

Council endorses 'status quo' on Regional government, calls for environmental protection

By Brock Weir

Aurora Council has come out in support of the status quo as the Province continues its review of Regional Governance.

Local lawmakers unanimously supported a motion brought forward by Mayor Tom Mrakas that states 'the Council of the Town of Aurora endorses the effectiveness of the current two-tier municipal governance structure, with continued exploration and implementation of furthering efficiencies and partnerships, as has excited between York Region and our partner York local municipalities since its inception in 1971.'

The motion went a step further and reiterated Aurora's commitment to the environment, noting that both Council and 'actively engaged citizens value the distinct identity of their community of communities and are committed to being proud hosts and stewards of the Oak Ridges Moraine, Greenbelt, Lake Simcoe and the Holland Marsh.'

The Province has been undertaking a review of Regional Governance since last year, a move brought in by the then-new Progressive Conservative government. Since then, 'special advisors' appointed by the Province have been carrying out consultations and reviews on a number of key subjects including the possible move to single-tier municipalities and/or amalgamating existing municipalities.

'This [motion] is basically let the Province know that we feel York Region works well as a Region,' said Mayor Mrakas at last week's Council meeting. 'We do look for efficiencies currently. We work within the Northern 6 (Aurora, King, Newmarket, Whitchurch-Stouffville, East Gwillimbury and Georgina) for waste and for many other aspects and we do a great job. We think the status quo works.'

While Council supported the motion unanimously, this conclusion was not reached without discussion and questions.

First up was Councillor Michael Thompson who wondered just when the Province was due to make their decision.

'When the review process started, they put out a timetable and originally said they thought the consultants would make their recommendations towards the end of June,' he said. 'I am now hearing rumours it will be held off until after the election.'

Mayor Mrakas responded

it was his understanding that due to the Provincial Government's extended summer recess that there would be nothing forthcoming until after the Federal Election this October.

With this out of the way, Councillor Wendy Gaertner questioned whether the Mayor's motion went far enough.

'I think it is comprehensive and it is certainly necessary to send the message,' she agreed. 'I am wondering if, because this is so crucial, whether we might send an even stronger message and say we're 'absolutely opposed to this' ' unless you feel that the motion covers it, [and] you have covered a lot in this motion.'

The Mayor replied that the motion covered all the bases and was worded similarly to other motions considered and passed in York Region's other eight municipalities.

'We're willing to sit down [with the Province] and work with them and have some conversations,' he said. 'We're opposed to amalgamation, we think the Regional structure works well, and we want to get across the point that the things we do in the Region, we're already doing the things they're asking and looking to do, and that is find efficiencies. We want to convey that message across the Province in a diplomatic way.'