

Region trying to convince towns to license restaurants

BY JEFF MITCHELL
Staff Writer

Do you think you should be able to review a restaurant's latest inspection results before deciding to dine there?

Members of York Region's health committee do and they're going to try one more time to convince area municipalities it's a good idea.

They've instructed regional staff to send information packages to the six municipalities that do not license restaurants in an attempt to sway local councils.

That may be the easy part. Restaurateurs hate the idea.

"Where does it all stop?" said Irv Riopelle, owner of The Crow's Nest in Newmarket.

Riopelle has been involved in an ongoing battle with the region over its smoking bylaws. And he's fought the Town of Newmarket over a number of zoning issues. He says it's

time for the region to stop imposing regulations that are having a deleterious effect on his industry.

Another restaurateur simply called licencing "a money grab" by the region.

Posting inspection results, which has long been a goal of the health committee, can only occur if lower-level municipalities licence establishments.

Currently, the only means of notifying the public of problems with restaurants is when they are closed down or charged for health violations.

"In order for the region to really effectively enforce any sort of bylaw, we need the municipal level to bring forth their own licensing bylaw," said Vaughan Councillor Joyce Frustaglio, chairperson of the committee.

She said there ought to be a push to "get the mayors of this region to accept their responsibility in participating in this program."

Vaughan, Markham and

Whitchurch-Stouffville are the only municipalities that licence restaurants now. Attempts by the region to have others fall in line have been rebuffed.

That's largely because municipalities can't handle the additional workload and expense, Newmarket Councillor Diane Humeniuk said.

"It's a lack of internal resources," she said. "We're drowning; we're trying to keep our heads above water."

Humeniuk suggested the region make another pitch for licencing, stressing the health angle: "Tell us the

health risks," she said. "Don't just tell us we have to hire more people."

While he supports the renewed attempt to bring municipalities on board, regional chairperson Bill Fisch said the effort has been made before.

"We've led the municipalities to water... some are prepared to drink, some are not," he said.

Restaurant owners most assuredly are not, according to Daniel Gilbert.

"Why don't they just leave this alone? No one wants this," said the owner of Daniel's of Nobleton.

"It serves absolutely no purpose; either the place is closed or it's open. It's completely wrong-headed. It's just a money grab."

York's posting strategy — to require the display of food inspectors' reports, as opposed to a colour-coded system — could be unnecessarily damaging to restaurants that have met health standards, but are cited for minor infractions that will not directly affect the diner, he said.

Riopelle said the food inspection system in York works well now.

"If a place is bad and it's a

health hazard, close the bloody place down," he said. "But they've got to work with us."

"If they're doing their job and coming around often enough, why would they want to (post inspections)?"

York Medical Officer of Health Helena Jaczek said new licensing bylaws passed by municipalities would have to include a clause requiring the posting of inspection results.

"At this time, I don't think any of the nine municipalities have the appropriate bylaw," she said.



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