

## Men's shelter debate enters of Federal campaign conversation

Continued debate over a men's transitional and emergency housing proposal in Aurora's south end spilled over into the Federal election conversation last week after candidates in Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill sparred over a campaign communication sent to residents by Conservative Costas Menegakis.

In a statement sent to residents, Menegakis said the issue of the proposal, which has been the subject of intense debate among lawmakers at the municipal level, was "a primary concern for you and the families in your community," but Liberal candidate Leah Taylor Roy says the contents of a letter was an example of "misinformation."

"The Liberal candidate, Leah Taylor-Roy [sic], has taken a position in support of the proposed men's shelter in your neighbourhood working against principled decision of Mayor Tom Mrakas," he wrote. "Ms. Roy chose to ignore the voices of her constituents. I believe that a final decision on where to place such a facility requires community input. I commend Mayor Mrakas and his team for listening to your concerns and I fully support the decision to search for an alternate location."

"Like many of you, I understand the need for a men's shelter in York Region. An appropriate location would include easy access to medical help, social services and transportation. The process to secure a site must include examining the impact and safety of both the local residents and those staying in the shelter."

He said that if he is elected Member of Parliament on April 28, he "assured" recipients he will "always stand with my constituents and work to find the most appropriate solution on any issues that may arise," before asking them for their vote on election day.

But Taylor Roy contends the comments contained in the letter are "a clear example of the kind of misinformation we've unfortunately come to expect," and said this election is "not about political stunts or personal attacks."

Instead, she said, "it is about who has the experience, honesty and vision to represent our community and defend Canada's values at a time of global instability."

"At stake is our economy, our sovereignty, and our progress as a compassionate, inclusive society," she said. "Canadians deserve leaders who show up, listen, and act with integrity."

Addressing the comments related to the housing proposal specifically, she said her attendance at a recent Council meeting where the matter was discussed was as a private citizen who lives near the proposed site, not in her position as Member of Parliament.

"I did not speak, I did not vote, and I was not representing the government or our riding," she said. "I was simply there, like many other concerned residents, engaged in a matter reflecting our community."

"Mr. Menegakis suggests in his letter that there should be consultations and public forums to discuss this proposal. I fully agree. In fact, what Mr. Mengakis doesn't seem to either know or want to acknowledge are the multiple consultations and public information sessions that have been held over the past two years. Prior to this, the Mayor of Aurora, Tom Mrakas, in his role on the Regional Council had been involved in the development of this proposed housing solution at this site and had supported it. My personal stand in favour of this initiative is entirely in line with the values I hold: that everyone deserves a safe place to call home—whether permanent, temporary, or transitional. However, this issue is not a federal issue—it is a local town issue and has been dealt with appropriately by the Town Council."

"When Councillor Gallo saw the lack of progress in finding an alternative site for the proposed transitional housing development, he changed his initial position. He recognized the urgent need for this housing from the beginning but had voted against it initially to allow for the possibility of finding a better site. When he saw that none had been found, he asked for reconsideration of the original site on Yonge Street by the Region of York. The Town Council voted in favour of this motion. As it was and is not a federal matter,

I was not representing constituents when I attended.

It's unfortunate that Mr. Menegakis has chosen to focus on attacking my character and my service over a misrepresented personal act of citizenship rather than engaging in meaningful dialogue on the critical issues facing our riding and our country. Just this week, I participated in a community debate in my role as candidate to represent [residents] at the federal level, which Mr. Menegakis declined to show up for. Instead, he continues to communicate through statements rather than standing before constituents to discuss the real challenges facing us.

Menegakis countered that residents are upset that Taylor Roy inserted herself into a divisive regional and municipal issue by communicating with the Minister of Housing on the issue.

As a concerned resident in this riding, I have followed this issue very closely, he said. I have read the reports, watched the Council meetings, spoken with municipal leadership, spoken with thousands of residents at their doors, and spoken with professionals in the social services sector. I understand and support the need to provide protective and safe facilities for the most vulnerable among us. We must be a compassionate society. While Leah thinks Ottawa knows best, I believe any elected person has a responsibility to listen to their constituents as well.

**By Brock Weir**