

Ontario Government Regional Government Review

Should Markham merge with Whitchurch-Stouffville? Or perhaps Vaughan or Richmond Hill? Or separate totally from York Region? Should the Region Chair be elected or appointed (the current practice) or should Regions be eliminated altogether? These are the kind of questions likely to be considered by the Ontario Government's Regional Government Review announced on January 15th 2019. The current structure has been in place for almost 50 years. Public transit, water supply, ambulance services, policing and arterial roads (except the 400 series) are handled by York Region. Local roads, water distribution, fire services, garbage collection, community centres, parks and libraries are the responsibility of each municipality. The announced goal of the review is to help ensure that the 82 municipalities under review, including York Region and all its towns and cities, are working effectively and efficiently, and continue to provide vital services communities depend upon. The review includes consultations with councilors, stakeholder organizations, and the public, in the spring of 2019.

Why should you care? Consider the relationship between your property taxes, how effective your municipality is at managing taxes, and the actual services you receive. Each municipality manages this relationship differently. Should residents in a "better off" or "well managed" municipality, have to pay higher taxes resulting from a merger so that their new partners in any merger can "catch up"? The amalgamation of Toronto took place over two decades ago, yet mechanical sidewalk snow clearing is still not available in some parts of the City, whilst it is in others. Markham owns a district energy company, and has a 25 year capital reserve fund for infrastructure, funded by its taxpayers. Others may not be as prepared.

Emergency services are another important point. Markham has its own fire service, some municipalities in the Region share fire services. Ambulances and policing are regional responsibilities, while the 911 service is provincially managed. Not all services use the same mapping systems, yet all have to interconnect seamlessly to respond to an emergency. It all seems to work very well, thank goodness, but any changes to how these services are funded and managed clearly needs careful consideration. Same thing for school boards which are currently regional.

Nobody wants to pay higher taxes or suffer reduced services, and nobody wants their community split in half like Thornhill, but something may have to "give". Many of us watched in shock and awe as Toronto Council was cut from 47 seats to 25 right in the middle of an election. Are we next? To learn more visit the review web site at www.ontario.ca/page/regional-government-review. To get engaged and voice concerns or opinions, contact your local MPP, your municipal councilor, and your local resident's or ratepayer's association.

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