

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Building Ontario Up

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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Building Ontario Up For Everyone Act

Last Thursday, the Ontario government introduced the Building Ontario Up For Everyone Act (Budget Measures) 2016. If passed, the bill will include a provision to ensure the direct election of the Chair of York Region Council and the other remaining Regions (Niagara and Peel) who do not directly, or democratically, elect their Chair and CEO.

As you may know, just months into my term as Member of Provincial Parliament, I introduced a private member's bill that asked for the direct election of the York Region chair. The York Region Chair is an unelected position and is directly appointed by the members of Regional Council. It's wonderful to see my bill incorporated in provincial legislation. Bill 42 ? Direct Election of the York Region Chair, received all-party support during the first and second reading, and was supported by many residents and elected officials during public hearings.

Five York Region municipalities passed motions in support of Bill 42, including Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Markham, Newmarket and Whitchurch-Stouffville. The Region of York accounts for about one-third of the local municipal tax bill, has an annual operating budget of \$2 billion dollars and a debt of almost \$2.9 billion. I have argued that the chair of the region is, perhaps, the most powerful political municipal politician in the Region. It's about time that job was directly elected.

When I became a Minister in June, my private member's bill could not move forward, but I was convinced that the direct election of regional chairs was such a great idea that, surely, the provincial government would make it happen. I was delighted to see my bill reflected in the government bill, introduced by Ontario's Minister of Finance.

I want to thank York Region MPPs Helena Jaczek and Reza Moridi, for their earlier championing of direct election. Each had introduced a version of my bill, but because of election timing, they were not able to proceed. I would also like to acknowledge the many mayors, regional councillors and members of the public whose voices impacted this bill by calling, writing and making deputations to my office and before the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly in Queen's Park. This was a team effort. The Building Ontario Up For Everyone Act also included proposed legislation that would help new home buyers. The bill will modernize the Land Transfer Tax Act and double the maximum Land Transfer Tax (LTT) refund to \$4,000 for eligible first-time homebuyers, as of January 1, 2017.

The act will also include an increase to the LTT rates on one or two single-family residences on the portion of the purchase price above \$2 million, the revenue from the proposed increases will be used to fund the enhancements to the First-time Homebuyers Refund. This is great news for the residents of Aurora and Newmarket. The Act also includes: establishing the initial parameters for the Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario, an amendment to the Pension Benefits Act, Enabling regulations that would implement recommendations from the review of Credit Unions and Caisses Populaires Act, 1994, extending Ontario Securities Commission on whistleblower protection to employees, the ORPP Legislation Repeal Act, 2016, amending the Tobacco Tax Act, amending the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001, amending the Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act, 1993, amending the Occupational Health and Safety Act, Amending the Ontario College of Trades and Apprenticeship Act, 2009 and Amending the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997. The Building Ontario Up For Everyone Act is great news for residents in Aurora and all across the province. This Act will continue to build Ontario up and move democracy forward.

Dairy Quality Inc.

I recently had the honour of hosting the Premier's Agri-Food Innovation Excellence Awards. One of the organizations being recognized was Dairy Quality Inc., in Newmarket. They developed a hand-held somatic cell counter utilizing smartphone technology. With this mobile testing device, dairy farmers can now get information about the health of an individual cow in just seconds without the expense and time of a commercial laboratory. The device, which is currently in use around the world, gives farmers better control of herd health while providing consumers with top quality milk. I applaud your vision and perseverance to develop an "app" that enables producers to have real time information. Congratulations on helping to ensure Ontario's dairy producers are at the leading edge of technology and remain competitive.

Alice Sheridan

The Town of Newmarket recently suffered the loss of one of its greatest residents. Mrs. Alice Sheridan passed away at the age of 97

on November 13. Alice and I became friends in the last two years, and I always respected her insight into local, provincial and federal politics. She had a no nonsense attitude regarding politics, and was not shy in telling you if she disagreed with your stance on an issue. She was fearless, honest, and she cared deeply about her community and neighbours. She was a role model to us all, and I will never forget our talks.

As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.