

Community pride a key in Ward 41 Rooming house, parking violations seen as vital issues Half of residents

in Canada less than 15 years

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Hratch Aynedjian, front right, campaigns with volunteers in the ward where 10 candidates are running.

Residents of Ward 41, Scarborough-Rouge River, are tired of uncut lawns, garbage-strewn sidewalks and out-of-control street parking.

They point to a concern that has plagued the community for years: the growing number of illegal rooming houses.

"The lawns are poorly maintained. There are so many cars on the driveways and people just leave their junk on the sidewalks even when it's not on a collection day," complained Valerie Plunkett, a retired TV production assistant who has lived in the ward for 17 years and heads the 1,600-household Rosewood Taxpayers Association.

"And you don't see any bylaw enforcement because we are so short of bylaw-enforcement officers."

Bounded by Steeles Ave., Highway 401, Markham and McCowan Rds. and the CNR tracks to the west, Scarborough-Rouge has both a huge immigrant community — nearly half the residents have been in Canada less than 15 years — and a higher median income and homeowner rate than Toronto as a whole. More than half the residents are of Chinese heritage.

It's no coincidence the three front-runners in a 10-person race for the vacant council seat — long-time civil servant **Hratch Aynedjian**, grassroots activist Chin Lee and former Etobicoke politician David Robertson — tout community pride and ownership as key platform points. Scarborough-Rouge, formerly held by Bas Balkissoon, is destined to see one of the tightest races in its history on Nov. 13.

"It's a wide open field," noted Tom Chang, who has lived in the Brimley Forest neighbourhood more than two decades. "With that many candidates, the votes are going to split. Whoever manages to get 10 votes plus one is going to win."

Media-savvy Aynedjian, 42, born in Lebanon of Armenian heritage, has 16 years experience as a political assistant at city hall and Queen's Park. He said he'd prioritize the city budget to focus on hardcore services such as maintaining

infrastructure rather than "soft" services like shelters. Tackling illegal rooming houses is a top priority for him.

"Every other street in the ward has an illegal rooming house. The problem is we've never had bylaws regulating it across the amalgamated city."

A Scarborough resident since 1979, he has drawn fire from opponents for living outside Ward 41. He has promised to relocate if elected.

"That's a big issue," said long-time resident Clement Edwards.

"If someone is coming from outside, he or she may not know or even care about the community."

Lee, 53, who came here as a Malaysian in 1971, believes his grassroots involvement with the local police liaison committee and other community groups will serve him well.

"When I first moved into the ward 17 years ago, it was much cleaner, better-kept. But the community seems to be falling apart, and we need to work hard to build a more stable, strong and vibrant community," said Lee, who ran (unsuccessfully) for a Scarborough council seat in 1994 to keep the incumbent from being acclaimed.

"Some of the people living in rooming houses are newcomers. They don't know anything about property standards and bylaws. It's not just about enforcement. We need to do a better job in educating our newcomers."

Robertson, 44, an Etobicoke councillor from 1978 to 1991, said he's upset with deteriorating recreation programs and would like to boost immigrant-settlement services in the ward.

"We need to introduce a new property standards committee to strengthen the city bylaws and enhance our

neighbourhoods," said Robertson, who teaches English as a second language and ran unsuccessfully for the NDP in Scarborough-Agincourt in the federal election.

While Lee and **Aynedjian**, both from the Liberal party, have pledged to roll back the 9 per cent council pay hike awarded this year, Robertson said he would donate the raise (minus inflation) to community groups.

Also running are Jose Baking, John Ching, Min Lee, Malcolm Mansfield, Thadsha Navamanikkam, Scott Shi and Sonny Yeung.