

Jones gets support for her bill from Regional council

By Bill Rea

Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones asked Peel Regional councillors for support of her bill regarding sewage bypasses, and she got it.

Councillors seemed almost enthused last Thursday as the members present unanimously passed a motion supporting the private member's bill. Four of Caledon's five representatives on council were there to vote. Mayor Allan Thompson had already left the meeting.

Jones had introduced her bill (Bill 141) late in May. She had previously noted that the Ontario Water Resources Act already requires bypasses at sewage treatment plants to be reported, but impacted municipalities don't have to be informed. Her bill, if passed, would require the Ministry of Environment to publish within 24 hours cases of sewage bypasses into waterways.

Sewage bypasses occur when flow exceeds the capacity of the treatment plant, normally due to storms. This means that raw sewage is released into connected waterways.

She had also pointed out that there is currently no requirement for public reporting when a bypass takes place. This is in spite of the fact there is potential risk to people who swim, fish or boat in impacted waterways.

Brampton Councillor Gael Miles observed it makes sense that there be notification when sewage goes where it shouldn't.

"It's kind of a no-brainer," she commented.

Mississauga Councillor Jim Tovey agreed, adding not informing the public in cases like that is contentious.

"It's very much needed," he said. "Good job, Sylvia."

In a letter to Regional council, a copy of which was included in last Thursday's agenda, Jones stated the intent of the bill is to make sure residents know as quickly as possible when sewage bypass has occurred, so they can make safe and educated decisions about how they use their local waterways. As well, she stated it will enable residents to access information of sewer systems, thus helping them to understand the importance of investing in key infrastructure.

"As you are no doubt aware, millions of litres of untreated or partially treated sewage is bypassed from sewage treatment plants every year into our local waterways," Jones stated in a July letter to Environment and Climate Change Minister Glen Murray, a copy of which was also included in last Thursday's council agenda. "Unfortunately, the state of some of the province's sewer infrastructure means that untreated or partially treated sewage is regularly bypassed."

Peel is not the first municipality to show support for the bill.

"I've had a number of councils support (it)," Jones remarked, adding she had been approached several times at the recent conference of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. She also said the support is coming from all around the province.