

Mayor renews calls for merged Regional fire services

Central York Fire Services, which serves Aurora and Newmarket, should expand to encompass Whitchurch-Stouffville as well, according to Mayor Tom Mrakas.

Mayor Mrakas renewed his calls for further amalgamation within local fire departments last week at the Joint Council Committee's (JCC) first meeting of 2020, while adding he will continue to press the Region as a whole to take a look at the matter this week.

The JCC is a group of Council members and staff from both Aurora and Newmarket tasked with overseeing the operations of the Central York Fire Services. (CYFS)

There, Mayor Mrakas, who has previously floated a similar amalgamation with the City of Richmond Hill, said JCC should give serious consideration to working with the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville and their respective fire department with an eye towards bringing fire services together under one umbrella.

The Mayor's motion, which is expected to be discussed by the JCC in March, calls on the Committee to 'investigate the potential consolidation' between the two groups as a 'first step' towards a Regional fire service.

Mayor Mrakas tells The Auroran he has had conversations with Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Ian Lovett, as well as Newmarket Mayor John Taylor, and Mayor Lovett was 'open to looking at' the idea.

'We thought this was a good opportunity to investigate it,' says Mayor Mrakas. 'Similar as we did with Richmond Hill, it is no secret to anyone that I would like to see Fire become a Regional service. I have always maintained that the way to do that is to start slowly, one step at a time. If we can start to consolidate slowly, I think we will get to a point where it does make sense to be a Regional fire service.'

In addition to potential cost-savings, Mayor Mrakas says he believes further consolidation will lead to service efficiencies.

'I don't believe there is immediate savings by amalgamating, but I think you're able to provide a better service,' he says. 'When it comes to fire, it is about safety of our residents and I want to ensure that we are providing that best possible service. That is not to say the fire departments of each municipality is not providing top notch service, because they are, but sometimes if there's a house or a building that is just on the other side, there are so many things we have to look at. We have to have agreements between each other and it just doesn't make sense.'

?To me, I think it will become a more efficient [service] which, in turn, makes the service level better for our residents and, in turn, makes it safer for everyone. If Police can be a Regional service, why can't Fire??

Mayor Mrakas is expected to place a further motion on the table at this week's meeting of Regional Council. The text of the motion, which was released prior to Thursday's meeting, states a ?Regional Fire Service may achieve further operating efficiencies, improved department structure, increased service level(s), and cost avoidance opportunities.?

The motion, which calls on Regional staff to work with all nine York Region municipalities to report back on a Regional Fire Service's potential, will likely come up for discussion in February.

By Brock Weir