

Residents should have the right to recall elected officials: Councillor

By Brock Weir

Residents across Ontario should have the right to turf their elected municipal officials if they lose the confidence of the public, according to Councillor Paul Pirri.

When elected officials such as mayors and councillors are charged with criminal offences ? as has been recently experienced in London, Ontario and in Rockland, a suburb of Ottawa ? there is very little residents can do about it, says Councillor Pirri. Coupling this with the scandal-plagued mayoralty of Rob Ford in Toronto, the Councillor argues it is high time for the Province to do something about it.

Councillor Pirri will introduce a notice of motion next week calling on Aurora to take the first steps in encouraging Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Ontario Government to ?look hard at the institution of recall elections for municipal councillors.?

?There are currently two mayors who have been charged with crimes,? he says. ?The individual out Ottawa-way has also been charged with two other councillors who breached public trust. With what is going on in the City of Toronto as well, I think there has to be some sort of mechanism in place to ensure that over a four-year term, citizens and people in the community's rights and faith in government should be trusted.

?I think there is a perception that in a lot of cases, politicians aren't doing it for the right reasons and I think there has to be some power to the residents in our communities to help ensure politicians are doing a good job.?

Looking ahead, however, Councillor Pirri says he does not endorse any particular mechanism and that should be left up to the Province. Determining something that works is very important, he says, looking at other provinces and American states that have similar safeguards in place. In some jurisdictions, a petitioner needs approximately 50 per cent of eligible voters to sign before the wheels can move on a recall election.

?There would have to be a threshold made in the process that is high enough to inhibit a group of people from having it used as a political tool,? he says. ?If 50 per cent of the population comes out to sign their names on a petition, I would think regardless of it being used for a political mean or not, I think it would be obvious that person has lost the confidence of the electorate. I think it should be a tenant of good democracy that you hold the confidence of the majority of the people you represent.?

At the end of the day, however, this is about putting powers back into the hands of the people, he says.

?Over the last few months, there has been a lot of news made over politicians in the GTA who engage in certain behaviour without having any real repercussions,? says Councillor Pirri. ?I think the legal system is one avenue [accountability] can take place, but if an individual in any municipality has lost the confidence in the residents in that community, the residents should have the right to speak up and to demand change.

?You hear it quite often that if you don't do a good job in any job you can be fired. The only place you can't do that, and the only time a politician can lose his job is at election time and I am not sure the residents are best-served by that.?

What do you think: Should Ontario pave the way to recall politicians? Send your thoughts to letters@auroran.com.