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THE REGION

GTA mayors fear board will be scrapped

BY LISA QUEEN
 STAFF WRITER

Mayors are predicting the start-up date of the Greater Toronto Services Board will be delayed for the fourth time.

The board was originally supposed to get up and running last January, but the province postponed implementation until July.

July then became September, which was pushed back to January 1999.

But with just over two months to go, some mayors are suggesting the province is backing off the latest date.

Oakville Mayor Ann Mulvale floated the idea at the GTA mayors Oct. 16.

York Region mayors, such as Aurora's Tim Jones and Richmond Hill's Bill Bell, are also wondering about the province's plans for the board.

However, York Mackenzie MPP Frank Klees and Durham-York MPP Julia Munro insist the province intends to pass legislation this fall that will enact the board.

"That's certainly the intent, that has not changed, but, obviously, it is subject to the legislative process," Munro said.

Klees agreed.

"Certainly, I know of no plans to delay it. It's very much the intent of the government to have it in place," he said. However, Klees also said the GTSB could be bumped by the over-loaded legislative agenda.

Mulvale said rumors are rampant the board would be shelved until after the next provincial election. "It's not going to start, regardless of what you hear, in January. They (the province) are going to back down," she told mayors.

Mulvale invited Alan Tonks, the provincially appointed moderator of the GTSB, to comment, but he declined.

Mulvale pointed out even basic questions — such as where the GTSB will operate from and whether any support staff will be hired — have yet to be addressed.

But Klees argued that's not a big deal because the GTSB is only supposed to coordinate services throughout the GTA, not be another level of government.

"That (where the board will meet) shouldn't be a problem because we have lots of space. If they need a place to meet, they can meet in my boardroom."

Hopefully, Klees has a huge boardroom — the GTSB will have 40 representatives.

The only service the board will be directly responsible for is GO Transit, although it will act as a discussion forum on other issues.

With only two months to go before the province's January target, Jones doubts the government has time to implement the board.

"We've got eight weeks. They won't be up and running in eight weeks. Plus, there's Christmas in there. I'd be floored (if the board was operating)."

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Planning sessions this week

York Region's planning department has scheduled three public information sessions this week on the future of the region, all starting at the regional headquarters in Newmarket.

The first of the sessions, part of the region's Planning for the Millennium program, is Wednesday at 7 p.m. Changing Ethnicity in York Region will cover the changing cultural fabric here and the effect on communities. Speakers are Markham Regional Councillor Tony Wong and regional social services commissioner Joann Simmons.

A mobile workshop, Industry in York Region, will include a bus tour of a number of employ-

ment hubs in York to learn what shaped them, transportation impacts, design elements and ways to integrate business parks into the rest of the community. It takes place Thursday and the bus leaves the administration building at 12:30 p.m. The cost for this workshop is \$10.

York Region's Changing Economy is the title for the third session, Thursday at 7 p.m. Speakers include Derek Holt, senior economist with the Royal Bank, Scott Chandler, senior consultant with Royal LePage and Don Eastwood, the region's director of economic development.

Registration for these sessions is encouraged. Call 895-1231, (905) 773-3004 or (705) 437-1617.

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