

Task force too slow: councillor

From page 1

Collectively, the local bylaws would amount to a region-wide ban on smoking in public places ranging from workplaces, stores and municipal facilities to bars, bingo halls and bowling alleys.

But since the task force came to light last fall, Burkholder, backed by other chamber of commerce leaders, has complained the committee is ignoring the business community's concerns.

"This task force and its process are seriously flawed."

Frustaglio makes no apologies for the task force being biased. But she rejects accusations her group is neglecting business concerns.

"I'm accused of being biased and not having an open mind. Of course I'm biased," she said.

"My primary concern, as chairman of the committee of health and social services, is the health of our residents," she said.

"Let's not take the health risks of ETS (environmental tobacco smoke or second-hand smoke) too lightly. It's been documented that the health risk to children is mounting and increasing."

But Frustaglio said any resident or business owner is welcome to attend committee meetings and address the task force. For the past few weeks, there has also been a series of public meetings on the proposed ban.

"When we're being accused of ramming this thing through, I really take exception to that."

At the same time, Frustaglio said York



RUTH BURKHOLDER: Board of trade president says businesses may have to take region to court.

has been dragging its feet on prohibiting smoking in public places, pointing to other jurisdictions that are actively fighting smoking and tobacco firms.

"I don't think we're moving too fast. I think we're moving too slow. We're way behind other municipalities," she said.

"If the City of Toronto can do it, come on guys, surely to God, we can do it. Peel brought in a bylaw that mirrors the one York was looking at in 1997. They get all the credit."

"We're still shaking in our boots, waiting because somebody has suggested we haven't given an opportunity to

business (to comment). We've given ample opportunity."

But Vaughan Councillor Michael DiBiase argued his city has proved a smoking ban doesn't work unless residents and businesses are on side.

"We have in Vaughan a very stringent bylaw but everybody smokes. We attend functions and the room is filled with smoke," he said.

"I don't think we're being realistic. I think that's what's happening in Vaughan. The compliance rate in Vaughan is zero as far as I'm concerned."

DiBiase urged the task force to work out a compromise.

"We may pass a bylaw and it looks great on paper but reality doesn't work that way. If we don't have the support of the public, I don't think we're going to go anywhere."

Vaughan Mayor Lorna Jackson insisted the bylaw, considered the toughest in North America when it was passed four years ago, is working.

"To suggest it is not working is not true. It is working. Maybe not as much as we want or enforced as much as we want. But it is working."

However, Jackson argued, until the province passes legislation restricting or banning smoking in public places, it will remain very difficult for municipalities to enforce local bylaws.



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