

New Regional Council to be sworn in next week

By Brock Weir

Spring and summer proved to be raucous seasons for York Regional Council, and now that the dust is settled, the newly-elected Regional voices are set to take their seats next Thursday.

Incumbent Regional Council members went into this election season expecting the Chair of the Regional Council would be elected directly by the people following the passage of legislation by the previous Provincial Government last year. Things were thrown into disarray in July, however, when the newly-elected Premier Doug Ford and his Progressive Conservative government scrapped Regional Chair elections in a number of jurisdictions, including York Region, maintaining a system where the Chair would be elected by the 20-member body.

An elected Chair was something that Tom Mrakas advocated passionately for during his time as Council, but now he will be taking his voice to the Regional table as well, as, under the current set-up, the Aurora's Mayor remains its lone voice at the Top Table. During his time on Regional Council, outgoing Mayor Geoff Dawe took his fair share of heat from his local Council colleagues after voting against an Aurora Council resolution in favour of electing the position of Chair, particularly from Mr. Mrakas.

While the Mayor-Elect concedes that the present climate at Queen's Park means that an elected Chair is likely not in the cards for quite some time, he will press his position that Aurora needs a further seat ? and a further voice ? at the Region.

?One of the things I want to bring to the Regional table is a strong voice,? he says. ?Similarly, as I have been over the past four years in Aurora, I want to bring that strong voice to the Region and make sure I advocate and look to get the most I can get for our Town from the Regional level and make sure we're well represented.?

Mayor-Elect Mrakas says he defines ?well-represented? as ?making sure Aurora is not left behind.?

?I know it is going to be tough with the Provincial government and they are not really looking forward to expand government, but I will be advocating and fighting for that extra seat.?

In the lead-up to his decision to vote against Aurora Council's motion to fight for an elected Chair, Mayor Dawe told The Auroran that his position on the matter had changed once he was at the Regional Table and saw how it worked, firmly believing an elected Chair would give York Region's southern tier the electoral advantage as they also have an edge in population.

But Mr. Mrakas says his ?mindset? won't change once he takes a seat at the table.

?I was elected because of what I feel and my passion. That will always continue. I will never change that. I think once I get to the Regional table the only thing I would look at is what are the policies and procedures in order to put those things forward and try to advocate and fight for those things? How do I go about doing those things? Those are the things that might change, but as far as my passion and my vision and my thoughts, those won't change.?

At press time, incumbent chair Wayne Emmerson, former mayor of Whitchurch-Stouffville, and former Thornhill MPP Mario Racco, have put themselves forward for Chair.

This decision will be made by the new Regional Council on inauguration night.

The meeting will take place at Regional Headquarters in Newmarket on December 6 at 7 p.m.