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The Stonehaven

Possible GTSB role in dispatch

BY LISA QUEEN
 Staff Writer

Abandoning plans to have the Greater Toronto Services Board operate ambulances, Markham Mayor Don Cousens is now hoping the board will take over dispatching paramedics instead.

Cousens and Toronto Councillor Howard Moscoe proposed having the board run the entire operation a year ago, just as the GTSB was getting off the ground.

But they admitted Friday time passed them by.

For example, York and Durham regions took over handling ambulances on Jan. 1.

But Cousens and Moscoe suggested the GTSB can still have a hand in the emergency service by overseeing dispatch.

Although the province unloaded ambulances to regional governments, it kept control of dispatch, despite concerns by municipal politicians.

Suggesting the province is now willing to hand over control of dispatch, Moscoe argued the GTSB is the best level of government to take over because local boundaries shouldn't be a stumbling block when deciding which ambulance should respond to an emergency.

"There's nothing that cries out more for consolidation (at a GTA level) than dispatch service for ambulance," he told a committee meeting Friday afternoon.

"There are no more Toronto hospitals. There are no more York Region hospitals. They are GTA hospitals."

"People (ambulance attendants) are scrambling around trying to find somewhere for their emergency patients and they end up having people die in the back of ambulances. I'm sorry if I'm getting passionate about this. The crisis point is here."

Cousens said he and Moscoe came together in an attempt to

improve a critical service for residents across the GTA.

"I know the world must be shaking its head and saying 'Don Cousens and Howard Moscoe? What a team,'" he said.

"To me, it's a delight because two people from two different communities are working together."

"I think there's a desire on all our parts to get the best value and best service for our residents."

Cousens convinced the committee to set up a task force that will look at having the GTSB take over dispatch, including funding issues.

"I think we can put a stake in the ground today and take this forward. We could have a winning proposition."

Moscoe pressured politicians to ensure the task force brings back a report by the end of March, arguing the GTSB will lose all credibility if it fails to act quickly.

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