

York discusses making masks mandatory

By Mark Pavilons

York Region council will decide this week whether to make masks in public spaces mandatory. Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti tabled the motion at council June 25. York made masks mandatory on York Region Transit July 2. "We cannot afford to let our guard down until a vaccine is found. As the economy continues to reopen, we should guard against any false sense of security. The pandemic is not over and the threat of a second wave is a real possibility," Scarpitti said. He wants to make wearing masks mandatory at all indoor spaces, and in crowded outdoor spaces where physical distancing is not possible. Options could include an order under Section 22 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act. York Region Council also has the authority to pass a bylaw under the Municipal Act. "The community expects us to do everything we can to ensure public safety and to stop community spread. A policy mandating masks throughout the region is both a responsible public health response and a sound economic decision. We have to take every step possible to restore public confidence in the marketplace and create consistency among businesses throughout York Region." Scarpitti previously called on the Provincial Government to create a similar consistent policy across Ontario, in lieu of that; extra precautions should be taken in large urban centres and across the GTA, he pointed out. "We just have to look to the situation that is unfolding in some jurisdictions south of the border, with the number of cases rising at an alarming rate." Scarpitti said Masks4Canada, a group of doctors and members of the medical community, have signed an open letter asking federal and provincial public health officials to make masks mandatory in all indoor spaces outside the home, in crowded areas where physical distancing is challenging or impossible and on public transit. The letter states: "In addition to the current physical distancing measures and hand hygiene, masks are critical in order to ensure a safe reopening, prevent additional outbreaks and save lives." I commend York Regional Council for endorsing my call to make masks mandatory on York Region Transit, effective July 2, and I believe this is another necessary safeguard in the fight to stop COVID-19," he said. The report on mandating masks will be presented to York Regional Council at a special council meeting today (July 9).