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**Official Report  
of Debates  
(Hansard)**

**Wednesday 24 February 2016**

**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

**Mercredi 24 février 2016**

**Standing Committee on  
the Legislative Assembly**

Municipal Amendment Act  
(Election of Chair  
of York Region), 2016

**Comité permanent de  
l'Assemblée législative**

Loi de 2016 modifiant  
la Loi sur les municipalités  
(élection du président  
de la région de York)

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE  
L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Wednesday 24 February 2016

Mercredi 24 février 2016

*The committee met at 1302 in committee room 1.*

**COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Welcome, everyone, to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. Before we begin, we have one item of house-keeping that I need to address.

On March 25, 2015, Mr. Hillier moved a motion regarding e-petitions. In the following debate, it was agreed that consideration of the motion be deferred. Members have a copy of this in front of them, I believe. That motion has remained on our agenda until today.

As the motion makes reference to a trial basis up until the end of the 2015 fall legislative session, I'm now prepared to rule this motion out of order as it refers to a time in the past that makes it impossible to fulfill.

**Mr. Bas Balkissoon:** You're an angel.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Thank you. We just wanted to get it off the agenda.

**Mr. Lou Rinaldi:** Off the books.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Off the books, yes.

**MUNICIPAL AMENDMENT ACT  
(ELECTION OF CHAIR  
OF YORK REGION), 2016  
LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT  
LA LOI SUR LES MUNICIPALITÉS  
(ÉLECTION DU PRÉSIDENT  
DE LA RÉGION DE YORK)**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 42, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 to provide that the head of council of The Regional Municipality of York must be elected / Projet de loi 42, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités pour prévoir que le président du conseil de la municipalité régionale de York doit être élu.

**MR. DARRYL WOLK**

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We're here today primarily to discuss Bill 42. Our first deputant—we've made some changes to the agenda today. The first one is Darryl Wolk. I would ask that you state your name. You'll have five minutes for your presentation and then each party will have three minutes to ask questions.

**Mr. Darryl Wolk:** Yes, absolutely. Thank you very much. My name is Darryl Wolk. Good afternoon to Clerk Day, Chair McNaughton and members of provincial Parliament who make up this committee.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to Bill 42, on the election of the York region chair. My comments today are focused on the process of selecting the chair; I have no issue with the job performance of current chair Wayne Emmerson. My concern is that the appointment process for chair is not democratic or transparent.

The York region chair oversees a \$3-billion budget, including \$1.2 billion for capital projects. The chair is the face of York region, with responsibility for intergovernmental relations, transportation, human services, economic development and policing. Unfortunately, under the current appointment process, he faces no accountability or has no mandate from the people. He serves at the pleasure of his colleagues, who put him in that role.

The current population of York is over one million people and it's currently the fastest-growing municipality in Canada.

The issue of electing the York region chair is not new. Private members' bills have died on the order paper prior to being passed into law. Traditionally, the idea has had the support of all three parties represented in the Legislature. I'm thankful that MPP Chris Ballard has reintroduced this bill. It has passed second reading and currently sits at this committee.

The private member's bill was debated twice at York region council where I also made a deputation. With Newmarket's representatives split, York region council voted 14-5 against the election of regional chair, this despite Newmarket, Markham, Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Stouffville and other municipalities passing resolutions supporting Bill 42 at their local councils.

Common sense says that if residents were polled and asked if they prefer an appointment or an election to determine the head of York region, I think they would show overwhelmingly that they would prefer democratic elections.

It is obvious that most on York region council want nothing to do with direct elections. This is particularly true for those in the club thinking about retiring as mayor and hoping for the plum appointment next. It is easier to lobby for 11 votes behind the scenes than run in a region-wide democratic election based on ideas and a vision for the region as a whole.

The York region chair is the highest-paid head of council in Canada. York region also hosts the highest-paid mayor in Canada, from Markham, according to the Toronto Star. Even the mayor of the small town of Newmarket is collecting more than the Ontario finance minister. This is a prestigious club to belong to, and they want to keep the chair position to club members only. Instead of direct elections, favours are traded in the back-room, colleagues are lobbied over steak dinners, and committee requests are considered to get the majority of the 20 votes to effectively be mayor of York region.

It's time Queen's Park forced democracy on York region. The bill is straightforward and not controversial for residents of York region who do not currently sit on York region council. There is plenty of time to put an election process in place in time for the 2018 municipal election.

Around the GTA, chairs in Durham, Halton and Waterloo are currently elected directly by the people. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. We already know this can be done. York, Peel and Niagara are the only regions left where the council is still appointed. I would challenge any current York region council member to point out any problems in Waterloo, Durham or Halton that have arisen as a result of the people directly electing their chair.

There are many issues that could be discussed related to the Municipal Elections Act and the Municipal Act. There are many issues that can be discussed about proportional representation or what other jurisdictions are doing. Those issues should be debated separately from Bill 42. When it comes to democracy and transparency, York region should attempt to be first out of the gate and not last.

In the local media, a York region-based cabinet minister was quoted in a local paper as calling the appointment process of York region "a joke." He is correct. In York, the last chair appointment was a common-sense choice: Two candidates ran and lobbying had begun well before the municipal election. Most members returned already decided on who they would appoint. Outsiders were shut out. The regional councillor who defeated me in the municipal election announced days after his election that he would run for the chair appointment. That would have caused an expensive by-election in Newmarket, but in the end, he was defeated handily by Emmerson.

Theoretically, had council appointed John Taylor, we could have had two by-elections in Newmarket caused by the appointment. That would have been possible had a ward councillor challenged for the regional seat and won, triggering a second by-election in the vacant ward. Time and money would have been wasted.

Alternatively, a ward councillor could have been appointed to the regional councillor seat with someone not on council appointed to represent the ward. With a full term ahead, that would have been unacceptable. It makes more sense to just add the chair to the ballot during the municipal election and simply allow residents of York region to decide.

In the case of Peel region, taxpayers were not so lucky. The Mississauga ward 4 councillor ran for chair shortly after getting elected and was rewarded with the ability to vote for himself. He faced four opponents for chair that were not members of Peel council, resulting in quality outsiders at least being considered. After several rounds of voting, the final three candidates were Frank Dale, John Sanderson and Steve Mahoney. Things got strange when Mahoney and Sanderson were tied for second. To break the tie, Mahoney was eliminated by not having his own name drawn out of a hat. In the final round, Frank Dale was able to vote for himself and John Sanderson was not. This led to Frank Dale winning in the end.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Sorry, I have to cut you off. It's been five minutes now. We'll start with the official opposition. Mr. Hardeman.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** Thank you very much for the presentation. It seems fairly straightforward when you have a position, the head of a council—that if the whole council is elected it would seem fairly obvious that electing the head of council would also be a concern.

You mentioned in your presentation the cost of politics, the price of the mayor and the price of the regional chair. Do you have any concerns that when you make that an elected position, in an area of over 1.1 million people, I think you said, and two people have to go out and run an election in that area for that job, that's going to automatically require a very good salary in order for anyone to be able to invest that kind of capital to get elected? Do you have any concerns about that?

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**Mr. Darryl Wolk:** Yes, certainly, in municipal elections, whether you run for mayor or—in the case of regional council, I put up about \$25,000 of my own money to run.

Ultimately, it would be expensive to run region-wide, but it wouldn't be expensive to the taxpayer, because, through the Municipal Elections Act, you'd have a cap on spending and there's a cap on donations. Some people may try and self-finance; others may try and seek out donations.

I know Mr. Coe comes from Durham region, where they just decided to elect their chair. For me, while there might be a cost and while it may limit certain people, particularly ones with a high profile or perhaps laypeople who have the means to do it, what it would allow in York region—when I ran for office, for regional councillor, in Newmarket, nobody really discussed regional issues. In fact, many people didn't know what a regional councillor was or anything that was happening at the regional level.

I think a high-profile election in nine different communities would give people an opportunity to think about what's happening in Markham, Vaughan, the region as a whole, the waterfront and Simcoe county, and hopefully draw some more interest in the regional process generally.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** Okay. Lorne?

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Yes, through you, Chair—

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Thirty seconds.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** —to the delegation: Can you speak a little bit about the experience and research that you might have done about the practice in Halton and Durham region that you just alluded to?

**Mr. Darryl Wolk:** Yes. I know—

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** And Waterloo and how they got to that particular point?

**Mr. Darryl Wolk:** I know in the case of Durham, it was a referendum, if I'm not mistaken. Off the top of my head, I'm not sure how Waterloo and Halton initially decided to go in the direction of electing their chair, but I do know Gary Carr in Halton has been elected for at least two terms now. Ultimately, in Waterloo, it's been at least two terms as well, from what I understand.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We're going to move now to the third party and Mr. Mantha.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** I just wanted to share with my friends across the way that I just had a very nice post from my wife. I just wanted to let them know that this morning I told her, "The first time I saw you, my heart whispered 'You're the one.'" She just responded to me and blew me a kiss. That's what I was doing.

**Ms. Eleanor McMahon:** That's sweet.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Isn't that nice? I'm a big moo-moo.

Anyway, in your—

*Interjections.*

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Come on, that's in the record; that's going to go. She's going to read it. I get points.

In your opening comments, you were cut off. I want to give you the chance to say something, or anything, that you didn't get a chance to cover. Go ahead.

**Mr. Darryl Wolk:** There were a couple of excuses that were brought up last time about how the south would always win, and I just wanted to mention that there's no guarantee of that. It's quite possible that you would have a candidate from Markham and Vaughan going against each other; there's always a possibility of two Markham candidates who would split the vote. There are residents of York region, such as Helena Jacek or Frank Klees who were from northern York region, who I think would have the profile to compete for the chair position if it was elected.

The other thing I wanted to point out is, the main point out of this was—actually, I still have quite a bit left, but it was mostly just addressing some of the arguments that had been put forward by members of regional council during their debate about why the chair shouldn't be elected.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** I'm one who is all for democracy, That's one of the biggest reasons why we're all sitting here around this table. Why is it not working here, or why would it be better if it would work through that process?

**Mr. Darryl Wolk:** I think it would be better, first of all, because the chair would have an actual mandate to

take the region in a vision that would be supported by the people.

Right now there's no issue with the way that Chair Emmerson is performing, but the reality is that he's only accountable to the people who appointed him, and he's not accountable to the people at all. As a result, there was no interest from the general public in terms of how this appointment was made; there was no set of visions that you could choose between for the region as a whole.

All members of York region council will likely tell you—at least this was my experience at the doors—that if you're running in Newmarket, you're going to spend your time focused on Newmarket issues. You're not going to talk about the York region subway proposal; you're not going to talk about the NHL arena proposal in Markham; you're not going to talk about casinos in Vaughan or the waterfront in Lake Simcoe; you're just going to talk about the issues that are facing your own community.

I think regional issues, which, to be honest with you, are where the majority of taxpayer money goes, are important, but they just don't get the type of profile and there isn't really a transparent process right now as far as both how the chair is appointed or, really, how decisions are made because the media doesn't cover it, it's not televised and most people don't even know that regional government exists.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** You mentioned, on several occasions, transparency and accountability during your presentation. How is this going to change with an elected member?

**Mr. Darryl Wolk:** I'll put it this way: If you were to run in a region-wide election you'd have to run on a platform and be—

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** I'm sorry. I've got to move to the government and Mr. Ballard.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** Thank you very much for coming forward today and making a presentation. It's certainly appreciated.

A number of the comments that you're making, those of us involved in this debate in York region have heard time and time again. I think what's of interest to me from your perspective, because you've been involved in the local political scene for many years, is the impact that direct election of a regional chair might have on the taxpayer's and the public's knowledge of what the region is and what services it delivers. Do you have any thoughts or any comments on that?

**Mr. Darryl Wolk:** What I would be most excited about would be that regional chair platform. The argument was that, basically, it's only one vote on the regional council, so therefore the position is not powerful. But if you take that argument, then no mayor is powerful, because we have a one-mayor, one-vote system right now. Nobody would make the suggestion that, in Markham, the ward councillors should appoint the mayor.

The way the appointment process works right now, frankly, is that you need to get 11 votes, and you wheel and deal behind the scenes. Had I been elected, I wanted

to annex a road called Green Lane that was part of East Gwillimbury. That would have been my offer to the two candidates, and whoever cut the deal would have gotten my vote. If that didn't work, then potentially I would have asked for the chair of the human services committee.

This is not the way you conduct democracy, and it's not the way to make decisions on regional issues or municipal issues. Certainly, an election is transparent. Who knows what deals Emerson made before the election when he decided he was going to retire as Stouffville mayor, knowing that he had the chair position in his pocket?

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** Okay, but just to follow up, from your perspective, from your experience, how aware are people in York region of regional government and what it does and how much, in terms of a percentage, it is of their municipal tax bill?

**Mr. Darryl Wolk:** Well, I would go door to door and say, "Hello. My name is Darryl Wolk and I'm running for regional council." People would look at me like I had three heads. I had to change the title to deputy mayor of Newmarket so that people understood what I was running for.

Newmarket is actually the capital of York region; we have the regional headquarters right in our own community. But most people don't know that there's a regional council, and they have no idea what's discussed at the regional council. They are used to dealing with issues such as garbage, local transit, local jobs and property taxes at the municipality itself. But nobody knows that York region has the highest debt per capita in the province; nobody really gets an opportunity to discuss anything to do with human services or the fair-share issue I talk about often in Peel. The fact that it's not even televised and that meetings happen during the day—people work. They don't have an ability to go and find out after the fact. It's just a big black hole. I've even heard from municipal councillors that they don't get communication about what's happening at the upper tier level of government and they find out things after the fact.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Thank you very much, Mr. Wolk, for presenting today.

**Mr. Darryl Wolk:** All right, thank you.

MS. GLORIA RESZLER

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We'll move now to our next deputant. I'd like to welcome Gloria Reszler, who is joining us by teleconference today. I believe she's on the phone.

**Ms. Gloria Reszler:** Yes, I am.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Gloria, if you could introduce yourself, and I just want to let you know that you'll have five minutes to make a presentation. Each party has three minutes to ask questions, and we'll begin with the NDP.

**Ms. Gloria Reszler:** Great. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Gloria Reszler, and I thank you for the opportunity of presenting my thoughts and concerns

about the private member's bill put forward by MPP Chris Ballard.

My family and I have enjoyed living in York region since 1988: first Aurora, then rural King township, and finally Newmarket. With the ongoing growth in York region, these municipalities have changed.

Having moved from the city of Scarborough to York region and having been active in various local groups within Scarborough, I have developed a strong understanding and appreciation of the importance of a council, its elected members, and the role that the elected officials have with democracy.

The election of the chair for York region is important to the citizens of the region and, in my view, has been very long overdue. As you know, to date, there have been several other MPPs, namely Reza Moridi and Dr. Jaczek, who have had the foresight to see that electing the chair of York region by the citizens of York region should be carried out.

In the years of living in York region, I've been involved with numerous community-based projects; i.e., starting a ratepayers' group; being a founding member of the Oak Ridges moraine STORM and representing the organization on the provincial body creating that legislation; making many deputations to York region council and to various municipalities; coordinating several groups that came together to try and set up a ward system; and the Aurora Historical Society. So I have been active.

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Over the many years, residents, friends and neighbours have expressed to me their concern and disappointment in not being able to elect a chair of York region. So now is the time for this to happen.

There are almost two distinct regions of York region: the southern part, i.e. Vaughan, Markham and Richmond Hill; and the northern aspect being Aurora, Newmarket, East Gwillimbury, Whitchurch-Stouffville, as well as King township. These two distinct areas will be of concern in terms of electing a regional chair and for that chair being able to guide all areas of the region in the future.

Residents want the opportunity to elect the chair and must be put on the ballot for 2018. They understand that the chair will earn at least \$200,000 and more, and really want an open and balanced approach to the region. The various councils in the region have voted to have an elected chair, but it's a shame that all but one mayor has not supported their councils.

Here are a few of my key concerns. Candidates running for election for the chair position: What will be their capabilities, professional training, past experience? Not all current elected officials in the region have that wide range of capability which is needed for this region. There should be a limit to the election spending to help ensure that a good and fair cross-section of candidates can run.

York region is one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Canada, and a new approach to governing must be implemented in time for the 2018 election. The residents of York region deserve to elect their chair. Thank you for your time.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Thank you very much, Gloria. We'll move now to Mr. Mantha from the NDP.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Hi, Gloria. How are you doing this afternoon?

**Ms. Gloria Reszler:** I'm good. I wish it hadn't been such a bad weather day today.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** That's something that I experience quite often coming from northern Ontario. I travel the highways twice a week, and I understand you having difficulties getting up.

My one question that I have for you: Do you think an individual who is overseeing a potential budget of about \$3 billion would need to have a role or actually a responsibility to the entire region and not just a particular section of it?

**Ms. Gloria Reszler:** Yes. It should be the entire region, and that's why I stressed my concern about the north and the south, shall we say. The individual, if it were an existing elected official, may not have that capability. That's why it's so critical for the residents to have the opportunity to choose and examine and see what the candidates are all about.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** What do you see as a negative with continuing the status quo?

**Ms. Gloria Reszler:** A couple of things. Mr. Emmerson has stepped up to the plate and trying to do his best. In some respects, coming from a small community, that's a good perspective for those who are in the northern reach. But having worked for a mayor of Scarborough, having worked for three cabinet ministers, I know the deal-making that can go on, the discussions that can go on in camera etc.

I think that is a negative side to a chair that is not elected, first of all. Second of all, you need to have residents being very involved in this region because of the decisions that are going to have to be made. I think this whole dialogue right now, the debate about an elected official earning good money, has gotten residents excited. The people I've talked to are keen to have a chance to vote.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Thank you, Gloria.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Great. Thanks. We'll move now to Ms. Wong from the government.

**Ms. Soo Wong:** Ms. Reszler, thank you very much for joining us this afternoon. I hope the weather's not too bad up in York region.

I'm going to show my biases. I did work for York region for a number of years. You can thank me or be upset with me about your York region no-smoking by-law. I was the lady who brought forth your no-smoking bylaw.

I also recognize that you're from Scarborough originally. I am a Scarborough member.

I want to ask you, Ms. Reszler, with regard to Bill 42, if passed, how it would provide opportunity for the citizens. Your community across York region is becoming very diverse; do you believe, if we passed this proposed legislation that my colleague Mr. Ballard put

forward, that it would allow more representation in terms of the diverse population? I know I met some of the Chinese in Newmarket recently at a Chinese function. I wanted to hear your comments about this proposed legislation being more inclusive in York region.

**Ms. Gloria Reszler:** Absolutely. That's one of the key components that are evolving with York region. We are having more diversity coming, so the expectation for those individuals is that we have a democracy here that we can choose and select. By having an elected chair, that individual—he or she—is going to have to connect with so many different elements in this region. That, I think, a non-elected chair doesn't have to do.

**Ms. Soo Wong:** Can I also ask you why you think the York regional council recently voted against this proposed legislation? As a resident in York region, what do you think about that?

**Ms. Gloria Reszler:** Well, I was a little surprised. I mean, it was 15 to 4, so it wasn't totally defeated. What shocks me more so is that so many of the councils have endorsed Chris Ballard's bill, but the mayors have not. Why is that?

The people I've spoken to are thinking that there must be deals being made by the mayors. It's creating too much negativity, and too many wonder what the heck is going on behind the scenes. I think it's really important that this bill gets through, and that the councillors who have endorsed the bill have an opportunity to sell that, shall we say, to their ward residents.

**Ms. Soo Wong:** Okay. Because of time limit, I only have a quick question for you: With regard to the constituents or the residents of York region, can you share with the committee—there are some concerns raised about the cost of electing a York regional chair. Do you think this will increase the cost of electing a York regional chair in York region?

**Ms. Gloria Reszler:** Yes. That's one of the comments I have put in my notes. I don't know if Mr. Day has had a chance to circulate that to you, but—

**Ms. Soo Wong:** It has been circulated.

**Ms. Gloria Reszler:** Yes. So, I think that \$600,000 for someone to get elected is a huge amount of money. Again, the residents I've spoken to are shocked that that may be the case, so I've asked that there should be a limit of a lesser amount of money put on that. A variety of candidates—

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Thank you very much, Gloria. Sorry to cut you off, but thank you for presenting today—

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Oh, I'm sorry, Gloria. I forgot that we have to move to the official opposition now. Mr. Hardeman?

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much, Gloria, for making your presentation.

Just a couple of quick questions. I noticed in your presentation that you spoke about how you know that to date there have been other attempts to do this. One was

Reza Moridi and Helena Jaczek, who both introduced a bill like this. You then go on to say that unfortunately their efforts were not successful, but now Mr. Ballard's bill can and should change that. I wondered what it was, except that he's a very nice gentleman sitting across from me, that you think has changed that would make this one more successful.

**Ms. Gloria Reszler:** I think Mr. Ballard, having been a municipal councillor in Aurora, had a different aspect than perhaps Dr. Moridi or Dr. Jaczek might have. Dr. Jaczek, being a bureaucrat for York region for a number years as the medical officer of health, also had a very different perspective.

But I think the time is such that now the residents want to vote. They want to change. Look at Justin Trudeau: In the country, residents are wanting more democracy and more openness. I hope that explains, Mr. Hardeman, why this has transpired this time.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** Thank you very much. The other thing I wanted to say: I very much agree with you that times have changed since the region was formed and we elected someone. I guess the question really is, how could you possibly have a council where the head of council is just appointed? Can you imagine the city of Toronto not having an election for mayor and letting the councillors pick the leader? I totally agree with looking at this change.

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But I do want to put in one point: When it was structured to appoint the chair the way they did, it gave absolutely no authority or no responsibility except to run council. All decisions came through council. That's somewhat changed, but legislatively it hasn't. Do you think we need to change legislation to also give this new elected office something to do?

**Ms. Gloria Reszler:** Absolutely, it's critical. First of all, there's \$3-point-whatever billion currently in York region, and in the future, that's of course going to escalate. I think it's critical that he or she has that opportunity to do a very different kind of job.

We need to get more business and more industry, so that just constructing houses is not going to be the only way to get taxes into this region. Because of the difference between the south and north geographically—the landscape, agricultural lands, Oak Ridges moraine, water—this is going to be one heck of a job for an elected chair to do. That's why I talked earlier about that individual having a wide range of skills that they need to have.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** Thank you very much for the answer.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Thank you, Gloria. Time has run out.

#### BROWNRIDGE RATEPAYERS ASSOCIATION

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We'll now try to get the Brownridge Ratepayers Association on the telephone. It will be another teleconference.

I'd like to welcome Mario Racco, the president of the Brownridge Ratepayers Association and a former member. If you would introduce yourself, you'll have five minutes to do your presentation. Each party will have three minutes to ask questions.

**Mr. Mario G. Racco:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly. I am Mario G. Racco and I'm the president and the contact person for the Brownridge Ratepayers Association. The contact information is 21 Checker Court, Thornhill, Ontario, L4J 5X4. My telephone number is 905-760-0330. The email is—

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** That's okay, Mario. You can continue.

**Mr. Mario G. Racco:** Okay, thank you. I thought I had to do that.

I am speaking in favour of Bill 42, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 to provide that the head of council of The Regional Municipality of York must be elected.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Legislative Assembly committee, I'm speaking in favour of Bill 42 because, as a resident of the region of York and as someone who believes strongly in the democratic political process, I have been offended by the inaction on the most important political position in the region of York. The process started in 2011, but as we know, it has been delayed so that it was never made into law.

I commend the province for giving the opportunity to the region to make their request, but since the region is not willing to do so, I believe that it is time that the province take leadership on this file and approve Bill 42. The province legislated the appointment of the regional chair in 1971, 45 years ago, when the population of the region of York was 169,000 people. Today, we have 1.2 million residents, and this number is growing every year.

Mr. Chairman, first of all, I wish to thank MPP Ballard for introducing Bill 42 and taking strong leadership on this file and getting support from members of all three parties in the House. I also want to thank the members of the three parties who have shown support for MPP Ballard's bill.

I believe that all the committee members are aware of the political dancing around this issue because of the five members of regional council who have argued in favour of an elected chair. I want to commend them and thank them for their commitment and respect for the voters of the region of York.

If I can raise a few concerns, I wish to warn the members of your committee that many members of the regional council have raised matters that are not real issues, but are things that may deflect from what the bill is trying to achieve. Many members of the region have argued that they are evaluating the potential benefit of the bill, that they need more time and that they are worried about the cost to run a regional chair campaign, or that they know what is best for the region; therefore, they are the best to choose the chair. The last point should offend all of you as elected members.



All this is nonsense, Mr. Chairman. What those individuals want to do is what is best for their political benefit. This honourable committee will see it as is, and will avoid any trappings such as when they ask you to do more studies, or say that the bill is not addressing all the issues. Their objective is to delay the passing of the bill so that it will not be implemented on time to be enforceable in the 2018 election.

Yes, there are consultants and politicians who are lobbying to prevent Bill 42 from passing, but there are many honourable members on this committee who I trust will do the right thing and make sure Bill 42 will become law.

One way to finalize this important bill that will improve democracy in the region of York is to strongly support the bill and speak with your party colleagues to support it in the House.

Democracy has never been inexpensive. A federal or provincial election is more expensive than electing the chair of the region, and so is electing the mayor of Toronto, yet we do that.

The region needs a chair who is elected by the people for the people, someone who will campaign on issues important to the people and who is elected because of the issues that she or he has championed during an election. Without that type of leadership, our traffic problems will get bigger; our planning will be reactionary, instead of being planned on planning merits; and our social services and health needs will be delayed.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Thank you very much, Mr. Racco. We're going to move to questions now. We'll start with the government: Mr. Rinaldi.

**Mr. Lou Rinaldi:** Mario, it's good to hear from you again.

**Mr. Mario G. Racco:** Thank you. Sorry, I have a little fever today; otherwise, I would love to be there.

**Mr. Lou Rinaldi:** Yes, and we miss your espresso machine down here.

A short question for you: You know that there's been a Municipal Act review, a consultation earlier on—well, I guess in the last year—that we have to do and that happens after every municipal election. Did your association make a submission to—

**Mr. Mario G. Racco:** No.

**Mr. Lou Rinaldi:** I'm sorry?

**Mr. Mario G. Racco:** The answer is no. No, we did not make any submission.

**Mr. Lou Rinaldi:** You didn't. Okay. All right. Thank you. I'll pass it back to Mr. Ballard.

**Ms. Eleanor McMahon:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Ms. McMahon?

**Ms. Eleanor McMahon:** Mario, hi. It's Eleanor McMahon. I'm the MPP for Burlington.

**Mr. Mario G. Racco:** Hi.

**Ms. Eleanor McMahon:** Thank you for your presentation today. I'm obviously in Halton region, where we have an elected chair. We just finished the OGRA/ROMA conference—you know OGRA/ROMA

well—and in the context of that had many good conversations with our regional chair. We met with them last week. It's a great forum for us in Halton to discuss issues of common interest and concern.

How do you see the election of a chair in York region potentially contributing to an evolving role of the chair? I know that Gary Carr has a very specific mandate. He works very co-operatively with all the officials, the mayors and certainly his colleague MPPs. Can you speak a little bit about that and how having an elected chair would actually improve that conversation and that role?

**Mr. Mario G. Racco:** Well, it will, for a simple reason that the chair will have a mandate from the people, and he or she doesn't have to be responding to specific requests, which is what's happening right now. The mayor, or even a regional council, may call the chair and push an item that he or she feels is important. The moment that you have an elected chair, that person will have made clear what his or her priorities are, and I think he or she will have to speak to those priorities, just like every mayor or Prime Minister to some degree has to do.

I think that will be a significant improvement. I realize that in your region on the first election things didn't get very exciting, but we've got to start the process. The moment the process starts, I think more people will get involved and the issues will be defined, and people must deliver, because if they don't deliver, they will not be re-elected. I think that's the benefit of having the chair. I think the chair doesn't have to worry that the mayor of Vaughan, who has four votes, or the mayor of Markham with five votes might be able to change things if he or she doesn't do what they request him to do, basically. That's what's happening right now.

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**Ms. Eleanor McMahon:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We'll move now to the official opposition. Mr. Hardeman?

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** Thank you very much, Mario, for the presentation. We've heard a bit of discussion about the question of why it is that the present structure is not, shall we say, 100% supportive of the change. Some might want to ask the question why that would be. I just want to put in that I had the privilege of being appointed as a regional chair for a term. I wasn't elected, and I can tell everybody here, and you, Mario, that I thought I did as good a job doing it as anyone who had been elected to it. So I think it's a natural thing that the people presently there are not necessarily seeing the need.

I think we all see the need in the accountability of it when you go beyond the present structure to say that if someone is going to be in charge—incidentally, when I was regional chair, I was also the mayor of one of the municipalities at the same time, so I was elected by some of the people, just not by all the people. In this case, of course, the person is elected only by the 20 people sitting around the table, and it really doesn't shine a light on the accountability.

**Mr. Mario G. Racco:** Exactly.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** In our structure, we have two or three times now had a major event with a considerable debate within our county during a term of office, and in all cases where the public objected to that happening, in the next election, the one who was the regional chair at the time it happened was defeated in their own municipality. That tells me that, in fact, the people need to have a say when the head of council gets to make major decisions that affect the public. So I think this really points out the need for looking at changing from where it used to be. Have you got any comments on that, Mario?

**Mr. Mario G. Racco:** I appreciate your experience, but I think you said it correctly: Transparency will never be the same. We don't really know what the priorities are unless we debate them. If we don't believe in that, then why are we electing Prime Ministers and Premiers? We do those things because we want to tell the people what is important, in our opinion, in the community and we want to achieve those objectives. If we don't do that at the regional chair, which is the most important political position in the region, then we really don't have much to compare.

Look at the hospital situation in our region. Look at transportation—it's a disaster. Look at the social services; look at what's happening in the Toronto Star yesterday and today. We've got people calling our kids terrible descriptions because nobody, quite frankly, is being challenged and nobody has taken a leadership position at the regional level to say, "Those behaviours are not allowed and I'm going to do something as a chair to make sure those things don't happen."

We are doing it almost everywhere else that counts—Toronto's doing it. How in this world should the region of York not do it?

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We'll move now to the third party. Mr. Mantha?

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Yes. Thank you for joining us this afternoon. I have a question for my friend. When did you serve as chair?

**Mr. Mario G. Racco:** From 2003 to 2007.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Oh, no, my friend here, Mr. Hardeman.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** In 1989, 1990 and 1991.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** And this was originated in—oh, no, okay, there's no connection there.

**Mr. Mario G. Racco:** No, no.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** I'm good with that.

I have one quick question for you. In your opening comments, you talked about the inaction of the chairperson and some of the concerns that you raised. How will electing an individual eliminate those concerns?

**Mr. Mario G. Racco:** Easily. He or she will be raising those issues—whoever is going to run for the position, I guess, will agree or disagree or make their own position. Then, when the election is over, we are clear what commitments were made and we expect them to deliver. So I think there is a priority already in the public's mind and the chair cannot ignore them.

Right now there is no such thing. We don't know what the chair's going to do because, quite frankly, we don't elect the chair. The mayors somehow twist some arms of the regional councillors to stick together as a group—it doesn't happen all the time, but that's the type of approach that's taking place at the region of York. So a few people, quite frankly, make that decision. The community doesn't go to the region to participate in those debates. The community sometimes goes to the city level to participate in debates.

And so there is such a disconnect between the people and the regional council, and the only way to be clear on what's important to the people and what committee members—the politicians—have made is by adding an elected chair, or whatever name you choose to give it. This is democracy. In fact, to quote somebody, "This is 2016."

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** So some individuals might say that in order to create more transparency and accountability, that's why you have an election, and it also creates a greater engagement by those that you actually elect. How do you see a greater engagement from the elected individual for the area?

**Mr. Mario G. Racco:** Well, the chair will have to have some meetings during an election and prior to an election so that the community will know who he or she is, and support or disagree with those petitions. By doing those things, sir, you are increasing participation. You are motivating some people, either in a positive way or sometimes, unfortunately, in a negative way. But there is participation, and when there is participation we can only do better, not worse.

Debate, discussion and disagreements should be part of democracy, where people will raise an issue as they see it and others will disagree or agree with that issue. At the end of the day we tend to come up with the best solution possible because there is not just one person deciding but a larger number deciding. That's why we need it. At the region, that is not happening right now.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Racco, for your presentation.

MR. JASON CHERNIAK

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We're now going to move to our next deputant: Jason Cherniak. If you would introduce, and you will have five minutes for your presentation and three minutes from each party for questioning.

**Mr. Jason Cherniak:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Jason Cherniak. Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important issue. I grew up in Richmond Hill, and I now live there with my own family. I started a law firm there that I still run in Richmond Hill. In my work, I deal with a couple of the towns in the region on a fairly regular basis, including politicians and staff.

I'm here to speak on my own behalf, but you should know that I'm on the board of the Richmond Hill Cham-

ber of Commerce and the government affairs committee. I'm a past president of the Richmond Hill Rotary Club and I'm currently an assistant district governor for Rotary regionally, so I deal with people from Newmarket, Aurora and Kleinburg, all within York region as well. I'm on the governance and nominations committee for the Mackenzie Richmond Hill Hospital foundation and I'm a board member of Chateau-Pâpe Theatre Productions, which is a local theatre company that travels around the region. Again, though, I stress that I'm here to speak on my own behalf.

I've read the second reading debate. I'm not going to go through what you have heard there and what you have heard here already today. What I would like to do is give you a sense of what the growth in York region means on the ground.

When I first moved to Richmond Hill in 1987, it was a former farmer's field and forest that separated Markham from Richmond Hill. If you drove along Yonge Street, you would hit old Richmond Hill, then there was a forest, then Oak Ridges, another forest and then Aurora, and Newmarket seemed like it was a world away. To get to Kleinburg, you drove through the wilderness, it seemed, along Major Mackenzie.

Most of those boundaries are now houses and businesses. There are no longer the forests that used to separate the different communities. As the region has grown, as those boundaries have fallen down, a lot of the region's residents have begun volunteering and going to the same events—the Newmarket Jazz Festival, for example. They travel to Stouffville for the annual strawberry festival. They can take the bus to the Richmond Hill Rotary craft beer festival, which is on August 6 this year.

The region, meanwhile, is spending billions of dollars to build rapid bus transit lanes along Yonge Street, Highway 7 and Davis Drive. This is, again, connecting the region, making it easier for us to live and work and play together. I'll note, as well, that we really need the Yonge Street subway extension north as the last mile for that regional transportation system.

That's the real problem with the current system: The regional chair is not bringing all those different communities together. It's not representing the change we've seen in York region. I'd ask you to consider the alternative to what we currently have.

As we approach 2018, municipal politicians are going to start going from community to community. They're going to be meeting with local non-profit groups, they're going to meet with businesses and they're going to start getting to know different parts of York region that they don't already live in or represent. Those politicians are going to do their outreach. They're going to put together teams. The good ones are going to have representatives in each part of York region, and those teams are going to get to know each other, further increasing the connections between the different towns and cities that we have.

Once the election finally begins, the politicians and their volunteers are going to go door-to-door. They're

doing to be talking to the average person; they're going to be engaging with them and helping them understand what the regional issues are and also getting a feel for what local residents are concerned about, which they may not know already.

**1350**

I assume, with different people running, we're also going to have some brainstorming and some good policy ideas, and maybe a debate, instead of essentially the consensus that's been going on in York region for a long time. Ultimately, it's going to be a free market of ideas, and the best ideas are going to win out hopefully.

I know that it would be easy to look at the region of York's motion that's just been passed—they formed a committee that's going to report in December—and say, "Let's wait for that committee report." I'd suggest the opposite. I think that this committee and the Legislature should pass this bill, make sure that it's going to be an elected chair, and tell the region of York, "It's now your job to talk about how that election is going to happen and what the role is going to be in that election for the region and for the various politicians." Don't let them talk about whether there should be an election.

You can imagine what the councillors were discussing at that meeting: "Well, if we have a committee, we don't have to support Bill 42." That doesn't mean everyone who voted against the motion to support this bill actually opposes the bill. They were just waiting for the committee report in many cases.

When I grew up in York region, Bill Fisch was appointed regional chair while I was in high school. A decade later, I started my law firm and he was still regional chair. He stayed there for another seven years after that. Over that same period, Richmond Hill politicians Vito Spatafora, Brenda Hogg and Dave Barrow were all re-elected six different times. They all sat on regional council with Bill Fisch. I'm pretty sure that if Bill Fisch had been running in an election, he would have been re-elected just as they were, and we would have had a successful council. And if not, so be it; that's democracy.

York region is a growing community and it has a growing sense of self. It's time for us to elect a regional chair who helps build connections between the communities, has democratic accountability and has democratic credibility.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Right on—to the second. We'll start with Mr. Coe from the official opposition.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Thank you and welcome. Prior to being elected as the MPP for Whitby–Oshawa, I was a Durham regional councillor for four consecutive turns, and we went through the process overall. Part of the process still included a referendum within the eight municipalities that formed the region of Durham. To what extent has that discussion taken place, in your knowledge?

**Mr. Jason Cherniak:** I don't know that there's been a lot of discussion about it, except to say that people

wonder whether there should be a referendum first. I believe, as the current act now stands, every town council would have to pass its own resolution to elect the regional chair, so the referendum wouldn't necessarily even be binding if it were to happen that way. Ideally, this would have been done before the last election when Bill Fisch retired. At this point, Mr. Emmerson is doing a great job, and I'm sure that if he wants to, he can run in an election.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** All right. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Mr. Hardeman?

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** I just wondered—you spoke about the appointments being appointed over a long period of time because, obviously, of the experience. When they have to appoint a new one, the most experienced person for the job is the one who's already doing it. What is it that you see that would—and you spoke about the councillors who have also been there and they do get elected—what makes you think that that would change, that the person, as long as they wanted to keep doing it, wouldn't just get re-elected?

**Mr. Jason Cherniak:** There's no guarantee it would change, but it would be up to the people to make that decision. What I think is important is that the person who keeps getting re-elected instead of reappointed is going to have an election period where they're out shaking hands and doing what politicians do. I think that, if you really believe in democracy, that's the whole point of democracy: It gives you a connection to the people. We have a CAO in York region. We don't need an elected chair who is an administrator; we need an elected chair who is a politician.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We'll move to the third party. Mr. Mantha.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** I heard you talking about your travels to and from home. If ever you miss the forest, come on up towards Algoma–Manitoulin. As soon as you pass Barrie, there's five hours of forestry that you can travel through. It's quite beautiful.

You've basically answered all the questions through the other questions that came through this process. Again, I want to ask you, as I have asked others: Transparency and accountability are something that the public has been crying for for a very long time, and engagement is part of that process. Having an elected member in that position, how do you see that bringing the regions not just closer together, but stronger as a region?

**Mr. Jason Cherniak:** It's interesting; I've met the regional chairs a few times. I don't get to know them as well as the local politicians, but there's definitely a sense that they're not the same sort of politician. They're not going out to events; they're not speaking quite as much; they're not going and meeting all the people that you tend to meet when you act as an elected politician. I think that if they do that, what they're going to do is see parts of the region that they're not seeing right now; they're going to have a better sense of how the policies that they're supporting are actually affecting the region.

They're also going to hear ideas. Sometimes, I think you do hear good ideas from people that you don't really expect, and that's something that the regional chairs just aren't getting right now. If you have an elected regional chair, you're really making that person do a better job, even if it's exactly the same person who's doing it now. It's not intended as an offence in any way; I think Emmerson is a great chair. But I'm sure he knows, as the former mayor of Stouffville, that being elected as the chair would be just as good as, if not better, for him.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Thanks.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Great. We'll move to the government. Mr. Balkissoon.

**Mr. Bas Balkissoon:** Thank you very much for being here and sharing your thoughts with us.

I'm reading the regional report and I'm trying to gauge how this ended up on the floor at York region, but I'll leave that for another discussion.

It clearly outlines in the report that there are two processes for the chair: One is, the region has to request it, and the other one is, the province can legislate it. I'm thinking back to the regions that have come together and have an elected chair and how that process was done way back when. I remember Hamilton was controversial, Waterloo was controversial. I think the only one that has been done is Durham, but they saw the writing on the wall that it was coming, and they actually started to act on it because we went through the same process with Durham, I believe, right here: Private members stood up and moved bills.

In my mind, it's come to the point where the province needs to recognize that the public is a lot different than it used to be 40 years ago. Maybe instead of just doing York region we should do a province-wide amendment of this bill, not focus it on York region, but basically say, "All regional chairs must be elected starting in 2018," and we give the regions an opportunity to submit back to us a governance model. Then we can also incorporate that governance model in the Municipal Act, because you don't want everybody to have a different governance model; you want to have something that's uniform across the province.

I just want to hear your opinion on that train of thought.

**Mr. Jason Cherniak:** Firstly, I wouldn't want to see this held up as a result of the larger process—

**Mr. Bas Balkissoon:** No, I'm not thinking about holding it up. We, as a body here, have the opportunity to amend this.

**Mr. Jason Cherniak:** Okay. I guess I can't speak for places I haven't lived, but my thought is that in some ways, it almost works better if it comes from people from the local area, because they're saying, "This is what we want and it's what works best for us." Then you avoid, I suppose, accusations that the province is forcing it on other people.

At the same time, the principles that I was just talking about I think apply across the province. It's a political decision for politicians. If there are people who are

fighting against you, is it really worth it to do it in places where they don't want it? That's how I look at it.

**Mr. Bas Balkissoon:** But the reason I asked you that question is, don't you believe if we do it province-wide and we have a model and a set of rules and policies province-wide, we'd remove the personalities from the individual regions completely, and then it's uniform and it's fair and it's transparent?

**Mr. Jason Cherniak:** I think it would be fair to say that, yes.

**Mr. Bas Balkissoon:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Thank you very much. That's the time. Thanks for presenting.

#### MS. KAREN REA

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We'll now call upon Karen Rea. Karen, if you'd introduce yourself. You have five minutes, and then we'll have three minutes for each party.

**Ms. Karen Rea:** Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members. My name is Karen Rea and I'm the ward 4 councillor in the city of Markham. I was newly elected in the 2014 election.

I am here today to support private member's Bill 42, on election of the regional chair. This bill is not about criticizing any previous or current chairs; it's about democracy. The position of chair is very similar to that of mayor, but on a much larger scale. Some say it is the most powerful position in York region. To appoint this position means that residents will not know what the candidate's vision, platform or mandate are for our rapidly growing region.

Residents should have the right to question the person vying for this position. We should be allowed to listen to debates and hear different point of view. With a budget and also a debt of over \$2 billion, we want to know what they're spending our dollars on and make sure that they're spending them wisely. If not, we should have the option in the next election to vote to remove the chair from his seat.

**1400**

Every politician, including those who sit on York regional council, ran a campaign. We raised funds, door-knocked and participated in all-candidate meetings. Not only were we interviewed by the press, but by every single person to whom we spoke during the campaign. They wanted to know whether we were capable of the job that we were applying for, a job of responsibility. Are we honest and trustworthy? Would we be accountable to the electorate that elected us in? Would we serve the public better than the other candidates that we were running against? We made promises and spoke about changes if we were successful in winning a seat.

We all had some kind of campaign, except the position of the regional chair. We have had six regional chairs over 45 years of council and not once has anyone had to run a campaign or tell anyone in the region why they are the best suitable person for the job. The chair needs to be accountable to the people.

There are concerns about how a candidate for regional chair would finance their election campaign. Reading a report from the region, the cost for a campaign could be up to \$650,000, staffing another \$25,000 to \$30,000, and if they chose to be part of the rebate program, a further \$150,000 to \$200,000. This would be the maximum amount on what would be allowed to be spent. I am sure that the candidates would get free airtime from the local radio and TV stations and their biographies put in the papers, like the rest of us did in the municipal election of 2014. Town hall meetings could be held in each municipality. There are ways to get your message out without spending the allotted amount of funds. If a candidate did raise the maximum amount of funds, the cost of democracy and an election is less than \$1 per person.

I would like to quote from an online article I found from July 2012 written by Gordon Prentice:

"[Professor] MacDermid tells us that, over the years, without anyone really noticing, powers that ordinary citizens used to exercise have gone....

"Councillors' terms have been extended. The opportunities for people to have an input have progressively disappeared....

"It gets me thinking about what we can do to reclaim some of the powers that have been lost—or misplaced—over the years."

The answer is the election of the chair.

Our residents deserve the right to directly elect one of the most powerful positions, the chair of York region. The candidate who wins will be one with a long-term vision; one who can lead us into the future; one who believes in being accountable, transparent and open; one who embraces change and solicits input and ideas from others, including residents; one who works as part of a team to enhance the quality of life for each of us.

Newmarket, Stouffville, Aurora, Markham and East Gwillimbury have already passed motions to support this bill. Yet when it came time to vote at the region on regional councillor Li's and Mayor Altmann's motion to support this bill, not all of the representatives upheld the decisions made by their own councils.

During the discussions at the region on this motion, I did not hear one good reason why the chair should not be elected. It was said that we do not elect the Prime Minister, the head of TRCA or OLG. How does that change what we're going to do? This will not help us move forward at the region. None of these comments have any bearing on the fact that residents should have the right to vote for the position of chair of York region.

The motion at the region was defeated. The province will ultimately have to make this decision. I believe that this change will happen and should happen. It's time to look at the larger picture, embrace change and move forward in an accountable and transparent way. Times are changing, and by working together we can finally bring democracy to York region.

Democracy is a government in which people chose their leaders. Your support for this private member's bill is also support for democracy.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Great. Excellent. Thank you very much. We'll move to Mr. Mantha of the third party.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Thank you, Karen, for joining us.

Sometimes the word "change" scares people.

**Ms. Karen Rea:** It does.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** It does. A couple of the reasons are that we don't know what that change is going to look like; we don't know how that change is going to benefit—positively or negatively.

How do you see this change, either way, benefiting or negatively impacting the area? First, how do you see it positively affecting the area?

**Ms. Karen Rea:** When you have somebody sitting in the same position for many, many years, you get the same perspective. If an individual is running, you get new ideas, they listen to the residents, they have a different perspective and—let me explain this properly. It's better to have someone with different ideas and different perspectives, because right now we have the status quo, and that's been the same now for the last 40 years.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Okay. I'm looking at the list and I don't know who else is coming up, because I haven't heard the other side. But again, I'd like to hear from you how you believe that this change is going to be good.

**Ms. Karen Rea:** We have a right to elect somebody into a seat, and it's a powerful position. Everybody around this table has been elected. The mayor is elected. All the regional councillors are elected. So why should this be any different?

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Thank you.

**Ms. Karen Rea:** You're welcome.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Okay. We'll move to Mr. Ballard.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** Thank you, Councillor, for coming forward and presenting today and braving the snowstorm to get down here. I'm just wondering if you can frame in broad terms the discussion around the council table when Markham debated the resolution to support Bill 42. We know that council voted in favour, but can you give me a sense of what some of the pros and what some of the cons were?

**Ms. Karen Rea:** There wasn't really much debate. It was a 10-to-3 vote. The mayor voted against it, regional Councillor Jack Heath voted against it and we had one new councillor who wasn't quite sure what the position was, so she refrained from voting. But it was a 10-to-3 vote. There wasn't a big discussion on it either way.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** Okay. And that seems to be what I've heard from other councils around York region where this has been tabled: that there isn't an awful lot of debate about why it's not a good idea.

**Ms. Karen Rea:** No.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** Okay. That's my question. MPP Wong maybe has one.

**Ms. Soo Wong:** I think I'm the only person at this table in this committee who actually worked as staff at

York region, so I totally agree with you, Councillor, on your comments that the chair has a lot of power. When you see this election process, do you see this levelling the playing field if this bill gets passed?

**Ms. Karen Rea:** I do, because not only can a mayor or a regional councillor and a politician run; it opens it up to a whole variety of people. You may have business people who have the experience to look at municipal issues as well. It could be somebody who used to be in politics who's no longer in politics. It would be opened up to every single person who wanted to run.

**Ms. Soo Wong:** In your written submission you comment about concerns dealing with the finance piece. I'm just startled by this comment here. If you could elaborate a little bit more about the fact that the regional chair is financing other mayoral candidates' elections. If I'm reading this correctly—

**Ms. Karen Rea:** No, you misread it.

**Ms. Soo Wong:** Okay. That's what I wanted you to clarify for us.

**Ms. Karen Rea:** I was up at the region last week. The staff report said how much it would cost to elect the regional chair, and they've quoted \$650,000 plus staff time, plus we have a rebate program in York region.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Okay. Thank you very much. We're going to move now to the official opposition. Mr. Hardeman.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** Thank you very much for your presentation. I think it has been said that it's rather a strange time to have hearings on a bill like this at committee and find that the people who are making the presentations—everyone coming in to speak is on the same side. So I think that tells you something about the democracy of it.

But I do want to point out as a caution to yourself and to those doing it that I had the privilege of introducing a private member's bill that had as much, if not more, support than this one. It took me five years to get it passed through this structure because, as was mentioned in one of our earlier presentations, when we're finished here, the government has to call it back for third reading.

**Ms. Karen Rea:** Right.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** And if they don't call it back before the House prorogues at some point, we're here again.

The reason I'm bringing this up is more for the benefit of the people sitting on the opposite side of this room than for the presenter, to make sure that the government realizes with the presentations we're getting here the importance of this bill. They should find a way to call it back for third reading and get it implemented so you can get to the 2018 election, because the five years are going to actually be a longer time than what the regional council said they wanted to do themselves. I guess I'd just ask that or make that statement on behalf of the members sitting across the room from me.

**Mr. Lou Rinaldi:** And I'll correct it—

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** It's up to them to get it done.

**Mr. Lou Rinaldi:** —off the record.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** No, no; it's on the record.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** One more minute. Any further questions?

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** Like I said, I just wanted to say that.

One small question: Could you give me some idea of what you think are the powers that the regional chair has that require him to be elected? If you look at the Municipal Act and the powers that are given to the head of council, they get to set the agenda and they get to run the meetings. Anything else they have is given to them by the rest of council, so—

**Ms. Karen Rea:** One of the comments made last week when I was up at the region basically said that Chair Emmerson has one vote, and only if it's a tie vote. They said, "We've basically appointed him to chair meetings." Well, he gets an awful lot of money just to chair meetings. So we need somebody elected who's accountable.

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**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Great. Thank you very much, Karen, for your presentation.

#### MR. JIM JONES

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We'll call Jim Jones.

Jim, you have five minutes for your presentation and three minutes from each party. Questioning will start with the government next time.

**Mr. Jim Jones:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Jim Jones and I sit on York region council, representing the city of Markham. I am here today to speak in favour of Bill 42.

I've been an advocate for an elected chair of York region for many years. I think my position represents the preference of my constituents as well as Markham council, which recently passed a motion in support of Bill 42.

When the regions were formed in Ontario in the 1970s, the provincial government appointed a regional chair in each. In 1971, the region of York had a population of just over 200,000 people and very limited responsibilities, mostly for roads, and the direction to create the infrastructure required to provide water and sewage treatment. There were originally 14 towns and townships and 11 police villages. Residents were accustomed to living in towns; they understood their local government and felt a connection to local politicians. The new region meant nothing to them and they had little connection with it.

In 2015, our population is over 1,180,000—larger than Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, and almost larger than Manitoba. By 2031, the population of York region is projected to be 1.8 million people. We still look after roads, water and waste water, but we are also responsible for health and social services, public transportation, public housing, regional planning, policing and many other governmental functions.

Our constituents are far more politically connected than they were in 1971. Many understand what the region is and what the region does. They understand region issues, its accomplishments and its debt. What they do not understand is why a position like the chair of this huge government is still appointed by a small number of politicians instead of being elected by the people.

The regional chair is not like the Speaker of the House. He or she votes, presents arguments, brings motions, and also has the important responsibility of appointing members to head the various regional committees and task forces. The chair is also, along with council, responsible for a very large budget.

Durham region had many of the same issues as York region, as a large, spread-out municipality with many towns and cities. It also partners with us in sewage treatment and waste water management, with a jointly owned incinerator. Durham held a referendum on whether the chair should be directly elected or not. Overwhelmingly, the people of Durham supported democracy and called for elections rather than appointments.

The councils of Markham, Aurora, Newmarket, Stouffville and East Gwillimbury have all voted to elect the chair of York region and to place our trust in the public, just as the voters place their trust in us when we are elected.

This is no longer 1971. York region is big; it has a big budget and big responsibilities. It is no longer appropriate to have a small group appoint the chair of York region any more than it would be appropriate for a small group to appoint the mayor of Toronto. It is not democratic, and our residents want change.

People want to hear from York region regional chair candidates, just like they want to hear from us at election time. They want to know about the individuals' qualifications, their experience, their understanding of complicated issues, their integrity, their vision; and finally, they want the opportunity to choose the person they feel is best qualified.

I do not believe for a second that the Ontario government in the 1970s would have foreseen what the responsibilities of the region would be in 2016, or that the population would be over a million people, or that we would still be appointing a chair with a simple majority of regional council.

Last week, I sat at a regional council meeting and listened to the arguments of some of my colleagues who are against the election of the chair. So many of their arguments included the statement, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Well, I think York region is a great place to live and work; I think it is generally well governed, and our regional council can take pride in that. However, elections bring transparency and accountability. That is what democracy is all about. No person or government should ever think that they have reached their best.

I believe that the election of a regional chair, with the transparency and accountability that it will bring, will make us better. This is what I want, what Markham council wants and, I think, our residents want.

Thank you very much for your attention.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Thank you very much. We'll move to Mr. Rinaldi for the first question.

**Mr. Lou Rinaldi:** Chair, just a clarification: The decision of this bill moving to third reading is a decision of the House leaders, not necessarily a decision of the government. Just for the record, to clear that up.

Mr. Balkissoon has a question.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** The government House leader calls bills for debate, though.

Any questions?

**Mr. Bas Balkissoon:** Yes, I do.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Mr. Balkissoon?

**Mr. Bas Balkissoon:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Jones, for being here. I really appreciate you being here. I've read your notes and I have to say that they're well thought out and well put together. I know you've been in the political business for a long time.

I don't have a problem with the request of my colleague. What I do have a struggle with is that since I've been in politics, I've seen Hamilton-Wentworth go through this process; Peel has had discussions; Durham has had discussions; York has had discussions; Toronto was chaos. I think it is a time in history when the province has matured enough that we should be looking at this beyond just one region.

I just want your thoughts on that because, to me, uniformity and the same set of rules for every region is better than having everybody pick and choose what they like. How would you feel if Mr. Ballard's bill would get amended to say that the province adopt an elected chair for all regions across the province, that the minister be given the power in regulation to adopt a governance model and that regions would get an opportunity to comment back on what governance model they would like?

**Mr. Jim Jones:** At the time, on that point, some of the members of York region council felt slighted was that you didn't pick Peel and you didn't pick Simcoe county because they surround us.

The other thing: This would have gone through a long time ago. I don't know what the other regions have, but one of the things with York region is that we have a triple majority. A triple majority means that we have to have triple the population—two thirds of the population has to vote in favour of it. So Markham and Vaughan almost have to vote in favour of it and then we get the other third.

Then we have to have two thirds of the council. But the two thirds of the council can't be just—well, it has to be two thirds of the council. Then, when it goes to York region, we have to have two thirds of York region council.

If we could just change the region of York act, we would probably get it through. We would just say, "If the council wants it, we should be able to do it." We don't have to do a referendum—

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We're going to move now to the official opposition and Mr. Hardeman for questions.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** Thank you very much for your presentation. I was ahead of you there, when I talked about the city of Toronto and the comparison between appointing a mayor there and appointing the regional chair. I appreciate that because I think that's really what this is all about.

I have a little concern with the suggestion that somehow the answer would be to just do this all over. I think we need to realize—and I'm sure you would agree with me in your presentation—that the majority of the regions, if you look at the voting you just mentioned, already have this. It's not all over the map. The choice is not how you do it; the choice is whether you do it or not. I think there are only about two left after this one that aren't done.

**Mr. Jim Jones:** There would be four more. There are nine municipalities.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** To me, I think we really should just move on—four, are there? Well, out of 13, that's not bad.

It seems to me that that's not something we should be pushing for. We should be pushing forward to get an answer to the request that the people of York have.

**Mr. Jim Jones:** I believe that we should deal with us; okay? I heard rumours that maybe Peel is doing something. I don't know about Simcoe county, but all the ones around us—if you do Simcoe county and Peel, then everyone is in the same boat. I agree with that.

Why we should do it is because, before we do that vote that night, he is nothing. He could be a member of council or a mayor or a person running for it, but he's a nothing. Then, once we do that, he becomes the most powerful member of York region council and maybe the most powerful politician in York region.

I love what the city of Toronto mayors have to go through with all the town halls and that, and I think that's what we should be going through here. We've got many, many issues, and it would be nice to know how they understand it.

In the end, it doesn't matter what you do. He's elected. He has still got to get 11 votes—that's including himself and 10 others—to get his agenda through.

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**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We'll move to Mr. Mantha in the third party.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** I want to be straight up: I'm all for transparency and accountability. I believe that having elected officials is how you do that.

You mentioned that, during your regional council meeting that you had last week, some of the people who were speaking against this motion were basically saying, "If it's not broken, don't fix it." What are some of the other arguments that they were bringing forward? I'm always one who likes to see both sides of the story. Is there anything that was brought forward in any type of



convincing manner that would make me re-look at the decision?

**Mr. Jim Jones:** I think that the chair felt that this was an attack on his transparency and his credibility, and it's not; it's that we have a fair and open system. I don't see anything else. Right now, what the system is: Whoever supports the chair gets rewarded. I've talked to Roger Anderson. He won, and he said, "At least now I have a mandate." He has a mandate of what to do. He still has to get the majority of his council to get his mandate through.

That's the same with John Tory. John has to get the majority of his council to get his mandate through, but at least he can take the lead and take the charge and not be beholden to any mayor or any person that put him there.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Thanks.

**Mr. Jim Jones:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Great. Thank you very much.

#### MS. WENDY GAERTNER

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We now have Wendy Gaertner. Please come forward. Thanks for joining us today. If you could state your name for the record. You have five minutes to make your presentation and then three minutes from each party for questioning.

**Ms. Wendy Gaertner:** Thank you. As you said, my name is Wendy Gaertner. I've served on the town council in Aurora for 12 years, and I have to say that I am here in support of Bill 42. There's a lot of interest in my community about the appointment-versus-election of the regional chair. I believe I can accurately say that there is overwhelming support for election versus appointment.

This is a position of power, influence and responsibility—it has been said many times. The person holding this position should be elected by those people that they are going to serve. That's in keeping with our democratic principles. Really, that's all I have to say, except that I thank MPP Ballard for bringing forth this bill and working responsibly on Bills 60 and 16. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Great. Thank you. Mr. Hardeman, do you have any questions?

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** First of all, I thank you again, very much, for making a presentation and, let's say, sticking with the process and keeping the line going as a consecutive presenter—number seven—who supports the bill.

I think it's an indication of the importance of moving forward with this when you've got the people that are being governed making a statement that they are all in favour of doing one thing. The government then has an obligation to listen to that and say, "Let's fix it so we can do what they're asking for."

**Ms. Wendy Gaertner:** I would agree.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** I really appreciate all the people who are making those presentations and making their voices heard. So often, and it may very well be the case in this one, the people on the other side are of the

mind that, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it, so we just won't be bothered with it. We won't get involved." That may be true; I don't know. But the truth is, to make things happen in a democracy, you're supposed to be able to have your voice heard.

The reason I say all that is because if you have someone appointed that is not responsible to you in any way, talking to them isn't going to help much. They are going to stick with their position because they don't have to accommodate the electorate. I can tell you that even when, as I mentioned earlier, I was in that position, though I didn't have to get elected by all the people of the area, I had to get elected by the people where I was mayor. So if I didn't do what I thought the majority of them wanted done, then I wouldn't be there very long. I think that's what we need here. It's not necessarily going to make a different person. It's not necessarily going to drive many different decisions, but you're going to have somebody who has to listen to the electorate before they make those decisions.

I support the bill 100%, and I do hope that we can get it through as quickly as possible.

**Ms. Wendy Gaertner:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Okay. We'll move to Mr. Mantha.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Thank you for joining us, Wendy. What you're asking for is really, again, engagement from your elected officials.

I'll just describe to you the weekend I just went through. I did three community carnivals, four hockey games, a couple of fish fries and a birthday party. What people see is my engagement through Facebook; right? They see the pictures. What they don't see is when a mom or a dad pulls me out between periods in a hockey game to have that chat behind the bleachers that nobody sees, where we talk about their hydro bill or when we step aside and talk about the problems their daughters are having with paying their tuition fees. That's what they don't see.

I think this is what you're asking for when you're asking for your elected officials to get greater engagement with the community, go down to the grassroots, go to community events and get a sense of the heartbeat of what's going on in the communities that are there that you're elected for. Essentially, that, in itself, is engagement. That, in itself, is transparency and accountability. That is presence.

I'm going to ask you the same question that I asked the gentleman who was there before you. I'm always the one who is open to both sides of the story. From your experience, is there any explanation out there to remain with the status quo that you've heard of and has not come here to the committee? Again, I'm always open to hearing both sides of the story.

**Ms. Wendy Gaertner:** I haven't heard anything compelling. We put forward a motion on Aurora council supporting the election of the chair. The vote was 8 to 1, with the mayor speaking against it. I think that our municipality is very interested in not having the status quo.

I have heard a couple of issues with it. One is that it could be expensive. But we're talking about democracy. If we're going to spend our money somewhere, let's spend it to enhance democracy.

With respect to maybe a power struggle between northern and southern communities, Aurora belongs to a group called the Northern Six. It's a co-operative working group, mostly of staff. Of those Northern Six, four of them have passed motions in support of the election of the regional chair. To me, there is nothing compelling to keep the status quo and every reason to change it, because we're talking about democracy.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Great. We'll move to Mr. Ballard, please.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** Thank you, Councillor Gaertner, for coming down today and braving the weather. I was going to ask if Aurora council misses me, but don't answer that just yet. We have more Aurora councillors coming next week.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Can we have a reaction right now?

**Ms. Wendy Gaertner:** Councillor—MPP Ballard, I miss you.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** Okay, there we are. That's good. That's on the record.

**Ms. Wendy Gaertner:** Your name is mentioned from time to time.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** From time to time. No doubt it is.

**Ms. Soo Wong:** Hopefully good stuff.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** All good. All the time, all good.

**Ms. Wendy Gaertner:** I'm not answering that question.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** You partially answered the question that I had in your last response about what possible reason—I've heard three or four of the same tired concerns raised over and over again. You talk about the Northern Six. I just wanted to touch for a second: a concern that northern York region would not be well represented if there was a direct-elect because there are so many people who live in the south end of York region. Do you have that concern?

**Ms. Wendy Gaertner:** I don't have that concern, and apparently four of the six Northern Six communities don't have that concern. Change is hard, and there are always issues and often not-foreseen issues, but I think in this case, we have been talking around and about this for so long with many good minds. I think we can anticipate pretty much anything that's going to happen.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** Thank you.

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**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Mr. Balkissoon.

**Mr. Bas Balkissoon:** Thank you for being here. You mentioned something, and I thought I'd just ask this quick question: You said when Aurora council debated this, it was an 8-to-1 vote, the mayor being the dissenting vote. Then the mayor goes to the region. Which direction did he vote for, council's wishes or his own wish?

**Ms. Wendy Gaertner:** The mayor voted against council's wishes and for his own.

**Mr. Bas Balkissoon:** That's not democracy. Thank you.

**Ms. Eleanor McMahon:** Mr. Chair, do we have a sec?

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Yes, go ahead. Ms. McMahon.

**Ms. Eleanor McMahon:** Thank you for coming here today. My name is Eleanor McMahon. I'm the MPP from Burlington. I serve in a region where we have an elected chair. I live in the south part of the region, the most densely populated, arguably, and we do have northern municipalities. I guess I consider my colleague Ted Arnott, although he's on the other side of the House, to be in the northern part of Halton region. I hope this commentary assuages some of the concerns that the north wouldn't be well served, because it's certainly not the case in Halton.

On the basis that a rising tide floats all boats, I wonder if you could touch on how this opportunity for an elected chair would serve to really raise awareness of citizens about what regional government does and why it's important. Can you comment on that?

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** I'm really, really sorry.

**Ms. Eleanor McMahon:** Oh, no.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** I even let it go for five seconds over. Thank you very much.

**Ms. Eleanor McMahon:** Thank you for coming.

#### YORK REGION TAXPAYERS COALITION

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We're going to call the York Region Taxpayers Coalition up next.

Welcome. I know you've been here for all the presentations today. You have five minutes to make your presentation and then questions will be starting with Mr. Mantha.

**Mr. John Blommestejn:** Great. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon to all the members of the committee. My name is John Blommestejn. I'm a volunteer with the York Region Taxpayers Coalition. I'd like to also introduce Maddie Di Muccio, who is our organization's president. She's here to join me in our presentation.

You've already heard from other presenters that York region is very large in terms of size, with a population that exceeds Atlantic Canada's provinces and is going on to exceed some of the prairie provinces' as well. We believe that a municipality of this size is owed democracy. As such, our organization does support the election of the regional chair.

However, as the proposed legislation stands today, we see Bill 42 as more ideologically driven as opposed to providing real, tangible benefits to the taxpayers.

Bill 42 does not address the governance issues that York region has, and it ignores the imbalance between the larger population of the southern three municipalities

versus the smaller Northern Six. If Bill 42 passes as it stands today, then electing a chair in the 2018 municipal election certainly won't hurt York region, but our members don't feel that it will help taxpayers much either, unless it goes further.

Last summer, the York Region Taxpayers Coalition wrote to Mr. Ballard and recommended two important amendments to improve the proposed bill. The first amendment we suggested to Mr. Ballard was as follows: The York Region Taxpayer Coalition requested that Bill 42 include the same accountability officers as those that the Ontario Legislature required when the City of Toronto Act was passed. Namely, we'd like to see the Legislature mandate to the municipality of York region the establishment of: a municipal ombudsman; an integrity commissioner, which would include a council code of conduct bylaw and a lobbyist registry; and, of course, an auditor general. With these accountability officers within the Toronto act, the Ontario Legislature acknowledged how complicated the municipal activities of the city of Toronto were.

The issues facing York region residents when interacting with their municipality are not automatically simplified the moment one crosses Steeles Avenue. Keep in mind that the population of York region is larger than many of Canada's provinces, and the annual budget, as you're already heard, exceeds \$3 billion, with projected debt expected to be about \$2.9 billion in 2017 and possibly going as high as \$3.7 billion in 2020. By recommending to the Legislature that York region adopt these accountability officers, you'll also be addressing major shortcomings with our present governance.

The second amendment that we suggested to Mr. Ballard involves the way that the chair is elected. The government has stated that the city of Toronto could possibly elect its municipal council members by way of ranked balloting in 2018. Pending the approval of this form of election by the Legislature, the York Region Taxpayers Coalition would like to see ranked balloting used as the form of election for the regional chair. This acknowledges the fact that 74% of York region's electors reside in just three of the nine municipalities. Electors in Vaughan, Markham and Richmond Hill, under a first-past-the-post system, could easily outnumber the others, and our fear is that any election will result in campaigns that are narrowly focused on the three largest municipalities. With a ranked balloting system, this would address that discrepancy. It would require candidates to campaign beyond the borders of Vaughan, Markham and Richmond Hill by building coalitions of support within all nine of the lower-tier municipalities.

This concludes our comments on Bill 42, and hopefully we convinced some of you, at least, to consider some of the amendments that we're proposing with regard to it.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Thank you. We'll go to Mr. Mantha from the third party.

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** Thank you for bringing up the "however."

Can you explain to me your comments with regard to including the accountability officers and how that would play out? How do you see that structuring, and what amendment would you see working to bring that in?

**Mr. John Blommestein:** Mr. Hardeman already alluded to it—that the current regional chair, while considered to be very powerful on paper, actually has very, very few powers. The current chair really only votes when there is a tie, and I've never seen that in all my years of watching regional council—to see it actually come up with a tie vote. That's how rarely that situation happens. He does appoint the committee members and that type of thing, but he really doesn't do much else.

As far as we're concerned, we've got real issues with the York region council. I'll give you a recent example. The Toronto subway extension from Spadina into Vaughan was originally slated to be \$300 million. It has ballooned to \$600 million, and council has voted on that, rubber-stamped it, without any checks or balances put in place. When you divide that sum over 294,000 households, it's over \$2,000 per household. If we had an auditor general, for example, we'd now be addressing issues like, "Is this money well spent? Is that \$2,000 per household going to the right places?" as opposed to regional councillors just lifting their hands up when asked to by staff, without any checks or balances.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We'll move to Ms. Wong from the government.

**Ms. Soo Wong:** I'm hearing—I want to get some clarification, sir—that you prefer to see the role of the auditor general to be more of a priority than Bill 42.

**Mr. John Blommestein:** Correct. When we discussed this with our members—

**Ms. Soo Wong:** So my question is, why isn't regional council, which has the authority to create an auditor general—because this is an independent body. You have a finance committee.

**Mr. John Blommestein:** Correct.

**Ms. Soo Wong:** This is regional council. This piece here that I heard from previous witnesses who came before this committee, as well as my colleagues from York region, asking us to make a more democratic process—having worked in York region, I can tell you that your chair is very powerful for a non-elected person. Do you not see that as added value in terms of democracy?

**Mr. John Blommestein:** Some people may hate this analogy, but I liken this to us saying, "We've got a headache," and the Legislature saying, "Here's a Band-Aid." It's not going to hurt me to have a Band-Aid, but it doesn't help me settle the issues that we have with accountability and transparency.

The one additional person on council: If it's legitimate that it's going to cost \$650,000 to run a campaign—I don't know if that's true or not; that may be excessive. But if it's that much, it's going to be supported by either someone who's very, very wealthy or a lot of developers contributing to that. It doesn't necessarily give the people another representative; it gives developer money another representative on the particular council.

The issue with a common person who is not getting—they've got issues with social housing, for example, or they're disabled and they can't get the government services that they need because of the disability. To have something like an ombudsman's office to call and to have it mandated by the province that you must have it—not, "If we don't like the report, we're going to fire you," because that happens in a lot of municipalities when it's voluntary. Markham had an auditor general, didn't like the auditor general's report, and fired the auditor general. It happens to integrity commissioners quite a bit, too. When an integrity commissioner comes back with something we don't like, they're fired.

We want to have that position mandated by the province, so that the person who is a one-time—"You know what? I'm not getting my social housing issue taken care of." They've got an office to call. It's not necessarily going to be the one person who you check in once every four years; it's going to be an office that's permanent, that you can check in every single day of the week.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Great. Thank you very much. We're going to move now to the—

**Ms. Maddie Di Muccio:** Sorry, Mr. Chair. If I could just add very quickly, just to clarify: Our organization does support—

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** I actually do have to move to the official opposition.

**Ms. Maddie Di Muccio:** Okay. All right.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We'll move to Mr. Hardeman.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** Thank you very much for your presentation. I just wanted to go back to the premise of Bill 42. Would you not agree that that's the first step?

I think Ms. Wong pointed out that the municipalities already have the power to appoint the auditor and the ombudsman themselves. But the present structure in York region doesn't facilitate that to happen because the regional chair is responsible only to the 20 people around the table, not the electorate.

If you started off by having that person elected, then, in fact, they would be responsible to the electorate, not to the council, and they would be much more likely to appoint those officers.

I'll just throw in the question: Your other challenges, the ombudsman and the auditor general, are exactly the same as every municipality in this province. The only difference is that you have an appointed regional chair as opposed to an elected leader. So the first step, in my mind, is always to see if you can find the source of the problem and fix it and, hopefully, once you plug the hole, the water will quit leaking out.

**Mr. John Blommestejn:** I'll challenge you on two points on that:

One, the city of Toronto is different. The city of Toronto actually mandates that they must have those accountability officers. The rest of the province does not have that mandated.

Number two is—and regional councillor Joe Li is going to speak afterwards and maybe he can answer this. This is something that we've been talking about for a long period of time with York region council and have gone and made presentations and have put up with the barbs and all that kind of stuff along with our presentations because they're not happy to hear when we talk about accountability and transparency.

But why haven't you done it? If you've got the power to do it, why haven't you done it? Why are you so afraid of accountability and transparency, when you've got a very large citizen group standing before you, saying, "We'd like this, please"? Why are they ducking and hiding?

I don't think it's ever going to happen, other than the Legislature turns around and says, "This must happen." You did it with the city of Toronto, and we're just asking you—for a region the size of York region, we deserve one too.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** I would just point out very quickly that if we put amendments like that in this bill, we're going to lose the record of having everybody supporting it because that would affect every municipality in the province—

**Mr. John Blommestejn:** And it should.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:**—and I don't think municipally elected officials or even the people would look very kindly on the fact that we, as a province, don't have any faith in the people they elect. It has to come from the local level.

**Mr. John Blommestejn:** I would go back to Mr. Balkissoon, who has asked this question before. Why are we doing this just for York region? Why aren't we doing this across the board? It's the same thing with these accountability officers. Why do we not trust Toronto politicians, but we should trust everybody else? To me, that doesn't make sense.

So if we don't trust Toronto—

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** Thank you very much. That's all the time we have.

**Mr. John Blommestejn:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton):** We're going to adjourn this meeting. We'll be reconvening March 2 at 1 o'clock.

*The committee adjourned at 1444.*







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