

York Regional council to ask province for additional member for Vaughan

By Angela Gismondi

The City of Vaughan could get an additional regional councillor.

York regional council voted unanimously in favour of asking the Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to enact a regulation to authorize adding an additional member of regional council for the City of Vaughan in time for the Oct. 27, 2014 municipal elections. The decision was made at the council meeting Thursday.

The addition would increase the City of Vaughan's representation on York Regional Council from four members to five, and is based on the need to ensure Vaughan residents are adequately represented based on a representation by population principle.

“The issue is self-explanatory,” said Mayor Maurizio Bevilacqua. “It is about fair representation for Regional Council. I think we have been underrepresented for a while and this issue will allow us to bring fairness to council and indeed to the City of Vaughan. I have spoken to a number of individuals and I think we're just ready for the vote now.”

Each member of Regional Council from the City of Vaughan currently represents approximately 78,000 residents, and based on population projections will increase to more than 87,000 residents in 2018 if its representation stays at four members.

With 28 per cent of York Region's population, Vaughan only has 20 per cent regional council representation. By contrast, if the City of Vaughan had five members, each Vaughan member of regional council would represent approximately 64,500 residents, which would be more favourable for City of Vaughan residents.

“This addition reflects how York Region's population is increasing by another 400,000 residents by 2031 with a majority of that growth happening in our southern three municipalities,” said Bill Fisch, York Region Chairman and CEO. “Based on its population, The City of Vaughan is currently under-represented on our current council and this request by regional council will address that.” Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti agreed.

“I think it is fundamental for this council to operate with representation by population and certainly the city of Vaughan has that population and I think the number of representatives and the weighted representation on this council should reflect that population based on the formula that we use,” said Scarpitti. “If down the road there are other municipalities that pass the threshold where we need to do the same thing, then I don't know maybe 15 or 20 years from now we may have to revisit some of that formula. The Formula is what it is and I think the City of Vaughan is owed that representation based on population.”

If the minister approves the regulation, council must give public notice of its intention to pass a bylaw changing the size of council and hold at least one public meeting to consider this. There also must be a triple majority support in order for the bylaw to pass. This includes:

- 1) Obtaining a majority of votes on York Regional Council.
- 2) Obtaining a majority of the nine local municipal councils.
- 3) Electors in the local municipalities must represent a majority of electors in York Region.

The bylaw would need to be passed by Dec. 31, 2013 in order to be in effect for the 2014 municipal election. Adding one additional member will bring the total composition of York Regional Council to 22 members, which includes the York Region Chairman and CEO.

The municipalities of Aurora, King, East Gwillimbury and Whitchurch-Stouffville currently do not have a regional councillor.

Those municipalities have motions coming forward next month requesting a regional councillor be added for the municipalities that don't have one.

“If the good mayor from Vaughan is talking about fairness then I am sure he would be willing to add an amendment it would be conditional on elected representatives be added to the other four municipalities that only have one,” said Grossi. “If we're talking fairness, I think it would only be fair with respect to those other municipalities. I didn't want to get into this discussion, but if we're going to get into it, we know what discussions have taken place so far and fairness means that Aurora, East Gwillimbury, King and Whitchurch-Stouffville should have an additional member.”