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COMMUNICATION

SP CW (WORKING SESSION) Weston Down Ratepayers Association

MAY 20, 2014

ITEM: 1

1 Blackburn Blvd.  
Vaughan, Ontario, L4L 7J2



Members of Committee,

My name is Anthony Francescucci and I am the President of Weston Downs Ratepayers Association (WDRA) and I'm here today to express the full support of the WDRA for ALL of the recommendations made by the Ratepayer Policy Review Taskforce and urge you to accept them as is or with minor modifications without changing the intent of the recommendations.

Before I begin, I'd like to ask all of the residents in the audience from Weston Downs to please raise your hands. As you can see, the issue before you tonight is a very important and contentious issue for our community because we feel that the current policy puts our community at a disadvantage and hinders our ability to be civically engaged.

Now, before I get into the details of why you should accept these recommendations, I want to draw your attention to the fact that you have heard, or will hear from a number of existing registered ratepayer associations. Some who were duly engaged in the taskforce process and some who were invited to participate but chose not to. I want to remind all here tonight that this issue is about supporting or fostering civic engagement. All associations were provided the opportunity to be engaged in this civic process. Furthermore, for those associations that **did** participate in the process, they all unanimously agreed to the terms of reference for this taskforce, which were discussed line by line and voted on. That means that the associations that participated in this process agreed to make recommendations based on a 2/3-majority vote of the members of the taskforce. Therefore, I can say unequivocally that a majority of the members of the taskforce support these recommendations, and with the exception of clause 9, ALL the recommendations were unanimously agreed to. As for clause number 9 there was only one association that was not in agreement with it. This should speak volumes to the level of engagement and support of those associations who participated in this process.

Now, on to the details of the recommendations. While we support all of them, we only plan to address the contentious recommendations.

Let's begin with the biggest issue of the night. That is the recommendation for regarding clause number 9 of the modified policy. This is the clause that says that if there is a ratepayer association that represents a large geographic area and there is a smaller community within their geographic boundary that wants to self-represent themselves, that there is a process to let the residents decide who should represent them. This is democracy and civic engagement at it's best. Today, the way the current policy works is, whoever is first to register a geographic boundary by the registration deadline, they are the ones that get to represent that geographic boundary. That means, you could have a situation where someone registers an area the size of an entire Ward boundary, like Ward 3 or Ward 1 for argument sake. The first person to register gets to say they represent the entire Ward. There is no consideration as to whether this person or group is effectively representing the ratepayers in that area, but as long as they continue to register that area every year, they can say they officially represent that area and they receive the associated benefit from the policy. Now, let's be realistic, there is no way that issues that affect the residents at the North end of the WARD boundary also effect the residents at the south end of that same WARD boundary. Now, it may be possible, however, I would argue that there is no way one group could meet the needs of all the residents in a geographic boundary of that size. Under the current policy,



2

there is no mechanism to hold the large ratepayer association accountable. That is the current situation in WARD 3. You have East Woodbridge Community Association who claims that they represent almost the same size geography as Ward 3. Yet, when you look at all of the major issues that have come up over the last year in the Weston Downs community, like the casino, the Vaughan mills secondary plan, the hospital, traffic, EAB etc, the EWCA did nothing to support our community on these issues. In fact, I would go so far as to say that there aren't even any active members of the EWCA that live in Weston Downs. Why should a registered ratepayer association like EWCA be allowed to continue to represent Weston Downs simply because they fill out some paperwork. This is what the current policy allows for. Heck, ratepayer associations have it easier than each of you as councillors. You're held accountable at least every 4 years by the residents of your constituencies, why shouldn't ratepayer associations be held to account in the same way. This is what clause number 9 allows for. If a large ratepayer association is not meeting the needs of all of the communities within it's boundaries, there is a mechanism to allow the residents within those communities to decide who should represent them. Now, let me be clear, we're not suggesting that EWCA should simply hand over the boundary and allow the WDRA to register. While that would be nice and make life easy, we are arguing that the residents of Weston Downs should get to decide. Let democracy prevail and not an administrative policy that hampers true civic engagement. Clause 9 makes it fair for both the existing ratepayer association and any communities that want to self-represent themselves. If the existing ratepayer association is truly representing the interests of the smaller communities, then they should have nothing to fear. If they are not representing the smaller communities, then clause 9 provides a mechanism to allow the residents to decide who should represent them. This is only fair and democratic. This is true CIVIC engagement at it's best. Let the residents decide, not some administrative policy.

Finally, with respect to clause number 9, staff has suggested that geographic boundaries should be eliminated. Here we are once again almost a full year later, and the clerks department is still recommending that there should NOT be geographic exclusivity for Ratepayer Associations. The whole reason why this taskforce was implemented, through a recommendation from council I might add, was because the clerk department made this same recommendation when we went through the consultation process, which they led, last year. Through the original consultation process, all the ratepayer associations agreed that there should be geographic exclusivity. In the interest of time tonight, we're not going to bother making the arguments as to why it's necessary, because we did last year. I can say with a fair degree of certainty that all ratepayer associations still support geographic exclusivity and if council attempts to remove this element from the policy, I would expect that there would be civic unrest in this City if that were to happen.

Now, we are not suggesting that there isn't a need for issues-based community associations that aren't bound by a specific geography. We do believe there is a need for these types of associations and that they should accrue some of the same benefits as geographically based ratepayer associations. However, this category of associations has a different set of needs and may not need to be held to the same standard as geographically based ratepayer associations. They represent issues, and issues come and go and therefore, these associations may not be around for the long-term unlike geographically-based ratepayer associations. We are suggesting that the City develop a separate policy to address the needs of this category of associations. The same way the City has a separate policy for community service organizations. You may even wish to strike a taskforce to develop this policy and involve those associations that are interested in participating. Trying to address the needs of both categories of associations in one policy is impossible. Believe me, the last taskforce attempted to do so and decided it could not accomplish that task with only one policy.

The next issue we'd like to address tonight is the issue of Ratepayer Review Board (RRB). As was mentioned at the start, the sole purpose of this board is to ONLY deal with issue of policy compliance.



It is not the mandate of this board to get involved in the affairs of the individual associations. Nor is the RRB intended to be an association of associations in the City of Vaughan. It is not an organizing board, it is intended to be a self-governing body. The reason why this review board was recommended was because the Clerks office has said they don't have the tools to deal with Policy compliance. The Clerk himself has said "while the current policy provides me the authority to deal with compliance, it does not provide me the tools to evaluate compliance". It is interesting that the City Clerk doesn't have the tools to evaluate compliance so therefore he can't exercise his authority to de-register a ratepayer association, but yet has no problems exercising his authority to prevent other ratepayer associations from registering. This is a double standard. Either you do or you don't have the tools to evaluate and exercise your authority. You can't have it both ways.

So if the City Clerk doesn't have the tools and Council doesn't want to hire additional staff to give him the tools, why not let a self-governing body made up of all registered ratepayer associations take over the responsibility. Council could pass a by-law to create this board, similar to the committee of adjustments, and it could approve the terms of reference such that it limits the powers of this board to only matters of policy compliance. Given that the taskforce has recommended that the board be made up of 1 member from all registered associations, no appointments would be necessary. Therefore, no extra work for Council or for the Clerk. Finally, let's be realistic. This board would only have to meet when issues come up. Currently, there are less than 10 un-registered associations. Therefore, once these 10 issues are dealt with, the work of this board should be minimal. It is our opinion that staff has over-estimated the amount of work that they would have to be involved with to support the ratepayer review board. The taskforce managed to develop these recommendations by meeting 8 times over the course of 4 months with minimal to no support from the Clerks office, why should the RRB be any different. Finally, the only reason the taskforce recommended that decision of the RRB come to Council for consideration and final approval is because they thought that is what Council would want. If Council is fine with the RRB making the final decision by power of RRB bylaw, I'm sure that the ratepayer associations would be supportive of that.

The next issue we'd like to address is the issue of minimum size of association. The taskforce struggled to a great extent on this issue because while it is important to allow communities to self-represent themselves, it would be a catastrophe if the City allowed individual streets to register as ratepayer associations. To address issue of minimum size the taskforce recommended the use of the term "pre-defined community". The intent here was to suggest defined communities or planning subdivisions for example like Weston Downs, Vellore Village, National Estates, Pinewood Estates, Vellore Woods, or Pine Valley Village. These are communities that have existed for many years and are clearly defined. In future, new communities in undeveloped areas will emerge. We are not overly concerned with the choice of word that gets used but rather that the intent remains the same. We would accept language as recommend by staff that includes a definition based on "the basis of roads, highways, rail corridors, existing vs. newer communities or on a subdivision basis, and include natural features such as river valleys and woodlots". As long as it is clear that individual or groups of roads would not be allowed to register as an association.

As we bring our deputation to a close, we wish to make two final statements. The first is directed to Councillor DeFrancesca. Councillor, this issue is particularly important for your ward. Six out of the seven ratepayer associations in your ward support these recommendations. Councillor DeFrancesca, we urge you to do the right thing for your ward and support these recommendations to ensure democracy prevails. Do the right thing and support your constituents by supporting these recommendations.

Finally, to everyone on council, we want to say that it has been 18 months since this issue has been raised. Two consultation processes have been conducted. You've received the feedback and

recommendations of a number of registered and unregistered associations on this issue. It is now time for Council to make a decision on which recommendations it will choose to implement. You need to make a decision on this issue; otherwise the work of the taskforce will have been in vain. Whatever you do, DO NOT defer this issue. You need to decide. If you choose not to make a decision on this issue, we expect that it will be quite telling, and we expect that your constituents will make that decision for you in the coming months. Please, support democracy and civic engagement and implement the recommended changes to the policy.

Sincerely,

Anthony Franciscucci	Sonia Meucci
President	Vice President
On Behalf of the Weston Downs Ratepayers' Association.	