



Statement from Durham Regional Chair and CEO Gerri Lynn O'Connor

JULY 27, 2018

RESPONSE TO PROPOSED CHANGES TO MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Whitby, Ontario – Today, Premier Ford announced his intent to make significant changes to the structure of municipal government in Ontario. The immediate impacts of his announcement will be felt in the City of Toronto, and the Regions of Peel, York, Niagara and Muskoka. Our understanding is the municipal electoral process presently underway in the Region of Durham is not affected by this provincial initiative. The elections of Regional Chair and Council will proceed based on existing ward and area municipal boundaries. The residents of Durham can be assured that they will elect their Council this fall based on the wards that their communities have opted to put in place.

In his remarks this morning the Premier indicated his government's intent to undertake a review of regional governments across Ontario to assess which level of government is best positioned to address the challenges we face.

Regional municipalities are not a new level of government. They have existed in Ontario since the 1950's.

In the Region of Durham, we are proud of the effectiveness and efficiency of the services we provide to our communities—essential services like policing, ambulance, public health, long-term care, safe drinking water, sewage treatment, roads, transit and waste management. The regional level of government provides these services in Durham because they are best planned, funded, and delivered on a broader geographic scale than by individual municipalities. Working together, we avoid duplication of effort, reap economies of scale and offer more equitable, higher quality services to the regional community.

Durham Regional Council has proactively restructured services and Council structure on multiple occasions to achieve greater effectiveness and ensure that the needs of our residents are met. When the Harris government downloaded services and costs to municipalities, Regional Council and staff worked diligently and creatively to manage the financial gap and continue to support our residents while maintaining a strong financial position. Many Ontario municipalities have still not recovered from the impact of downloading in several key areas.

The unaddressed social housing needs that the Premier noted this morning are almost entirely the result of the federal and provincial governments withdrawing funding from these programs in the late 1990's. At the same time, downloading of provincial roads, lack of provincial funding for transit, and reduced funding for other infrastructure also contributed to backlogs and gridlock. Some infrastructure funding has been restored in recent years, but municipalities still have insufficient revenue tools to address massive capital requirements.

The new provincial government has cancelled funding for various programs that were targeted to improve the energy efficiency of social housing stock, to expand transit and to make our infrastructure more resilient to climate change. Yet we have no indication of how, or if the Premier plans to replace this funding to municipalities generated by the cap and trade program.

I was a member of Regional Council the last time the province enacted change of this magnitude. I urge the provincial government to undertake the kind of consultation that is necessary on this important issue.

Here in Durham we are always open to making our operations as efficient and effective as possible. We look forward to engaging with the province during the review of regional government to demonstrate how we deliver excellent services and representation to Durham residents.

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