

July 8, 2024

**TOWN OF BRADFORD WEST GWILLIMBURY PRESENTATION TO THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND
CULTURAL POLICY REGARDING THE REGIONAL GOVERNANCE
REVIEW**

Good afternoon everyone: my name is James Leduc, and I am the Mayor of the Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury.

I appeared before this Standing Committee last November and on January 17th to share some information about our municipality and Simcoe County, express our appreciation for your work on this review and to encourage the committee to seek improvements towards:

- a) ensuring there is fair, democratic, and proportional representation for all member municipalities;
- b) structures and practices are in place that deliver efficient decision-making and good governance;
- c) service area responsibilities are clearly defined, aligned and avoid duplicative or overly cumbersome processes; and,
- d) lower-tier municipalities possess greater autonomy.

Today, I would like to build upon my previous comments to this Committee and make some specific requests regarding equitable representation.

As I explained on November 6th, each of the County's 16 member municipalities have two representatives, equating to two votes, unless a recorded vote is called for, which triggers a weighted vote system based on eligible voters. This results with 32 voices around the council table attempting to find common ground for a very large area comprised of scores of communities each with a distinct and diverse set of challenges and aspirations. Meeting the needs of those diverse communities is a challenge under the County's current governance structure.

However, it is not just the number of councillors that is of issue. There is a significant disparity within the County between political representation and financial contribution.

Just three municipalities, the towns of Bradford West Gwillimbury, Innisfil and New Tecumseth situated in south Simcoe County, — form one of the fastest growing regions in the country. Together, taxpayers within these three municipalities contribute 37% of the County's tax-base but are represented by just 19% of the faces around the council table – that's nearly 40% of the budget represented by less than 20% of council.

The Town of BWG took a deep dive into this situation in 2018. We attempted to determine if our taxpayers were receiving fair value for their contributions to County budgets. Referring to just two examples, we found that on a cost per household basis, BWG taxpayers were paying 19% more for paramedic services and social housing than the County average and 26% more than households within the separated cities of Barrie and Orillia. Same provider but we are paying more for less service.

This disparity is getting worse. Between 2009 and 2024, we estimate that BWG's assessment growth increased 8.7% annually while the rest of Simcoe County grew at a slower rate of 4.9%.

Over that same period, BWG's contribution to the County more than tripled – from \$8M to \$25M annually and our share of the County tax burden increased from 8.4% to 12%.

I look at this money flowing out and the services that we receive from the County. They do not balance. If this was a business, I'd be looking for other suppliers.

As I noted, this situation is not unique to BWG. It is a challenge for the high-growth municipalities of south Simcoe County to ensure that County investment, program and service delivery meets the needs of the rapidly-urbanizing area that is planned to be home to a significant portion of the County's housing and employment growth. These South Simcoe municipalities have progressed, have grown up, and the County's governance structure needs to evolve with us.

On June 18th, County Council held a workshop to consider other governance approaches that would ideally provide for fairer and more *effective* decision-making. The key outcome of that meeting was underwhelming.

Council referred an option to a sub-committee for further review. This option would reduce the number of members from 32 to 17, with each municipality represented by its mayor. While the potential reduction in councillors is welcome, representation by population will not be achieved and south Simcoe will continue to contribute 40% of the County's budget with less than 20% of the voice.

County Council has struggled with these discussions previously, including as recently as 2022 when a governance review committee was struck to self-reflect on its size and structure. Several options were discussed but a consensus on anything other than the status quo was not reached.

Simcoe County is too special to accept the status quo. We are faced with considerable growth, infrastructure and housing affordability challenges that cannot be solved with our old approaches to governance and service delivery.

In order to *pro-gress*, we need to be *pro-gres-sive*. I ask that this Committee be bold in its findings and recommendations. I ask that fair representation and financial balance be established for south Simcoe either through legislative changes imposed by the provincial government or through clearly articulated directives issued to County Council.

Alternatively, I ask that the government facilitate a discussion and arrangements that could lead to Bradford West Gwillimbury becoming a single-tier municipality.

These would be bold but positive changes that are overdue.

As I've stated at our previous meetings, this regional review is critical. Reform to Simcoe County's decades-old governance structure is required to best position this beautiful part of Ontario for success. We look forward to working with your committee and the province to define and implement that optimum structure.