

Paramedic move creates online furor

Written By SCOTT TAYLOR

Peel Regional Paramedic Services Chief and Director Peter Dundas tried soothing the fears of the many Caledon residents who believe a revamp of paramedic services will leave the area vulnerable.

Many people in correspondence with city councillors, or just among each other online a dedicated Bolton Facebook page, are questioning the service they'll receive once the move takes place.

Currently, paramedics have stations in Caledon Village and Bolton, but that's about to change. As of January 29, these paramedics will begin their shift at a station in Brampton. While Dundas stresses there will be as many paramedics on the road in Caledon as before, many see it differently.

Still, Dundas is sticking to his guns. The following is an email he distributed last Monday (June 9):

?I am proud to say that Peel Paramedics currently provides excellent emergency medical care to the residents of Caledon.

That won't change anytime soon. Even when we change the way we run our business.

In January, there will be a change in our service model. Paramedics who currently report to work at small stations in Caledon Village and Bolton will report to a larger station in Brampton. That doesn't mean Caledon will have fewer paramedics on the road. It means paramedics will need to drive further to get to work.

Our new service model is designed to get paramedics on the road faster at the beginning of their shifts. Technicians, not paramedics, will clean and restock the ambulances. We need medics on the road in case you need them.

Our stations in Bolton, Caledon East, Valleywood and Caledon Village will continue to be part of the system. Like today, these stations are places where paramedics can complete their paperwork or take a much-needed break.

And just like today, the residents of Caledon will always be protected. But in the new model, Caledon will be prioritized over other areas. For example, the first two ambulances that start at 5:30 a.m. every day will be assigned to Caledon. They will replace the ambulances in Caledon that will be coming off shift at 7 a.m. This approach will happen again with the night shift. These ideas are being developed in collaboration with our union partners.

?Regional Council endorsed this new centralized model for Peel in late 2007 to improve response times to emergency calls and optimize costs for taxpayers. As planned, the model has been systematically introduced over the last 10 years. The construction of the new Bolton station and changes to where paramedics report to work is the last step in this plan.

This has been a long journey. The 24 paramedics serving Caledon are among the last of our almost 600-paramedic workforce to shift to the new model. I recognize change is hard, especially for those that have built relationships within the community. We will continue to keep these staff members updated as changes are introduced.?

However, even with these assurances, many residents ? and at least two working paramedics ? question the plan's validity. Many believe paramedics starting in Brampton will receive calls for Brampton and Mississauga and be too far away when calls come in for Caledon, especially in the rural areas.

In fact, a petition has been started in an effort to get the plan scrapped. On the petition's page a woman identified as a dispatcher and two men identified as front-line paramedics argue the plan won't work. Many others agree, and even Mayor Allan Thompson weighs in with this comment:

?The safety and best interests of our Caledon residents is always my top priority.

Last week I had a meeting with the Region of Peel Commissioner of Health Services and conversations with the Chief of the Peel Regional Paramedic Services.

I shared both my questions and concerns and the questions and concerns I had heard from the engaged and caring residents in Caledon.

I asked for a status and update and expect to have something official out later today.

Let me be clear. I will never support anything that comprises the safety of the residents of Caledon.?

Councillors Barb Shaughnessy and Jennifer Innes posted they've both been in touch with the Region of Peel and they believe paramedic service to Caledon will not be disrupted.

The plan's initial estimated cost was about \$83 million for construction and land costs. It has since spiked to \$100 million.