

University expansion into region a top priority

By David Pietrangelo

York Region municipalities are welcoming the idea of opening a post secondary campus to facilitate the population's growing demand.

In December of 2013, the Province of Ontario released a plan called "Major Capacity Expansion Policy Framework."

Its goal is to provide the necessary post- secondary institutions and space needed to meet the increased demand by the growing population of Ontario.

The Province wants to ensure the benefit from its highly skilled and educated workforce in the global economy. Continuing to educate our growing youth and young adult population will show positive signs decades down the line.

The statement reads that the Province will be open for proposals from institutions and municipalities in early 2014. The Aurora and York Region proposal dates are not set, but are expected in the next 4 to 6 weeks.

Doug Lindeblom, Director of Economic Strategy for York Region, stated that their number one goal right now is to attract and help expand campuses like York University.

He added that the Region and its municipalities are the only ones in all of Ontario with a population above one million that do not have a major post secondary institution; so the demand and need are definitely there.

Economic development polls have shown that having a higher-level educational facility would be very beneficial. Lindeblom says it attracts investment, branding and reputation of surrounding municipalities.

To date, York University has been the only major school that has stepped up and shown interest in the Region, but considering other schools is not out of the question.

The York University Development Corporation told The Auroran that they are the closest institution to York's municipalities and it would make sense for them. Expansion wouldn't create any competition with others and would make the most sense to create a campus north of the current Keele and Steeles location.

There is no word yet on what the term "expansion campus" would mean in terms of size or capacity, but when proposals begin more information will become available to the public.

Mr. Lindeblom has heard from the Province that they want to place the facilities and developments in the right places. He says he believes that the municipalities of York are perfect, as cities like Aurora have the growth and demand necessary to help them thrive.

The location of the York University expansion would be determined further down the line, he adds.

The question of where will to be answered by the Province as it says it will need to work under their own development plans as well.

Representatives from each municipality, including Mayor Dawe and his office will present proposals and suggestions to help the Ontario and York University reach their final assessment. Lindebom says the timing is perfect, as research and polls suggest that the demand is anticipated to grow even higher in the next two years and continue for another 20.

The Province's plans have hinted at the expansions being built within the next three to four years.

Until that time, the Ontario Government will soon set dates for proposals from Aurora and surrounding municipalities.