

Wayne Emmerson re-appointed Regional Chair



By Brock Weir

Former Whitchurch-Stouffville mayor Wayne Emmerson will once again lead Regional Council for the next four years.

Mr. Emmerson, who was first appointed to the position by Regional Council in 2014 following the retirement of Bill Fisch, was re-elected to the position by Regional Councillors at Thursday evening's inaugural meeting.

He said he feels the Province will make changes to both the Region and local communities, and he called for a place at the table in those discussions.

Nominated by Richmond Hill Mayor Dave Barrow and East Gwillimbury Mayor Virginia Hackson he was uncontested despite others floating themselves as possibilities after the Provincial Government this summer nixed plans to have the position elected by all eligible York Region voters.

"Municipal government is the most important government; it effects the lifestyle of the people the most," said Mr. Emmerson after taking his seat at the head of the table. "We had a great four years and I feel the next four years will be just as good."

The next four years might bring a degree of uncertainty to the Region, he added.

"I feel the Province will make changes to our Region and local communities. All I ask is that we are at the table so we can be a part of the decision-making process. We are part of the solution, not part of the problem. Exciting times ahead, but I know this Council is up to the challenge."

A number of further issues will need to be addressed, he said, outlining the Region's priorities for the term. Top of mind during budget time, he said, was addressing debt, as well as an extension of the Yonge subway line up to Richmond Hill.

"The Yonge Subway Line is our most needed transit project," he said. "We will continue to ask the Province and Federal Governments for the funding to make it operational by 2031 or sooner. An integrated fare system is a must for this term of Council. We will be waiting to see if the Province will do this and upload all transit in the GTA. Housing rental is a high priority. Our DC (development charges) referral and funding from the Federal and Provincial Government will help. We hope to reduce our wait list [and] we can't do it alone on property tax."

Mr. Emmerson called on the Feds to support the Region's commitment to broadband to keep everyone connected, especially businesses, on the Province to enact further "green" measures, while noting growth targets are expected to be reviewed.

"We need more jobs as we continue to grow," he said. "We will continue to build roads and keep our assets in good repair. Our residents can be assured Regional Council will continue to provide funding for our community and health programs. We will maintain our high-quality water and wastewater systems."

Thursday's meeting afforded each member of Regional Council for the 2018 - 2022 term a few moments to address the packed audience gathered at York's Regional headquarters in Newmarket, including Mayor Tom Mrakas.

"I truly am very humbled and honoured to be sitting here with all these elected officials and all of you here tonight," he said. "I am looking forward to working with my Regional Council colleagues to protect and promote the interests not only of the Town of Aurora, but the Region as a whole. I am looking forward to a very exciting and great four years."