

# Are you fairly represented at regional council?

Communities such as Stouffville only have 1 representative in Newmarket

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With York Region's population growing rapidly and a newly elected council making some of the biggest decisions affecting your everyday lives, it is only fair to ask if you and your municipality are being fairly represented.

The nine mayors and 11 councillors on regional council, along with chairperson Bill Fisch, are charged with making a range of decisions, from the pipes under your house to the streets on which you drive.

Each councillor represents approximately 50,000 residents and Mr. Fisch — who will seek to maintain his position in the upcoming term — thinks every municipality is now fairly represented.

"It's based on population ... and when you look at it, the percentages are almost bang on," he said.

#### EVENHANDED

It is the chairperson's job to be evenhanded and ensure smaller municipalities' voices are not drowned out by their southern neighbours, Mr. Fisch said.

However, it stands to reason if Aurora only has one representative and Markham has four, Markham has more of an opportunity to influence the vote, outgoing Aurora Mayor Phyllis Morris said.

Because Aurora doesn't have a regional councillor, Ms Morris has been the town's lone representative and adding another has been an issue. Having someone to share the workload and cover what the mayor can't would be a help, she said.

The situation is similar in Whitchurch-Stouffville where mayor-elect Wayne Emmerson will be the town's lone representative in Newmarket.

Meanwhile, Vaughan was the last municipality to gain a regional councillor in 2003, giving the city three regional councillors.

Newly-elected Regional Coun-



**WAYNE EMMERSON:** Will be Whitchurch-Stouffville's lone representative on regional council.

cillor Michael Di Biase has already served as a councillor and mayor and said the city's interests are well-represented for the time being.

"I think we have to speak up ... and I think there's an opportunity to do that," he said.

Only Markham has more representatives on council than Vaughan, with one mayor and four regional councillors.

When the vote to add a regional councillor to Vaughan was tabled in 2002, the motion passed, however Newmarket, Aurora and East Gwillimbury objected.

Former Newmarket mayor Tom Taylor tabled a motion calling for a full review of regional representation, however, nothing materialized.

It may be time for another review and Mr. Fisch said that is likely to happen in the next few months.

The region, however, does not have the final say. The Municipal Act gives that authority to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Section 217 requires upper tier municipalities to have a chairperson and at least one representative from each municipality.

Beyond that, leeway is given in terms of how things are run.

Instead of a straight majority, the change must be approved by a triple majority of council, then the

local councils and those consenting councils must represent a majority of electors.

Each councillor represented an average 42,000 residents, after the last change.

Today, representation is closer to 50,000, but still preferable to Aurora's proposal in 2000. It called for regional representation to be lowered to one regional councillor for every 20,000.

#### PROVINCIAL INFLUENCE

At the time, it would have given the town an additional regional representative. It also would have seen regional council expand to 33 members and grow to about 50 members when taking today's regional population into consideration.

While acknowledging there could be a time when it makes sense to expand council, Mr. Di Biase said today's voters don't want a bigger government or more costs.

The region's population will grow about 50 per cent, up to 1.5 million, by 2031. But the distribution of the population won't change as much as you might expect.

Newmarket's influence wanes as it drops from more than 8 per cent of today's population to 6.4 per cent.

Richmond Hill drops even fur-

ther, from 23 per cent down to 16.1, despite concentrated growth in its south end.

Aurora might seem a logical place to add a councillor, but its growth will also fail to keep pace in the coming years.

East Gwillimbury is the clear outlier. Now accounting for less than 3 per cent of the region's population, it will be closer to 6 per cent in 2031.

The issue of whether or not East Gwillimbury should have another regional councillor arose at a recent election debate and while it might not be justifiable yet, it may be only a matter of time.

The one exception to the pattern is Georgina, which accounts for less than 5 per cent of the population yet has 10 per cent of councillors, with both the mayor and a regional representative.

Georgina's disproportionate power dates back to 1970, when provincial legislation created York Region from the prior York County.

The municipal affairs ministry acknowledged the general principle of representation by population but cited exceptional circumstances in Georgina.

While the town's year-round population might not be large, it swells during the summer months, when cottagers come north.

#### WANT MORE?

Out of the 20 elected members, there will be seven new faces around the council table this term.

They include four new mayors — Aurora's Geoff Dawe, King Township's Steve Pellegrini, East Gwillimbury's Virginia Hackson and Vaughan's Maurizio Bevilacqua — and three new councillors — Vaughan's Michael Di Biase and Deb Schulte and Markham's Joe Li.

A final meeting of the old council takes place Nov. 25 to deal with any outstanding issues, however, since one-third of councillors are so-called lame ducks, no new business will be on the agenda.

The new council has its inaugural meeting Dec. 9 and one of its first decisions will be the election of a chairperson. Mr. Fisch was acclaimed in 2006 and no one has put their name forward to contest him for the upcoming four-year term.

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