

Newmarket-Aurora PCs ramp up nomination appeal efforts, calling for audit

By Brock Weir

Members of the Newmarket-Aurora Progressive Conservative Riding Association will continue their efforts this week to seek an appeal into the process which saw Charity McGrath nominated to carry the blue banner in the 2018 Provincial Election.

As first reported in The Auroran last month, the riding association filed an appeal with the Ontario PCs on April 27 and, under the rules of the party, officials had seven days to respond. The Riding Association is set to meet this Saturday and will call on the Party Executive to order the Newmarket-Aurora results be audited by Pricewaterhouse Coopers.

In a press release Tuesday, Riding Association President Derek Murray alleges there is "clear and substantial evidence indicating the campaign team for Charity McGrath Di Paola blatantly breached party rules in their membership drive when members did not pay their own fees and their signature was falsified on the membership form, and fraudulent members were knowingly allowed to vote at the nomination meeting in which Charity McGrath Di Paola was declared the winning candidate.

The riding association initiated an investigation and 100 per cent of the membership list was called.

Receiving a 22 per cent response rate, the Riding Association says 89.89 per cent of respondents had been contacted by a candidate to attend the April 8 nomination meeting, 50.17 per cent signed an application to be a party member, and 40.06 either paid or had an immediate family member pay for their membership. In all, they are challenging 358 voters on the rolls over both municipality.

This information, they say, was provided to Bob Stanley, Executive Director of the Ontario PC Party who replied the Party reviewed the submission and determined it "does not raise a question that merits a hearing."

The riding association argues the rejection of the appeal indicates they feel "upwards to 25 per cent of [Riding Association] members potentially being forged or fraudulent is not worthy of a hearing."

"In all recent nomination races, Executive Director Bob Stanley is a consistent player," said Mr. Murray in his statement. "[PC Leader] Patrick Brown has indicated he has nothing to do with the nomination meetings. Notwithstanding the response from the Party Executive Director, we call on Patrick Brown, the Party Membership Chair, and the Party Executive to direct PricewaterhouseCooper to conduct an independent third party audit of legitimate memberships for all riding appeals and demonstrate that values of transparency and accountability are firmly in place in the Ontario PC Party.

"Ethics and accountability must start with our own party first. Only a full audit by PwC of the legality of disputed memberships can validate our parties' commitment to the principles of transparent, fair, and democratic government and the legitimacy of the nomination meeting and the resultant candidate. Our collective goal should be to decisively win the next election with the strongest candidate in each riding nominated by legitimate members and, in contrast to the current government, ensure the party stands for the highest ethical standards in keeping with the Leader's public commitment to ethics and accountability."

When asked to comment on the latest step in the appeal, Ms. McGrath said she wanted to thank "all the new members and existing members" of the riding association and called for unity.

"I'm deeply humbled and grateful to have obtained the support of the majority of the members and will continue to work very hard to get our message out to the voters in Newmarket Aurora," said Ms. McGrath. "I want to thank all those who volunteered to help my nomination campaign and those who purchase a membership to support my candidacy. I also want to thank [fellow nomination candidates] Tom Vegh and Bill Hogg on the recruitment efforts and sincerely hope that we can all work together to win the riding for the PC party.

"I'm excited to put the people of riding first and work hard just as Frank Klees did. I will be a strong voice for them and bring their concerns to Queen's Park. I believe that all local PC members are united in the belief that Kathleen Wynne's Liberal government needs to be replaced in the next year's provincial election and I look forward to working together to create the change that is so very needed in our province today."