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Media Release

York Region's wastewater projects environmentally sound and have no impact on the City of Toronto

Regional Council contingent dispel misconceptions of Region's infrastructure, Including threat to Toronto drinking water and watercourses

NEWMARKET – Members of York Regional Council today delivered a strong message to the City of Toronto's Policy and Finance Committee that the construction of the York Durham Sewage System (YDSS) is environmentally safe, is not a threat to Toronto drinking water and watercourses and all work meets regulatory standards.

York Regional Chair and CEO Bill Fisch joined Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell, Markham Mayor Don Cousens, King Township Mayor Margaret Black and East Gwillimbury Mayor Jamie Young and each delivered factual information regarding YDSS infrastructure and the measures York Region takes to ensure the continued health and safety of both York Region residents and businesses, and our neighbouring communities.

"York Region is undertaking sound planning and using state-of-the-art technologies to ensure the expansion of the York Durham Sewage System is done in accordance with strict environmental protection guidelines set out by the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Toronto Region Conservation Authority," Chair Fisch told the Committee. "Gravity sewers do not leak sewage into the aquifer. This system poses no threat to the City of Toronto and no threat to York Region."

York Region officials requested an opportunity to address Toronto's Policy and Finance Committee following a series of motions by Toronto Works Committee in September to investigate York Region's construction practices on the YDSS. Toronto's Works Committee moved ahead with the motions, despite a report by City of Toronto staff stating there are no impacts on watercourses flowing through the City of Toronto as a result of sanitary sewers in York Region and future YDSS construction.

"While it is somewhat astounding that Toronto Councillors chose to ignore the impartial advice of their own staff, I am pleased that we were able to dispel the growing amount of misinformation surrounding our wastewater projects," said Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell, Chair of the Region's Transportation and Works Committee. "These wastewater projects are critical elements to securing our social and economic prosperity over the coming decades. It is imperative that they move forward in a timely fashion to meet approved growth levels in our Region."

Each local Mayor, making a deputation before the Committee, spoke to topics within their municipal jurisdiction. Markham Mayor Don Cousens highlighted the environmental monitoring and protection that has set the current project apart from any previous works.

"The Region has implemented a \$30 million environmental monitoring and well mitigation program for our wastewater projects to ensure that what we are doing is both sustainable and as environmentally-benign as possible," said Mayor Cousens. "The project is strictly monitored by regulatory agencies on an ongoing basis as part of the permit process, and the Region continues to meet and exceed these very high standards."

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King Township Mayor Margaret Black noted the number of judicial challenges encountered by the King City project as well as the fact that the merits of the King City sanitary sewer project outweighed the arguments of the opposition – in every instance.

“The requirement for a sanitary sewer system in King City responds to documented health concerns caused by years of septic system failures throughout our community,” said Mayor Black. “These issues have been confirmed by the Ministry of Health, York Region’s Medical Officer of Health, two environmental assessments, various court reviews and a peer review, to list but a few.”

Town of East Gwillimbury Mayor Jamie Young discussed the need for planned growth and sustainable infrastructure within his community, especially illuminating the dedication of elected officials and local and Regional staff as defenders of the environment, while ensuring the protection of health and safety for both current and future generations.

“Some would lead you to believe that York Region’s servicing infrastructure decision is short sighted and does not support the environment or sustainability for future generations. That is not true,” said Mayor Young. “To achieve a sustainable community, it is paramount that a balanced growth approach be predicated on our commitment to the environment, society, infrastructure and the economy.”

Other information noted during the presentations included:

- York Region has spent more than \$3 million in hydrogeological studies to ensure that water taking for construction is sustainable
- Gravity-based sewers, such as those used for the YDSS, are used in more than 99 per cent of the province of Ontario
- In comparison to pumped systems, gravity sewers do not require any mechanical parts to operate, do not use electricity or burn fossil fuels
- Gravity sewers have a life span of more than a century, and operate virtually trouble free
- Sewage pipes do not leak sewage out into the environment, and if leakage does occur, it is from groundwater outside of the pipe leaking into the sewer; in relatively minute quantities
- Any pipe failure would be detected by routine closed circuit TV camera inspection, in addition to regular monitoring of flow rates
- A centralized sewage system such as the YDSS is environmentally and economically superior to locally-based sewage systems
- Wells in areas that have been dewatered have returned to normal when construction has been completed
- Water is not being wasted, rather cycled into local streams, supplementing businesses and being sent to Lake Ontario – the source of most of York Region’s drinking water as well as the City of Toronto

For more information on the YDSS, please visit www.york.ca and follow the links on the main page titled “York Region wastewater infrastructure projects”.

Residents who feel that de-watering along 16th Avenue has affected their well water levels are encouraged to call the Region’s toll-free hotline at 1-888-445-4418. All calls will be returned, and wells assessed within 24 hours.

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