

Regional Council membership should be reduced in bid for equity, says Mayor

Significant changes to the structure of Regional Council should be considered to allow communities like Aurora a greater say at the table, according to Mayor Tom Mrakas.

Mayor Mrakas, Aurora's sole voice at the Region, put forward a notice of motion on Thursday calling on the Regional Council as a whole to task staff with reviewing their composition with an eye of reducing their numbers from the present 21 (11 Regional Councillors, nine mayors and one chair) to just 10 members ? a seat for each of York Region's nine mayors plus the Regional Chair.

If such a reduction gains traction, Mayor Mrakas says the new structure should give each of the mayors a weighted vote tied to the population of their respective communities.

Previously, Aurora mayors ? including Mayor Mrakas ? have advocated for an additional seat at the Regional table. Aurora is one of just three York Region municipalities, along with King, Whitchurch-Stouffville and East Gwillimbury, to have just one voice at the Regional level, while smaller communities like Georgina, have multiple representatives.

As previous bids for an additional Aurora seat have fizzled, Mayor Mrakas hopes this will be a better way to ensure equity at the Region going forward.

?We believe we're being under-represented at the Region and there are others who believe they are under-represented,? says Mayor Mrakas. ?Vaughan believes they are under-represented by population and the numbers show that they are. Then, there are some that you look at and you say they are over-represented; Georgina, for instance, has a smaller population than us, but they have two members at the table.

?What happens through these discussions is as soon as Aurora asks for a seat, Vaughan asks for a seat and then someone else in turn asks for a seat and you're looking at increasing the size of Regional Council and adding four to five politicians. That is not going to happen and that is why it never happens, because it is not just about adding one seat. If you're actually at having a true representation by population, to me the best way to go about that ? and the most cost-effective way is to reduce Regional Council to nine mayors, create a weighted voting system and that will all of a sudden put everyone at true representation by population.?

It might be a tall order to get Regional politicians to seriously consider slashing their own ranks in half, but Mayor Mrakas is hoping the facts, in a report by the end of the year if Regional Council approves his motion in February, will ultimately win the day.

?Aurora is currently below Georgina in representation, below Newmarket in representation, equal to Stouffville, East Gwillimbury and King, so if you were to go with a nine-mayor system with a weighted voting system, we would leapfrog Stouffville, King, Georgina, East Gwillimbury and we would be just slightly behind Newmarket ? which would have seven votes and we would have five. It puts us in a better position to be represented properly as per our population.

?It is [cost-effective] because as we grow, and we all know each of the municipalities are growing, if you need to make changes [according to population], you don't need to add another position; all you need to do is readjust the voting numbers.?

He concedes it will be a ?difficult process? to get through, but says he honestly believes it is ?the one system we can all look at and agree we are all being presented properly, fairly, and in the most cost-effective manner for the Region and for the residents of the Region.?

?I am not saying that there's an issue with the status quo,? he says. ?York Region as a whole does a very good job where we all work together well, but when you're looking at that representation by population, there are other solutions that you might be able to make some fixes that would work for the meantime.

?This is the best solution for long-term. That's why us as politicians we need to stop looking to the next election four years from now, we need to start looking ten, twenty, thirty years from now and what can stand the test of time. I believe that making this change now at the Region, they will have the best governance model for a very long time.?