

Provincial electoral riding to be split, following Federal lead

By Brock Weir

Aurora will once again be split in two electoral ridings as the Province of Ontario follows the lead of the Federal Government.

Last week, Premier Kathleen Wynne introduced the Electoral Boundaries Act, 2015, which is intended to increase the number of provincial ridings in southern Ontario from 96 to 111, just in time for the 2018 Provincial Election. This boost will bring Ontario's provincial ridings in line with new Federal ridings created last year, which will come into effect in time for this fall's Federal election.

The Federal Electoral Boundary Commission's decision to split Aurora in two ? with the north side of Wellington Street falling within the reconfigured boundaries of Newmarket-Aurora with the south side of Wellington Street voting in the newly created riding of Aurora-Oak Ridges- Richmond Hill ? caused a significant amount of opposition locally.

Residents approached the commission with proposals which, in their view, made more sense than splitting Aurora into two electoral districts, as did the Town of Aurora, who endorsed a number of alternatives which were then presented to the commission as well.

Ultimately, their opposition bore no fruit, but now sitting in the Ontario Legislature is former Aurora councillor Chris Ballard who recalls all too well the opposition to the boundary split.

?It is unfortunate the Federal boundaries were changed to split Aurora in half but I look on the positive side and say Aurora will be served by two MPs and Ontario is following likewise because it just makes sense across the Province for the Provincial boundaries to reflect Federal boundaries. In the future, Aurora will have two MPs and two MPPs to hopefully serve the community better.?

Although when the changes come to pass, Mr. Ballard will ultimately find himself living in the southern riding, he says he has yet to make any decisions on the riding in which he will seek re-election. In the meantime, his ears are open to any feedback on the boundary change.

?I think once the Federal Boundary Commission did its work, people understood [and now that the Province is moving ahead] I haven't heard any objections, but I am certainly willing to listen to them and take those voices to Queen's Park. I think a lot of people believe it makes sense to have the Provincial boundaries and Federal boundaries align so people aren't confused on who represents them and where they represent them at a very fundamental level, and programs and services delivered by the Province can better align as well.?

This roster for this fall's Federal Election is filling up, with Newmarket-Aurora's candidate slate filling up fast. In Aurora's north riding, Conservative MP Lois Brown is seeking re-election, while Yvonne Kelly will carry the NDP banner, Kyle Peterson the Liberal and Vanessa Long the Greens. In Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill, Conservative Richmond Hill MP Costas Menegakis is seeking re-election, while Leona Alleslev is the confirmed Liberal candidate.