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Denver and the west

Aurora mayor can build strong consensus from conflicting views

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Aurora Mayor Ed Tauer visits with Sen. Nancy Spence during "Aurora Day" last week at the state Capitol. (Matt McClain, Special to The Denver Post)

AURORA — It was a budget-cutting study session like many others recently, and the Aurora City Council could not agree on what to slash.

They talked about cutting code enforcement, closing libraries, maybe dipping into reserves to make up an \$8.5 million shortfall.

They had talked for nearly two hours when Mayor Ed Tauer, in typical Ed Tauer fashion, took in all of the options, then got them to focus on a solution: a hiring freeze and service cuts.

Consensus reached.

Problem solved.

Tauer, 49, is again using his talents as a facilitator and consensus builder to solve a much bigger problem: FasTracks.

He has emerged as a calming and mediating force in the debate over whether to raise taxes or cut rail lines to achieve the expansion of the Regional Transportation District's system.

"I don't think we would have gotten where we are today without Mayor Ed Tauer," said Thornton Mayor Erik Hansen. "Ed is very driven toward a solution to this problem. He thought about how we can keep the entire region together. That's how he is."

Indeed. The term-limited mayor, a modest man who rarely takes credit for the things he does, has become a key figure on the future of the nation's largest transit-expansion project, which would extend commuter rail service to Aurora, Denver International Airport and northern and western suburbs for \$6.9 billion.

It's a big deal.

Yet, for Tauer, it's the little things that give him the most pleasure — such as meeting with residents at the state Capitol, as he did Thursday for "Aurora Day."

"Those things are more fun," he said. "A lot of times, when you're in a high-profile situation, something is wrong and you have to deal with it. The neat parts of this job are things like when the Boy Scouts come to our meetings."

Those who work closely with Tauer, a Republican, aren't surprised he has stepped up. He often works behind the scenes to fix problems in his hometown of 310,000 residents. Then, when solutions are reached, he steps back and lets others play the part of hero.

"I don't think Ed is a headline seeker," Aurora City Councilman Bob FitzGerald said. "I think he gets in the spotlight because he does some smart things."

Tauer's recent work with FasTracks is evidence of that.

As a coalition of mayors struggled to come up with a plan to ensure that the rail project reaches its goal, Tauer played an important role keeping members focused.

Thornton, Broomfield, Aurora and other suburbs do not want to see their rail lines reduced or eliminated, as the project is more costly than originally thought.

Tauer, along with Hansen and others, came up with a plan that still needs approval by RTD: Ask voters for another 0.4 percent sales-tax hike to ensure that all of the projects get completed on time.

A tax hike during these times can be controversial, yet Tauer was able to broker the agreement with the other mayors for the greater good of the region.

"He did it in such a way that took traction," Broomfield Mayor Pat Quinn said. "It was the accumulation of all the mayors in the room, but Ed continued to say things that others can buy into. When Ed's in the room, he's listening to what people are saying, and thinking, 'Is there a way we can be unified?' "

Tauer said it was a difficult consensus to reach.

"I would say it was brutal," he said. "But tough decisions don't usually get easier with time, and this is one of those decisions. At the end of the day, the mayors said, 'It's the voters' money, and they should get to make the decision.' "

Tauer wasn't always the leader he is now, says Nadine Caldwell, who spent 16 years on the Aurora City Council, adding that he's a great ambassador for the city and region. "He's changed a lot. He was more about Ed back then. Today I think he's more about the city."

Tauer, who has a little more than two years left before term limits force him out of office, used to work in telecom and software.

Some have speculated that he may run for higher office, such the Senate or governorship.

Even he isn't sure what he'll do.

His wife, Betsy, recently entered "ex-mayor" into a [Monster.com](https://www.monster.com) job search to see what awaits her husband in a couple of years.

Tauer recalled her telling him: "Nothing came up. You're not qualified for anything."