

Emmerson tapped as new Regional Chair



By Brock Weir

In what he says is likely to be the last appointment to the job, Wayne Emmerson was named Chair and CEO of the Region of York at the inaugural meeting of Regional Council last Thursday night.

The former mayor of Whitchurch-Stouffville, who did not seek re-election to the post this year, will serve as Chair at least for the 2014 ? 2018 term.

After receiving the chain of office from outgoing chair Bill Fisch, who held the post from 1997 until his retirement this year, he said the Province had ?assured him it will probably be the last time? it would be an appointment.

Mr. Emmerson was appointed to the Region's top job by the 20-member Council in a vote which came down 16 ? 4 against challenger John Taylor, Regional Councillor for Newmarket. Mr. Emmerson was formally nominated for the position by Richmond Hill Mayor Dave Barrow, a nomination which was seconded by Regional Councillor Danny Wheeler of Georgina.

Both cited Mr. Emmerson's over 25 years of political experience, 17 of which were served on Regional Council, as important factors to leading the Region forward.

Citing significant growth in Whitchurch-Stouffville during Mr. Emmerson's tenure as Mayor, growth which was fostered with balance, low taxes and fiscal responsibility, Mayor Barrow said Mr. Emmerson was the right leader.

?We need his experience and his leadership as we continue to advance all of our significant initiatives and large scale projects that are underway,? said Barrow. ?He instinctively understands our Region and the important work that we do, and we need to continue doing that work. We need a Chair who has the experience and a proven track record of success. We need a Chair that can build on the legacy of our previous Chairs and our previous Councils while embracing the new ideas and the innovative projects that will no doubt come forward generated by this new Council.?

Adding to this theme, Councillor Wheeler noted Mr. Emmerson's appointment to the position would not put York Region residents through a by-election as Mr. Taylor's appointment would.

?Wayne could not in good faith inflict the potentially high cost of a by-election on the residents of his Town,? said Wheeler, noting Mr. Emmerson's announcement he would not seek re-election following Mr. Fisch's retirement. ?This act speaks volumes about the fairness and integrity he will bring as York Region's next chairman and CEO. It highlights Wayne's fiscally responsible approach and his commitment to protecting the public's financial interests.?

Responding to the nomination, Mr. Emmerson said over his 17 years as mayor, he has had the opportunity to work with almost everyone around the Regional table on almost every committee formed by the Region. Through this collaboration they knew his strengths, weaknesses, abilities and track record.

Being a mayor, he noted, was like running a business ? knowing where the needs of the community are and having a vision to address them.

?It is about [being] innovative and taking calculated risk,? said Mr. Emmerson in his pitch to Council before his ultimate appointment. ?It is about listening to the constituents and your colleagues and giving each viewpoint equal opportunity. It is about being collaborative, building on collective wisdom and knowing when to ask for help.?

Over the next four years, York Region will face many issues, including maintaining existing services in the face of growth, management of growth, along with sustainability, transportation, congestion and affordable housing. These needs must be met while keeping taxes low, he added.

?I know that investing in infrastructure is directly related to our ability to successfully manage growth,? he said. ?Investing in roads and transit, and the ability to move people in and out of York Region is important for many reasons: it connects people to work, school, family and community. We need to stay the course in building the foundation of what we have already accomplished in this area. By continuing to advance our YRT, Viva transit, and road systems, as well as supporting the development of subway expansions and two-way GO Service, we will reduce congestion and travel time.

?We are tasked with balancing the priorities of our municipalities against what is best suited for our taxpayers. Now is the time for continued fiscal prudence in ensuring development charges can help pay down our debt. We are fortunate to have nine strong and vibrant municipalities. If I am elected your chair, my task will be to continue to improve our Region in the face of all challenges and opportunities. I am also committed to learning more about the specific needs of your municipalities and working together with you to find solutions.?

Following the vote, Mr. Emmerson said there were no words to ?adequately express his appreciation? and pledged his commitment for the next four years.

Continuing growth in York Region, he added, is a testament that the Region ?remains a desirable place for people to live, do business and visit.?

?We need to ensure everyone has access to the services they need,? he concluded. ?We have done a lot and we can do more.?