

Veterans and newcomers vie for Aurora's new ridings

By Brock Weir

Get ready to say goodbye to Newmarket-Aurora as we know it, and hello to a few new faces.

Aurora's Federal electoral boundaries will officially split in two in time for the next expected Federal election in 2015. The Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission offered their final report to the House of Commons calling on changes across the province, including splitting Aurora in two at Wellington Street.



Incumbent Conservative MP for Richmond Hill and Unionville resident Costas Menegakis is planning a move to either Aurora or Oak Ridges, seeking the newly created riding of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill.



2011 Liberal candidate Kyle Peterson once again plans to carry the Liberal banner in the reconfigured Newmarket-Aurora.



Jason Cherniak will launch his campaign to become the Liberal nominee for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill at Jonathan's Restaurant on October 20. Aurora north of Wellington will now vote for their MP as part of a reconfigured Newmarket-Aurora, which will also include Newmarket in its entirety. Those living on the south side of Wellington, however, will now vote as part of the newly formed riding of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill.

The southern riding will include all of Aurora south of Wellington, as well as northwestern Richmond Hill, with Major Mackenzie Drive at its most southerly point.

The riding was originally slated to be called simply "Aurora-Richmond Hill", but was changed to reflect the geographic and

historical realities? of the Oak Ridges community as well as its distinct identity at the request of Mr. Menegakis.

?It was important to me because I wanted to make sure communities of interest were looked after,? Mr. Menegakis told The Auroran. ?Oak Ridges itself is a unique community. It is part of Richmond Hill but there is a unique identity the residents of Oak Ridges really identify with.?

It was a distinction he says many residents brought to him when the community did not figure in the name of the proposed new riding.

The final recommendations of the Commission will bring the total number of ridings serving York Region up to 15. Mr. Menegakis said he is pleased there will be ?more representation in an ever-growing community? and it will ultimately lead to stronger representation.

With the stronger representation, however, come more choices for both the voter and people aspiring to get those elusive and coveted votes. In some cases, incumbent Members of Parliament will have a choice to make if their ridings have been split.

Mr. Menegakis, a resident of Unionville, tells The Auroran he plans on running for the Conservatives once again in the new Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill riding. With his home now on the market, he says he is eyeing a move to either the south end of Aurora or the north end of Oak Ridges.

Hoping to face off against the Conservatives in the new riding is Jason Cherniak. The Oak Ridges lawyer has formally announced his intention to seek the Liberal nomination in Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill with a campaign kick-off scheduled for October 20 at Jonathan's Restaurant.

?I've been thinking about this for some time,? said Mr. Cherniak. ?We're expecting an election in 2015 and Liberal nominations are probably expected next summer in 2014 and now is really the time to start getting to know people and the other members, sign up new members, and bring the team together.

?I've lived in this community for almost 20 years. During that time, I've raised money for community charities, worked with local organizations and established my own successful law firm. I will bring the same dedicated leadership and results for our community as a Member of Parliament.?

In his announcement, he included endorsements from MPP Helena Jacek, Councillor John Abel, Councillor Vito Spatafora of Richmond Hill, former mayor and Liberal candidate Tim Jones.

Newmarket-Aurora's current MP, Lois Brown, lives in the northern riding as a resident of Newmarket. She confirms to The Auroran she will be carrying the Conservative banner once again in the reconfigured Newmarket-Aurora. 2011 Liberal candidate Kyle Peterson has also confirmed his intention to run for the Liberals in the next Federal election as well. Mr. Peterson came second to Ms. Brown in the last go-round, as a first-time candidate after spearheading a number of local campaigns behind the scenes.

The decision to split Aurora federally was vocally opposed by Ms. Brown, as well as MPP Frank Klees, Mayor Geoffrey Dawe and Councillors, who presented alternative proposals to redrawing the boundaries with the split.

?I itemized the reasons I felt Aurora should be kept as one unit, so I regret it hasn't happened,? said Ms. Brown on the initial recommendations. ?York Region is the lynchpin in the rest of the province because we are the fastest growing Region in Ontario and we knew things were going to be redistributed somehow.?

Debate over the fate of Aurora's electoral boundaries gained considerable attention through the community, with residents making submissions to two public input sessions and appealing to Councillors. They, and municipal staff, drafted a variety of possible solutions, particularly highlighting Aurora's historic and geographic connections to Oak Ridges and King.

?We are such a small community physically and in population that to split it up and have two Federal MPs just does not make

sense," said Mayor Dawe at the time. "I don't see how we would benefit from that. We have one Federal member and one Provincial member right now and the cohesiveness of one voice is extremely important in order to make sure we are heard properly."

Looking ahead to what could be his new riding in less than two years, Mr. Menegakis said with the "affinity" between Aurora and Oak Ridges it would have been "preferable" to keep Aurora intact.

"The Boundaries Commission had a goal of 106,000 residents per riding, plus or minus a percentage and they could not make it any other way but to split Aurora at Wellington," he said. "It was unfortunate that nothing could happen and this was the only way they could get the numbers."

While the Commission states the next Federal election is planned for October 2015, it notes the earliest an election could be called with the new boundaries is April 2014.