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Community voice could be lost: Kempkens

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countability, transparency and quality of population and public health programs and services. They were also tasked with improving the capacity and equity in public health units, to support integration with the broader health systems and the LHINs, to leverage public health expertise and leadership in planning.

Three major themes were established, and the panel released the opinion of the public health sector being stronger if there were fewer health units with greater capacity, if there was a consistent governance model, and if the sector was better connected to other parts of the health system.

"The main recommendation is to dissolve the 36 current boards of health, replace them with 14 autonomous regional boards of health, and those 14 regional boards of health would generally align with the existing LHIN structure," Kempkens said.

In order to achieve the regional boards of health, the region would be split up into two segments and gathered with other regions: Halton Hills, Milton and Oakville would move to Mississauga and parts of Etobicoke; Burlington would move in with Hamilton and Niagara.

In the conclusion of her presentation, Kempkens voiced some considerations. The first, with the region being split in two, the two local school boards would have to deal with two different regional public health entities, possibly on different schedules, deadlines and approaches. She also said there may be redundant positions and that might negatively affect planning.

"There's a lot of questions about how this entanglement will work and what would be the possible negative consequences of both the regional government and the regional public health entities," she said.

Her third point was in regard to how municipal representation would be handled under the new structure, noting the changes could negatively affect the local voice in the region.

Staff has attended a number of discussion periods with the Ministry of Health, and attended another on Oct. 31.

After she finished, Halton Hills Coun. Jane Fogal voiced her concerns.

"I read this report with some alarm," she said. "First I thought, what happens to all our staff? Do they suddenly all leave here and join another organization? Is it good for all of them?"

Kempkens could not offer an answer, stating the

panel has been silent on that particular question.

Fogal then called in the issue of funding, and her worry on taxing residents for purchases made without regional control.

According to Kempkens, additional funding would be required to guide public health through a transitional period, lasting anywhere between 18 and 24 months. She also said there has been no answer from the government regarding who would pay for public health.

"What problem is this fixing?" Fogal asked.

According to the panel, the problem came from reports over the last 20 years all having to do with the major themes described in Kempkens's presentation regarding few boards of health, and a better governance model.

"It was pointed out to the ministry that some of these reports are quite old ... and wouldn't it be prudent to look at the current evidence, to look at the current state of public health and if the problems described in the past are still ongoing, but we did not get a firm answer, or what the problem is they're trying to solve with this proposal."

Fogal said the proposal would work less effectively than what is currently in place regarding public health.

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