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Aurora forges ahead without Regional alternate

By Brock Weir

Aurora is going forward without appointing an alternate voice at the Regional Council table.
Council last week ratified its decision to vote down a recommendation from municipal staff which would have seen the Town's Deputy Mayor ? a post currently held by Councillor John Abel ? appointed as an alternate to represent Aurora's interests at the Region if the Mayor is unable to attend a meeting.
Aurora is currently one of just four York Region municipalities to have a single representative at the Region, along with King Township, Whitchurch-Stouffville, and East Gwillimbury. Aurora's representative at the Regional level is the Mayor and while the Town has been in a long-time fight to score a second seat at the table, the ability to appoint an alternate was a second-best solution recently offered by the Province.
Councillors, while sitting at the Committee level on February 20, shot down the idea citing just a handful of Regional meetings left on the calendar. It was a position reiterated last week despite a last stab by Councillor Abel to revive the idea.
?This is to enhance representation at the Region for our municipality,? Councillor Abel argued. ?We have only one seat and if the Mayor was unable to attend, we were not allowed to have an alternate. This, apart from getting a second seat, which is a whole other matter, is the next best thing we could have asked for because we always used to say we don't have a second representative and we don't even have an alternate in the case of an absence.
?This is what we have been asking for. For years we have been asking or this. We're not alone in this.?
While his motion to reconsider the matter was seconded by Councillor Wendy Gaertner, the rest of Council was unmoved.
?The reason I am not in favour of this now [is] I believe it will be used for political gains with nine months to go before an election,? said Councillor Paul Pirri. ?I don't believe it is appropriate to be committing the next term of Council and, lastly, we don't run to be Deputy Mayor. We get appointed by Council to be Deputy Mayor and for those reasons I am opposed this right now.?
Councillor Pirri, however, said he was interested in ?trying to find compromise? and suggested an alternative: taking Aurora's eight Councillors and rotating the position of Regional Alternate amongst them for the eight months left in the current term.
This suggestion also failed to find traction.
First to speak against Councillor Pirri's proposal was Councillor Tom Mrakas, who rejected the idea of an appointed alternate the previous week.
?I am not in favour of having an alternate to begin with, regardless of who it is, when it is,? he said. ?I don't think it enhances our representation. I don't think we should be settling for the next best thing, as I have stated before and, quite frankly, I don't know who in the Town of Aurora has been asking, other than maybe some sitting here or some sitting at Regional Council, for an alternate to be made available. I am just fundamentally opposed to having an alternate.?
This was a position largely shared by Councillor Michael Thompson who said with just five meetings left, and Mayor Dawe stating he had ?no intentions at this time? of missing any meetings, it didn't make sense.
?I think the comments we discussed last week were [to] really put this into play for the next term, like we do many other issues,? he said. ?I will not be in favour of the amendment.?
Added Councillor Jeff Thom: ?I still agree with the sentiment that this is something for the next Council to deal with and, if they so choose, they can appoint an alternate to Regional Council.?
Similarly, Councillor Sandra Humfryes said the timing of the alternate option was ?very unusual? and it ?would have been nice if Council had it at the beginning of the term.?
?We should have two seats,? she said. ?I think we have all talked about that around the table. That is why there has been absolutely no personal reasons for my vote. It just doesn't make any sense at the moment.?