

Province abandoning plans for forced amalgamation, Mayor Thompson ?pleased?

Written By MIKE BAKER

While the Province may have huffed and puffed in an early 2019 announcement that it planned to reassess regional governments across Ontario, the house, at least here in Peel Region, has not been blown down, with Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Steve Clark announcing on Friday there will be no forced amalgamations following a months-long review.

The announcement came as something of a surprise to those who were anticipating a Mike-Harris like response from the Province after it was revealed in January they were planning to complete a thorough review of municipalities across Ontario.

Speaking in London while attending the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) fall policy forum, Mr. Clark clarified the Province's stance on the issue.

?We will not force amalgamation of municipalities. We will not impose cuts on municipal councils,? Mr. Clark told the CBC. ?I want to make it perfectly clear. We will not be imposing these changes on our municipal partners.?

In total, the provincial government assessed 82 upper and lower tier municipalities, including Ontario's eight regional governments - Halton, York, Durham, Waterloo, Niagara, Muskoka District, Oxford County, and Peel.

Mr. Clark revealed that over 8,500 submissions from the public had been considered prior to a decision being made.

While there were certainly mixed feelings over the announcement in Peel Region, Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson was very clear in his determination that this was a positive for the local community.

?I was pleased to attend (Friday's) announcement on regional government. This is welcome news and reaffirms Caledon Council's position that the regional government model in Peel works. We look forward, and remain committed, to working with our municipal partners in Brampton, Mississauga and the Region of Peel, to better serve our residents and continue to be an innovative leader in the delivery of municipal programs and services.?

He added, ?The Minister clearly stated that he wants municipalities to work together on a review of our services and how they are delivered to look for efficiencies, streamline processes and prevent duplication. They have committed funding to do that work,? Mayor Thompson stated.

Indeed, included in Mr. Clark's announcement were plans to provide up to \$143 million to municipalities to help them lower costs and improve services for local residents. What, exactly, that means, remains to be seen, but Mayor Thompson appears to be optimistic some of that money will filter down to Caledon.

Brampton Mayor Patrick Brown was equally pleased with the announcement, noting, similarly to Mayor Thompson, that the regional government model in Peel Region works well for all municipalities involved.

?Very pleased with (Minister Clark's) announcement on the results of the regional government review. Part of the impressive legacy of former Premier Bill Davis was regional government, which enables municipalities to pool resources for key services like police and waste management,? Mr. Brown stated. ?We conducted two financial assessments on how disbanding the region would effect taxpayers. Both Deloitte Canada (audit, consulting and financial specialist) and EY Canada said the continuation of the Region was in the best interests of the taxpayers in Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon. I am glad the (Province) put taxpayers first.?

Peel Regional Chair Nando Iannicca said he was pleased the Province is committed to partnering with municipalities without pursuing a top-down approach to governance.

"I commend the Province for conducting a thorough analysis during the review. My view of this welcomed outcome is that it serves as a pause to allow us all to continue to work together to drive efficiencies towards less government and bureaucracy – a path for which I commend the Premier (Doug Ford) and his government," Mr. Iannicca said. "In Peel, we know our community well and understand the needs and challenges of residents and businesses. For over 40 years, the Region has worked in partnership with the local municipalities of Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga, as well as the Province, to ensure the residents and businesses receive excellent services."

He added, "It is time to strengthen these partnerships and continue making improvements."

Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie has never been shy when it came to sharing her thoughts on regional government. She has long held the view that the City of Mississauga would be better off separating from the Region of Peel. In her statement following Mr. Clark's announcement, she noted that while this wasn't the outcome she was hoping for, the City of Mississauga would continue to work with Brampton and Caledon to ensure "good government continues" for the residents of Peel Region.

"After a year of waiting for the results of the province's regional governance review, I'm extremely disappointed that the province has decided to maintain the status quo," Ms. Crombie noted. "The province has been clear that local communities need to decide what's best for them in terms of governance, decision-making and service delivery. Despite (Friday's) announcement, there are still some significant underlying issues at the Region of Peel."

Ms. Crombie went on to assert that Mississauga is not getting a fair deal from Peel Region at present, saying both the governance and financial models used at the regional level were "broken".

"Representation by population does not work, as Caledon councillors still have a vote worth four times that of a Mississauga regional councillor. Mississauga is still sending \$84 million more per year to the Region than we are receiving back in services, and there is a great deal of duplication between the Region and the City that needs to be addressed," Ms. Crombie said. "Now that this review had concluded, it is my hope that our regional colleagues in Brampton and Caledon will work with us to address these issues."