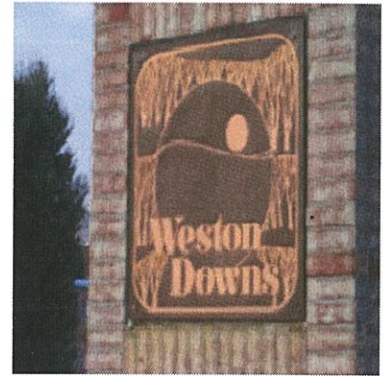


C7 - CW (WS) June 17/13  
Item 3

## Weston Down Ratepayers Association

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(905) 850-1767



Dear Members of Committee,

My name is Anthony Francescucci and I am here today to represent the Weston Downs Ratepayers Association (WDRA) and to bring forward our concerns with the staff report as well as provide you with alternative recommendations regarding the Ratepayer Policy Review.

I want to begin by expressing my extreme disappointment as to the timing of this meeting. I would suggest that many if not all of my counterparts in the other ratepayer associations would support my extreme disappointment as to the timing of this meeting. At this meeting, you have a major agenda item that affects the future of our associations. As you know we are volunteer associations, whose purpose is to hold the City accountable to its residents, which means most of us have to work another job to make ends meet. Therefore, the timing of this meeting makes it impossible for most to be here today to provide their input into this process. How is this a fair and open process for all? Shame on whoever made the decision to have this meeting at a time when proper input and representation is not possible. I have to wonder the true "agenda" of this meeting.

Now, on to the reasons why I'm here. Let me begin by stating that as an association who was once registered with the City, whose registration status was usurped by the "swallowing up effect" as outlined in the staff report, we believe the recommendations from staff moves us backwards instead of forward. That was not the purpose for requesting a review process.

I also want to state upfront that I do not believe it is the City's role to interfere with the business of ratepayer associations, but, because you provide legitimacy to registered associations, I do believe it is the role of the City to hold the associations accountable to their memberships.

What I'd like to do today is outline the problems in each of the categories outlined with option 3 that is being recommended by City staff.

### **Geographic Exclusivity**

First is the issue of **Geographic Exclusivity**. Staff is recommending that it should be removed and that ratepayer associations should not have geographic exclusivity. This recommendation is in direct contradiction to the feedback that staff received during the public input process. Almost 90% of those surveyed (according to the staff report) said that the revised policy SHOULD include geographic exclusivity for registered ratepayer



associations. Further to this, the consensus at the public hearing where the policy was discussed was that geographic exclusivity should be maintained. **In fact, in addition to geographic exclusivity the public input also indicated that there should be a mechanism to allow groups within a ratepayer association that has an extremely large geographic boundary, to form a new ratepayer association with smaller boundaries and be excluded from this larger association only if they meet the requirements required for registration.** This mechanism to allow smaller groups to organize is important because if a ratepayer association's boundaries are too large, these large association will not be able to meet the needs of the smaller communities within it. Therefore if a smaller community is able to organize and meet registration requirements, they should be allowed to register with geographic exclusivity. The stipulation to this mechanism is that smaller group registration should be limited to "natural geographic boundaries" associated with subdivisions or major arterial roads. (e.g. the Weston Downs community, the Vellore Woods community, the Vellore Village community, etc.).

Let me explain why geographic exclusivity is important. In addition to the suggestions provided by staff that geographic exclusivity provides legitimacy and creditability at council and at the OMB, the piece they failed to include in their report, which they received as part of the public input process, is that geographic exclusivity is even more important because it enables residents who live within those boundaries to clearly identify who their ratepayer association is. With only one association for a geographic area, the community knows who is acting on their behalf and who can represent them on community issues. They know where to go for support and information to address community issues that aren't being addressed by the City. Furthermore, as these associations attempt to fundraise within their communities to secure funding to help support community issues, it is clear where they should put their support. If you allow more than one association to represent a geographic area, then there is opportunity to create confusion and discourage support (think door to door water heater or natural gas sales reps who imply they are from the utility company and are here to change your installation, when they are not). **If you allow more than one association to represent a geographic area, then it creates confusion for residents and it discourages or impedes civic engagement.** We believe this is exactly what the City is attempting to do by NOT allowing geographic exclusivity. This will make it easier for the City to push through issues like the Vaughan Mills Secondary Plan or the Casino, because they are making it more difficult for groups to organize.

Having made the case for geographic exclusivity for ratepayer associations with geographic boundaries, this does not preclude the city from establishing a second category of associations called "community associations" (separate and distinct from ratepayer associations). These so called community associations could be allowed to form on a particular issue (e.g. Casino, Hospital, etc.) without a geographic boundary associated with the group. Because community associations are based on an issue and not a ratepayer area, geographic exclusivity is not necessary to provide the same legitimacy or credibility needs for residents. Residents can easily decide whether or not they should support a "No Casino In Vaughan" community association. It's one issue.



Given the feedback from the public input process and the importance of geographic exclusivity to associations, HOW DOES STAFF THEN COME BACK AND RECOMMEND to committee or council, to remove geographic exclusivity when the consensus was that there should be geographic exclusivity. This is just wrong and should be rectified.

To summarize on the issue of geographic exclusivity, we believe the City Ratepayer Policy should provide for geographic exclusivity for ratepayer associations with the condition that if there is a ratepayer association which covers more than one natural boundary such as a subdivision or more than one set of arterial roads (with North, South, East West boundary), smaller groups based on natural boundaries or arterial roads should be allowed to register if they meet the minimum requirements for registration and be excluded from the boundary of the larger association. In addition, we support a second category of association that should be allowed to register based on a community issue and not a geographic boundary.

### **Threshold for Registration**

On the issue of **Threshold for registration**, we believe the recommended changes are headed in the right direction. Use of households as a measure of membership is better. We do however think that 25 households may be an insufficient number for ratepayer associations that represent large geographic boundaries. A better measurement for membership for purposes of registration thresholds may be a percentage of the number of households within a geographic boundary. For example, an association that wanted to represent a geographic boundary from Steeles to Major MacKenzie and Pine Valley to Hwy 400, that could have upwards of 15,000 households, should have a higher threshold than for example an association that wanted to represent the Weston Downs community with only 1800 households. If an association truly wants to represent a geographic area, the measurement threshold for registration should be such that it encourages the associations to secure a broad cross-section of households throughout their area. Otherwise, it might require groups to select smaller boundaries that better represent their community interests and issues. You should think of the size of associations, not on the geography they cover, but on the number of households within that geography. Therefore, a more appropriate threshold for membership should be X percent of the number of households in the geographic boundary being registered. The percentage should be determined in consultation with the group of ratepayer associations.

### **Ongoing Registration Requirements**

On the issue of **Ongoing registration requirements** we believe the new Policy should maintain the same annual requirements that are required with initial registration. The rationale to support this is NOT so the City can interfere with the business of these associations, but so the City can protect the interests of the membership of these associations. If associations risk the loss of registered status and the associated benefits, this creates motivation for the Executives of the board of directors to be responsive and accountable to their membership. Without accountability, you could have associations with Executives that run as a dictatorship rather than a democracy which results in less civic engagement from the residents.



We believe that the annual requirements for ongoing registration should continue as under the current policy. These annual requirements will ensure associations are active and engaged with their memberships; otherwise they risk losing registered status and the associated legitimacy, credibility and benefits that are afforded to an association.

We believe the membership threshold and annual registration requirements we propose are not designed to allow the City to interfere with the business of associations. They are designed to support memberships who are at odds with their Executives that think they can do what they want without the appropriate membership support. The only time City oversight would be necessary is if there is an issue and the membership of a registered association requires support to hold their Executive accountable. Staff suggests that this would add significant cost to the City if such an oversight role were implemented. We believe this isn't the case. The City already plays an oversight role when it comes to Community Service Organizations. In fact the City CSO policy provides the tools and the authority for staff to have oversight over community service organizations to ensure they are accountable to their memberships. Why can't the city do the same for registered ratepayer associations and the proposed category of "community associations". Clearly an infrastructure already exists for the oversight of CSO's registered with the City. The City has XX CSO's registered; adding another 20 ratepayer organizations to the list surely isn't going to add a significant cost to the city, especially when City involvement is only necessary when an association's executive is not accountable to their memberships.

### **Benefits**

Finally, on the issue of **Benefits** for registered associations, we believe that the recommendation of staff was a cop out. Public input was very clear through the survey and the public hearing process. Public input requested, in addition to the already provided one free meeting space for annual general meetings, that the City should provide one free meeting space per month for association executive or board meetings. If the City truly wants to foster civic engagement, they need to make it easier for ratepayer and community associations to organize and strategize on how to address community issues that affect them. For those associations who want to be engaged and active in community issues, they need to meet and discuss. Affording them the opportunity once per month will not be a significant burden on the city. We are talking about one free activity room per month for those associations who need to have a board/executive meeting to discuss issues. There is no cost to the city for these rooms, it's a lost opportunity costs to the City because it is unable to rent the space if it is being used by a ratepayer association. Not every association will take advantage of this opportunity so it is difficult to estimate the lost opportunity costs. If the City truly wants to foster civic engagement, the least they can do is create opportunities for associations to organize at no cost. These are volunteer organizations that have to fundraise to support their organizing efforts. Allowing them to meet once a month at no cost would alleviate some of that burden. Their efforts have significant benefit for large numbers of residents, which should outweigh an organization who may want to rent the room for profit or a private event. Furthermore, as I understand, some CSO organizations, such as seniors groups are provided free meeting space at community centres. If providing activity rooms at local community centres is too challenging for the

City, the alternative should be to dedicate one room/space at City Hall for ratepayer associations to book at no cost. Surely in the new grand City Hall, the allocation of a community room for ratepayer associations to book should not be onerous on the City.

### **Conclusion**

We, the Weston Downs Ratepayer Association urge this committee to consider our concerns and our recommendations to modify the staff proposal for the new ratepayer policy.

If the City truly wants to foster Civic engagement, you must modify the proposed policy recommendation otherwise it will be perceived that the City is returning to its historical reputation as the “[City above the Law](#)” because it is impeding civic engagement.

If this committee is not prepared to modify the recommendation today, I urge you to develop a taskforce with representation from existing ratepayer associations, to revisit this proposed policy and come back to committee with a new recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Franciscucci', written in a cursive style.

Anthony Franciscucci  
Acting President  
Weston Downs Ratepayer Association