

Progressive Conservatives re-open Newmarket-Aurora nomination

By Brock Weir

The Progressive Conservative Party has re-opened nominations in Newmarket-Aurora.

The party announced Thursday night that nominations would be re-opened in the ridings of Newmarket-Aurora, Mississauga Centre and Brampton North.

In the process, the party has also deemed Charity McGrath, who was named the party's candidate last April, unable to seek the position again, according to riding officials.

'Doug Ford has been clear, the membership of our Party must be respected and heard,' said PC President Jag Badwal in a statement on Thursday evening. 'Earlier today, the Ontario PC Party's Provincial Nominations Committee (PNC) met. The unanimous decision of the PNC was to reopen nominations in Brampton North, Mississauga Centre and Newmarket-Aurora. The PNC has set aside the nomination in Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas as a result of the flawed process.'

Last April, Charity McGrath secured Newmarket-Aurora's Progressive Conservative nomination for this spring's Provincial election, narrowly beating former Aurora councillor Bill Hogg to the post. Incumbent Newmarket Councillor Tom Vegh placed third in the race.

It was a contentious nomination and the results led to the local Progressive Conservative riding association resigning en masse citing irregularities in the process.

Their appeals were dismissed by former PC leader Patrick Brown.

Outlining the appeal, former riding association president Derek Murray said there was 'clear and substantial evidence indicating the campaign team for Charity McGrath Di Paola blatantly breached party rules in their membership drive when members did not pay their own fees and their signature was falsified on the membership form, and fraudulent members were knowingly allowed to vote at the nomination meeting in which Charity McGrath Di Paola was declared the winning candidate.'

'The riding association initiated an investigation and 100 per cent of the membership list was called.'

Receiving a 22 per cent response rate, the Riding Association said 89.89 per cent of respondents had been contacted by a candidate to attend the April 2017 nomination meeting, 50.17 per cent signed an application to be a party member, and 40.06 either paid or had an immediate family member pay for their membership.

In all, they challenged 358 voters on the rolls over both Aurora and Newmarket.

This information was passed on to the then PC party brass, they said, who replied the Party reviewed the submission and determined it did 'not raise a question that merits hearing.'

'I am pleased to learn of the decisions made by the Provincial Nomination Committee,' said Ford in a statement Thursday evening.

The process for this re-opened nomination was not fleshed out by the party at the time of the announcement, with Badwal noting, 'further details will be provided at a later date.'

Those details were not forthcoming by press time.

Local PCs, however, spent the intervening week looking forward to learning just what those details might be, including Aurora resident Murray.

One of the most vocal critics of the results, and an equal proponent of a full review and audit of the results, he led the mass resignation of association directors.

'In order to have another nomination period, I am not sure how much time we have,' said Mr. Murray. 'The election is June 7, and it will be in the hands of the party how we handle this. We can have a nomination process, but it takes time: first, you have to get the candidates. Second, you have to get the people to vote for them. Normally it is up to the riding association to find the people. The party could appoint somebody, but no decision has been made on it at this stage. The nomination meeting is one day, but it takes five or six weeks [to get to that point].'

Nevertheless, Mr. Murray said he was 'very happy' to learn of the Party's decision to re-open the nomination process.

'Even if it took eleven months,' he said. 'My opinion of what I thought of what happened everybody knows, but I am happy about it. We have a new leader as of last Saturday night and one of his promises was he would look over the whole riding associations where there was still a dispute and make a decision. Interestingly enough, he has been in his job less than a week and he has already overturned four of them. That is a pretty good indication that we have a new leader and he means what he says. He said he was going to do it, and he has done something.'

'That, to me, is a plus. With a new leader we all have to learn how to deal with him. Doug Ford has not been part of the party. I don't

know him well, I have met him on a few occasions, but I can't tell you I know him well. He is a person who gets things done and if we're going to beat Kathleen Wynne, that is what we need.?

Finding the right candidate is essential in building trust in the PC brand for those who may have been left disappointed by the last nomination process, he added.

?When this gets settled down and I go back and organize the riding association the way it was, which I would do, I would get most of my Board back and I'll get most of the people who said they weren't going to vote this time in the general election, I'll get them on side and they'll vote Conservative. It wasn't the policy they were arguing, they were arguing about how the candidate was selected the last time.?

Ms. McGrath told The Auroran she would provide comment ?once she understood things.? However, a quote had not been received by press time.

Mr. Hogg, who was travelling overseas when this decision was made, said he would comment further upon his return.