

Chairperson dynamics in spotlight

BY LISA QUEEN
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Four years ago, with his sights set on taking over York Region's top political job if regional chairperson Bill Fisch retired, Wayne Emmerson announced he wouldn't seek re-election as Whitchurch-Stouffville mayor beyond October 2014.

Conversely, his declared opponents for the regional chairperson's post, Newmarket Regional Councillor John Taylor and Markham Regional Councillor Jim Jones, were re-elected in their municipalities less than two months ago. If either of them is appointed regional chairperson Dec. 11, their municipality, under provincial legislation, would have to appoint a replacement or hold a byelection to fill the vacancy.

In fact, there is a possibility of two byelections if a ward councillor ran and won the regional councillor's job and then a byelection was held to replace the ward councillor.

Since this is the first time regional council has selected a new chairperson since Fisch was appointed to the job in 1997 and since there is a strong chance the chairperson will be elected by voters across the region beginning in 2018 if provincial legislation is changed, the dynamics of selecting a regional chairperson for this term are in the spotlight, York University political science professor Robert MacDermid said.

Not only could the selection of the candidate set off a domino effect of appointments or byelections, but it highlights how undemocratic the system of choosing the most powerful political position in the region is, he said.

Candidates don't have to present a political platform to residents. Instead, they lobby other regional councillors behind the scenes and voters have no idea what discussions have taken place, MacDermid said.

Candidates only make a short speech before council Dec. 11 before the vote is taken, he said.

"It's an incredibly powerful position and the fact it isn't elected seems kind of strange. Ultimately, the regional chairperson is responsible to regional politicians, not residents," he said.

Not surprisingly, Emmerson has a different opinion than Taylor and Jones about whether or not a candidate for regional chairperson should have run for re-election in the municipal elections held about six weeks before appointment of the regional chairperson.

"I've been up front with the people," he said. "I'm not going for two jobs, I'm going for one...I've tried to be as fair as I possibly can."

Emmerson said he wouldn't have felt right running for mayor, only to turn around a few weeks later and seek the chairperson's job.

"I put all my eggs in my basket and (said) I'm going for regional chair," he said, adding Richmond Hill Mayor Dave Barrow will nominate him and Georgina Regional Councillor Danny Wheeler will second the motion.

"I can't go to my (campaign) workers and my supporters and say I want to be mayor and six weeks later say I want to be regional chair. I think a lot of people would be upset. Why did you say you wanted to be mayor if you want to be regional chair?"

For more on this story, visit yorkregion.com.

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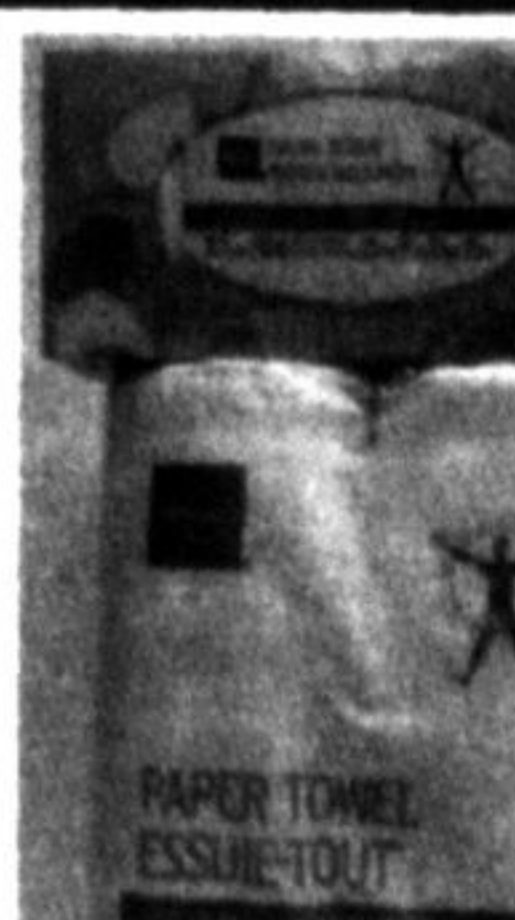
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