



**“YOUR VOICE MAKES OUR VOICE STRONGER”**

<http://unionvilleresidents.ca>

Hon. Steve Clark  
Minister of Municipal Affairs  
Email: [minister.mah@ontario.ca](mailto:minister.mah@ontario.ca)

February 12, 2019

Dear Minister Clark:

**Consultation on Regional Government Review**

The Unionville Residents Association (URA) is one of Markham’s largest and most active resident associations. We received your January 15 announcement of a regional government review for 9 upper-tier municipalities and their lower-tier municipalities with interest. Naturally, this review includes York Region and Markham.

It is entirely appropriate that the Province undertake such a review, as the current structure has been in place for almost 50 years. We are very pleased that your plan includes consultation and request that we be included in the consultation as a stakeholder organization.

Although nothing is a given at this stage, we note that many previous reviews have resulted in amalgamations of municipalities, based on the premise that amalgamation would produce more efficient and less costly local government. However, research on the Province’s largest cities found these benefits did not materialize – specifically the exercise did not result in cost savings or lower property taxes. One of the reasons was that wages were harmonized upward. The research also found that when rural areas were amalgamated with urban areas, residents began to demand more urban services, which further stretched municipal budgets (op-ed by Prof. Lydia Miljan, University of Windsor, in The Toronto Star January 21, 2019).

It should also be remembered that the existing two-tier governance system already represents “amalgamation light”, in that many municipal services, such as policing, housing and public health are already shared across municipalities. As well, several adjacent northern York Region municipalities (the N6) have merged other departments such as fire, water and other services.

We believe that any change be consistent with the following principles:

- Equal or lower property taxes. This must be the goal.
- Efficiency yes, service level changes no. Opportunities to improve efficiency of service delivery and reduce duplication should certainly be studied. But adjustment of service levels, either up or down from today’s level, should not be considered at this time.
- Fairness. If amalgamation is considered, there must be fairness to municipalities, like Markham, that have a strong balance sheet, being merged with ones having a weaker financial position.
- Balance between municipalities. Care must be taken that any new municipalities (e.g. after amalgamation) have “balance”, so that all have a chance to grow and be economically competitive.

- Transition funding. If municipal staff reductions are anticipated, the Province should provide funding for severance payments to surplus staff.
- Funding for Provincial Downloading. Previous amalgamations were followed shortly after by Provincial downloading, i.e. transferring responsibility of some services from the Province to the municipality. If this happens again, a sustainable revenue source needs to be available to compensate the municipalities so that there is no property tax increase.
- School boards, emergency services and social services. If regional boundaries are changed, impact on these services need evaluation, e.g. school board boundaries should change also.
- New boundaries of region, city or wards. Boundaries should utilize natural or physical boundaries reflecting identified communities locally recognized. Community cohesion should be preserved. Boundaries should not serve the interests of any particular ethnic group.
- Elected representatives. Representatives must be elected by the public (i.e. regional chair should not be appointed if 2-tier government is retained)
- Ward size. The distribution of elected representatives (i.e. wards) must be fine-grained enough that these representatives are accessible to citizens. Wards must not be too large.
- Impact Assessment. Regardless of what the proposed new government and service delivery structure will be, there must be an impact assessment of the proposal and the option must undergo public consultation.

Again, as mentioned, please include us in the consultation as a stakeholder organization. We look forward to continued dialogue.

Yours truly,

*Alick Siu*

Alick Siu, President

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