

Peel angry at Premier over election of Chairs

By Bill Rea

Peel Regional councillors are going to give Premier Kathleen Wynne a piece of their collective mind.

Councillors voted last Thursday to send a letter to the Premier protesting the enactment of Bill 70 and asking it be repealed. The letter will also be sent to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Peel area MPPs, as well as clerks of York and Niagara Regions. Bill 70 requires the general election of the Chair of Peel, along with the Chairs of York and Niagara, for the next term to start in the fall of 2018. The bill was introduced in the legislature in November, and received Royal Assent in December. Councillors were angry that it passed without proper consultation with the Region.

There were a number of strong and angry comments, and a few councillors could be heard at times singing the Twisted Sister song We're Not Gonna Take It. In the end, the motion carried almost unanimously. Brampton Mayor Linda Jeffrey, who has long supported the election of Chairs, was the only one who voted against the motion. Caledon Councillor Johanna Downey was absent on other municipal business.

Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie raised the matter last week, pointing out the Region had already taken a position on the proposal, opposing the general election of the Chair.

Peel's Chair is chosen by Regional councillors shortly after the municipal elections.

Crombie pointed out the bill was passed with little fanfare, adding no one had realized it was going to be adopted so quickly. "It was done without our consultation, and we're opposed as a council," she declared.

Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson remarked that he understood the matter was a done deal. Regional Solicitor and Director of Legal Services Patrick O'Connor confirmed the bill has been enacted, and the only way to reverse the decision is to have it repealed.

Caledon Councillor Barb Shaughnessy agreed something should be said about the fact the Region wasn't consulted, either through a letter or a motion passed at council.

"I think we have to make our voices heard," she declared, adding these new elections are going to add a burden on the taxpayers. "We shouldn't just sit back and take it. Let's do something about it."

Mississauga Councillor Pat Saito agreed that just because it looks like there's no hope of getting the bill repealed doesn't mean the Region should do nothing.

"It's showing a blatant disregard for municipal government," she declared. "It's a sham."

Saito added the Province is always referring to open and transparent government, but not when it comes to the municipal level.

"I think it should be a resolution of council," she said, referring to the action that should be taken, stressing the need to tell the Province to pay attention to municipalities when they are asked for opinions. "Stop making decisions on the fly."

"This is just the tip of the iceberg," Brampton Councillor Grant Gibson remarked, adding other changes are coming. He added there are some confusing points in the bill. He said it says the current term of council ends Nov. 15, 2018, but he understood it would end Dec. 1.

Gibson also pointed out there's no word on how much an election for Chair will cost.

"It's the most least transparent thing I've ever seen," he said.

Brampton Councillor Gael Miles reiterated that council had passed a motion telling the Province it believed the Chair should continue to be appointed. She also brought back up the issue of getting more Regional councillors for her city.

"It's certainly top of the agenda in the City of Brampton," she remarked.

Crombie put forth the idea of sending a letter signed by the councillors.

Mississauga Councillor Karen Ras countered that a lot of letters are sent to the Province, and they either go unanswered or no action is taken.

She was also upset there was no consultation with residents.

Ras also wasn't in favour of electing the Chair. Someone running across Peel would need either a big name or deep pockets.

Mississauga Councillor George Carlson argued it's not anti-democratic to appoint a chair, pointing out the chairs of the local school boards are appointed.

"He's above politics," he said, adding an appointed Chair can speak for the Region without feeling the need to count heads.

"I don't think it's a move that's going to improve anything," he commented.

Caledon Councillor Annette Groves observed that having the Chair elected would mean a Caledon resident would likely never occupy that office again.

"They won't even campaign there," Shaughnessy yelled across the room.

"We don't have to take this like a bunch of sheep," Brampton Councillor John Sprovieri said, adding the Region should tell the Province they will boycott the legislation.

Brampton Councillor Elaine Moore agreed council should act, pointing out they already made their position overwhelmingly clear. She stressed the need to act collectively.

"It is a dictatorship by the Province, as everything else is that they do," Mississauga Councillor Carolyn Parrish commented, adding she supports election of the Chair, but she also wanted to stand by her colleagues.

Mississauga Councillor Nando Iannicca likened the situation to the recent election of American President Donald Trump, who was behind in the popular vote, but won in the Electoral College.

"It's a very smart system that they have, but they have it for a reason," he said, arguing that without it, presidential candidates would only campaign in large population states, like New York, Florida, Illinois, Texas and California.

"It's easy to throw it out when you're upset the morning after," he added.

Iannicca also pointed out that with an elected Chair, there would never again be one from Caledon.

He also said he found it "galling" that they put issues to the federal and Provincial governments that they don't act upon, but come up with other ideas.

"They've got to get rid of that program that when the Province and the federal governments elect people and they go to Ottawa or Queen's Park, they've got to stop the practice of the frontal lobotomy before they start; that they forget how a city runs," he remarked.