

POLITICS AS USUAL: Meeting of the Mayors

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

The Mayors of the GTA's municipalities met last Friday in Mississauga to devise a plan to put forward to the provincial and federal governments to fund the cost of their respective ice storm recovery efforts.

Not all the municipalities' mayors were present. For example, our own Mayor Dawe, as well as East Gwillimbury Mayor Virginia Hackson, were invited but unable to attend due a closed door Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority meeting.

But, a significant number were able to make it.

It was reported that 19 Mayors and 3 Regional Chairs were in attendance at the meeting. (Okay 19 Mayors, three Regional Chairs ? and one deputy mayor?not even this important meeting could proceed without Toronto's circus pitching a tent in its midst?but I digress).

That is, I believe, approximately 2/3 of the mayors of the municipalities affected by the storm. It's extraordinary that so many were able to get together so quickly. The large group met behind closed doors to discuss their plans ? the outcome of which was a request for over a quarter billion in funds to help offset the municipalities' costs.

The arrangement being a ?1/3, 1/3, 1/3? approach to paying the costs with a firm deadline of March 1.

First the positives: I think it is great that so many egos were put aside in the furtherance of the greater good.

It's either a testament to the severity of the issue or the strength of the chair, or both, but regardless, the fact so many political leaders were able to come to a unanimous decision on something ? anything! ? is remarkable.

In the face of such a united show of strength ? including from the largest and 6th largest cities in the country no less - I think that the various governmental levels will indeed work towards resolving the funding issue associated with the storm clean up.

The fact numerous elections are looming doesn't hurt either.

Now the negatives: I will leave aside the attempt by Ford to drag partisan politics into the mix, Mayor McCallion did a great job of smacking that down rather quickly anyway. My concern is the odd way in which we were, and are, represented and implications for the effectiveness of that representation. I could not get a list of all those who attended.

However, photos of the event show our Regional Chair Bill Fisch, representing Regional Council, one assumes. Also in attendance, in the very centre of the photo, was Markham Mayor Scarpitti, as well as Richmond Hill Mayor Barrow, ostensibly ensuring their municipalities had a voice at the table too. As Regional Council passed a motion asking for relief for the Region's municipalities and the Region is represented by the Chair, if the Mayors were also there to press their case, whose motion and whose needs take precedence?

Does that not create competing demands? Regional versus Municipal relief? Who speaks for whom?

Maybe concern is too strong a word ? confusion would be more apt. We shall see some changes at the Regional level with the election as opposed to appointment of the chair. In the interim, I think it would be beneficial to better understand just who speaks for us, and when.

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is, after all, Our Town.