or university campus.

"We don't need the type of industry that you're seeing right now being developed in Caledon – that type of industry where you have a lot of warehousing distribution centers. They really take up a lot of land, but the majority of that type of industry does not employ the people who live here," said Groves. "So, you're using up large tracts of land and the employment side is not very good – not only do they not employ the people who live here, they're very expensive to maintain. They're hard on our roads."

For Groves, community events are extremely important. Over the years, she said she's been involved in organizing and fundraising for many community events and it gives her great joy to see kids smiling and neighbours connecting.

'People are dealing with all kinds of challenges? you want to have those things so that people can take a break from the challenges they're experiencing, for their mental well-being,' said Groves. 'For me, that's why community events are so important. It's about bringing people together.'

For those reasons and more, Groves said if elected she wants to include more room in the Town's budget for community events, making them a priority. She said Caledon has amazing volunteers but they need to know the Town is there to support them, give them a leg up, and take some of the fundraising burden away.

Groves gave examples of some things she's been proud of during her time as a Councillor.

She said she was happy to play a part in getting Caledon residents improved facilities to play Bocce. She said she reached out to community partners and businesses to help when residents said the Town's single court was not enough. Now, there are four, and an indoor facility so that Bocce can be played year-round by everyone. Groves is also proud of facilitating a 20-acre land donation for an urgent care facility as this aligns with her passion for health care.

She said when the Town of Caledon originally did not accept the donation, she took it to the Region of Peel which did accept the donation.

'Keeping people healthy is extremely important because if you're not healthy... it affects the entire economy. It affects everything,' said Groves.

Groves says she envisions a Caledon where residents can do everything they need and want, right at home.

'It is my job to make sure that I provide those resources, those services, those buildings, all of those things for the people here,' she said. Partnerships with businesses and individuals are a great way to accomplish that without cost to the taxpayer, explained Groves. 'If we want to reduce (greenhouse gases) and we want to reduce gridlock, then we need to provide things so that we have people driving less and doing more things in their own community,' she said.

Groves is the Chair of the strategic housing and homelessness committee at the Region of Peel. She said Caledon is losing a lot of its seniors as they age and she wants the Town to be in charge of what's developed so more diverse communities can be built.

'For me, community is integrating everyone: seniors, first-time homebuyers, people who are ready for their next move, and also those individuals with special needs,' said Groves. 'We use the word 'affordability.' What is affordability? It's different for everyone. It's very different for everyone. So, we've got to make sure that we are creating the type of housing that is truly affordable to different demographics.'

Groves registered as a candidate for mayor on the first day possible, May 2.

She said it's important for voters to know what her intentions are, and since Caledon is so big geographically, there's lots of ground to cover campaign-wise.

'What's really important to me, as someone who's looking to become the mayor of this town, is to make sure that we respect the people that live here. We don't always agree with each other? but we have to respect the public, that this is their town. We are employed by them. And so I believe that full transparency is extremely important in whatever we do,' said Groves.