

Emmerson celebrated upon his retirement as Regional Chair

Wayne Emmerson was celebrated by the Region of York on Thursday morning as the long-time Chair brought the gavel down on his final meeting of Regional Council.

Last week brought a nearly 30-year career in municipal politics to an end, following Emmerson's announcement early this fall that he would retire effective November 29.

At the final the meeting steered by Emmerson, former mayor of Whitchurch-Stouffville, tributes were offered by Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti, who was tapped to do so by his colleagues as the longest-serving Regional Council member.

"Your leadership, your vision and your unwavering dedication to the residents of York Region has truly set a standard that all politicians should aspire to," said Scarpitti, delivering remarks after Council formally approved the 2025 Budget. "Over the years, you have been a steady hand at the helm, fostering collaboration, championing innovation, and building trust among all partners. You made it look pretty easy and [that] is the mark of a seasoned pro."

Emmerson was lauded for his support of the Yonge Subway Extension into York Region, up to Highway 7, his dedication to improving telecommunications Region-wide, and his "strong, steadfast support" of the York Regional Police.

"What has been truly outstanding has been your commitment to serve with integrity that has truly set the tone and shown what leadership truly means. It has been a privilege for all of us to work alongside you and I am sure everyone here will agree that we have learned a lot from you " including how to stay calm during a meeting, even if it seems like the room might spontaneously combust," Scarpitti continued. "Your mentorship and steadfast commitment has inspired us to do better, to be better, and to serve with purpose " and, most importantly, with heart.

"While today might mark the end of your time in politics, it is truly far from the end of your legacy. Your work and your commitment to York Region will continue to shape the work that we do here, like a well-constructed building that never goes out of style."

While one Regional Councillor was delegated to give the testimonial at Emmerson's final meeting, Aurora Mayor Tom Mrakas noted in a social media post, "I'd like to offer my heartfelt congratulations to my colleague, mentor and most importantly friend Wayne Emmerson on his well-deserved retirement after an incredible 33 years of dedicated service to Stouffville and York Region! Wayne's unwavering commitment and leadership have left a lasting legacy in our communities."

Following a standing ovation from Regional Councillors, an emotional Emmerson began his remarks, saying "it has been an honour" to serve, and played a video he'd recorded lest his emotions get the better of him.

"I want to thank York Regional Council, past and present. Your leadership is much appreciated. You have made a difference for our residents. I want to thank you for your friendship and thanks to those also who have supported me over 10 years. It has been a great career for me, and 10 years being the Regional Chair is the best job I have ever been able to do.

"I have really appreciated working with you over the past 10 years. I hope we have made a difference together and I hope you continue to do this over the years and keep working on the best interest of the communities."

In his remarks, Emmerson thanked York Region MPs and MPPs for their collaboration, as well as Regional staff, Chief of Staff Lina Bigioni, and his family, particularly wife Deborah for helping him to follow his dreams for the past 49 years.

"This has been a great opportunity for me to work with so many different people and make a lot of friends," he concluded. "I want to thank you all from the bottom of my heart and may God bless " and take a little time to enjoy the view."

The formal process to appoint Emmerson's replacement was expected to begin last week, but on Monday, December 2, the Province announced the appointment of former York Regional Police Chief Eric Jolliffe to the role.

Traditionally, a Chair is appointed by a vote amongst Regional Council, but, in the wake of Emmerson's retirement, speculation was rife that an appointment could be made directly by the Ontario Government.

By Brock Weir