

Mississauga can veto plans to expand council

By Bill Rea

Peel Regional councillors last week backed the Town's position to expand the Regional body, but that position might not get very far.

There's every indication Mississauga will veto it.

It was a split vote last Thursday that saw Regional councillors back one of the four options for the council configuration that were put forth by the Governance Review Task Force. The one that Caledon councillors unanimously backed last Tuesday, also known as Option 2, was also supported by the Brampton councillors. It passed 12-10, as all the Mississauga councillors who were present voted against it, but two of them were absent for the vote.

'I'm going to kill them,' Mississauga Councillor Carolyn Parrish jokingly remarked after the vote was taken.

Option 2 would see Regional council grow by eight members, with Mississauga and Brampton each getting four new representatives, while Caledon would keep its current five.

The current configuration has 12 councillors from Mississauga, seven from Brampton and five from Caledon.

Regional Solicitor Patrick O'Connor pointed out a triple majority would be required to change the composition of council. That would include the approval of a majority of the municipal councils in Peel representing at least a majority of the registered electors (voters) in the region. That means the City of Mississauga would have the necessary numbers to be able to veto any proposed change.

And that's just what will happen, according to Parrish.

'There's not a single councillor in Mississauga who will vote for Option 2,' she declared.

The task force consisted of Regional Chair Frank Dale, the mayors and CAOs of the three municipalities, the Regional CAO David Szwarc and Regional Clerk Kathryn Lockyer.

Dale expressed appreciation for all the input the task force received, also thanking the three mayors.

'Consensus is not always easy,' he remarked, adding the three showed good faith while advancing the interests of their municipalities. 'I'm extremely proud of this council and glad to see progress so far.'

It was Caledon Councillor Jennifer Innis who moved adoption of Option 2, but Parrish was quick to voice her opposition, favouring a configuration modelled more of representation by population (rep by pop). She pointed out there are some 59,000 residents of Caledon, adding there is no ward in Mississauga that small.

According to rep by pop, Parrish said Caledon is entitled to less than one councillor. She was calling for three representatives; the mayor and one councillor each to represent the east and west sides of town.

'Mississauga is being magnanimous,' she said.

Parrish added Mississauga is happy with the current arrangement of a mayor and 11 councillors. There is no desire to add more elected positions in the city, and she could see taking two seats from Caledon and giving them to Brampton. She also said the vote at City council against adding more members passed unanimously.

Parrish also said she didn't want to hear about how big Caledon is.

'I don't represent rocks,' she said. 'I don't represent horses.'

She said it's not necessary to travel all over town to represent it. That can be done with use of emails and social media, she said.

'You're representing people,' she declared.

Mississauga Councillor Pat Saito said this issue has been discussed a lot over the years.

She also said there is a case for giving more councillors to Brampton, and agreed with Parrish that Mississauga doesn't need anymore. She said it would be irresponsible to add four more. Saito pointed out residents are speaking out all the time against bigger government.

'It's a waste of taxpayers' money,' she added.

'Our taxpayers have been under represented . . . for many, many years,' she observed, adding Mississauga taxpayers have been paying the bulk of the Region's bills.

Mayor Allan Thompson said he respected the opinions coming from Mississauga. He also cited the Municipal Act, which states representation by area is a key consideration. Caledon has 56 per cent of the land area of Peel, and he said it's full-time work to represent that.

'It's full-time work,' he said. 'You have people. We deal with everything.'

He also suggested a compromise could be using weighted votes for Mississauga's representation, giving the mayor two votes at

Region instead of one, and giving some of the City councillors with larger wards extra votes as well.

'That's one way of making it work,' he argued.

Mississauga Councillor Jim Tovey said he and his colleagues would have to sell Mississauga residents on the idea of getting four new councillors at a time when people want less government.

Brampton Councillor John Sprovieri said he agreed with Mississauga's position.

'It doesn't make sense for them to take another four seats,' he remarked, adding it makes sense to increase Brampton's numbers, given the growth in the area.

He also agreed that cutting Caledon down to three would create too much of a burden. He said the councillors would need a helicopter to get around town.

'This is a two-tiered system that's not working for people,' Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie commented.

Mississauga operates on a single tier (meaning all City councillors are also Regional councillors), and Crombie said Brampton could change to a similar model any time.

She added they were trying to do what's right, adding Brampton's growth justifies another two seats.

Crombie observed that adding eight more council positions will add another \$2 million to the Region's budget.

'I cannot face my taxpayers and say 'I'm going to add eight people to this council,' she said.

Caledon Councillor Barb Shaughnessy commented that Caledon has worked with its Brampton and Mississauga counterparts for years. The issue, she said, is Mississauga wants to maintain half the seats at council, and adding seats to both Brampton and Mississauga would accomplish that.

Shaughnessy also said rep by pop is not always practised. In the House of Commons, Prince Edward Island is over represented in terms of population numbers.

'You're creating a hardship on us,' she told the Mississauga councillors, asking them to view the issue from Caledon's point of view.

'We want to work with you guys. But you've got to understand that Caledon needs a little more skin in the game.'

'It's clear consensus won't be reached today,' Brampton Mayor Linda Jeffrey observed.

But she added this is the only chance to correct an injustice in time for the next municipal elections in 2018.

Jeffrey used to be a Liberal MPP, and she recalled in her first year at Queen's Park, then Mississauga mayor Hazel McCallion was pushing to have her city separate from the Region. The issue was referred to Justice John Adams, and Jeffrey said he came back with a compromise. But she said then premier Dalton McGuinty cherry picked the recommendations in the report, and Brampton got the short end.

'I had to vote against my party,' she said. 'I think they call that 'career limiting.' I feel proud of what I did.'

'I guess you can't say it was a Gong Show, but it was close to it,' Thompson commented later.

He also said Brampton deserves to have all its councillors at the Region.

'I think it got political,' he remarked, pointing out growing councils is nothing new. He said Niagara Region has a council of 32, and the councils in Halton Region and Toronto are adding seats.

'There's been a bit of a toxic environment this term of council,' he added.

He also thought the Mississauga reps didn't seem to be listening.

'I think they were focused,' he said 'They were hooked on numbers and not listening to anything else.'

Thompson said it will be the Province that decides the make up of council.

'Two municipalities stood together,' he said. 'That will be a good message to send to the Province.'

'We started off where we ended,' Shaughnessy commented later, pointing out they went in with the position that Caledon keeps its representation, Brampton gets more and Mississauga remains at 50 per cent. 'I don't think anybody gained any ground.'

She also doesn't think there will be any changes in time for the next election, since the province is going to ultimately decide which municipality gets how many seats.

'I think Caledon held firm on its position,' Councillor Annette Groves said the following day, pointing out Caledon supports Brampton getting more councillors.

'The province should be dealing with this issue,' Groves said. 'I don't think it should have been dealt with at the regional level.'

'I think that the option that was presented and approved by the majority of Regional council was a compromise,' Innis observed.

She also said Option 2 could be implemented without creating any new councillors for Mississauga. It could be done with weighted votes.

'We need to ensure we have effective representation,' Innis asserted, pointing out Caledon has a lot of land, as well as Provincial policies governing much of the planning in town.

?I hope we can continue to work together and the Region will continue to be successful,? Innis added.

?I think that it's important to remember that this was brought to the table as a Brampton issue,? Councillor Johanna Downey commented.

?Brampton needs the extra representation,? she added. ?Obviously, we believe that should not come at our expense.