

Transit, new voting system on minds of voters

Thornhill

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Full house for Thornhill debate

By: Caroline Grech

There's more on the minds of Thornhill residents than the faith-based funding debate, if an all candidates debate at Thornhill Secondary School is any indication.

Extending the subway, dealing with health care and where candidates stand on the referendum, were among the issues put to candidates Monday night.

It was a packed house with more than just campaign supporters on hand. Markham councillors Jack Heath, Erin Shapero and Jim Jones were also among the audience.

The first question of the night was asking candidates their support for a subway extension of the Yonge line up to Hwy. 7.

While both Tory candidate Peter Shurman and Liberal MPP Mario Racco vowed support for the extension, not everyone agreed.

"I am the one who proposed the subway," Mr. Racco said, adding the province would pick up two thirds of the tab under the Liberal plan, while the federal government would pick up the remaining the rest.

But NDP candidate Sandra Parrott expressed concerns about the move.

"The NDP has decided we are for light rail transit and the subway to York University. Are you willing to let your education and health care go down to make your lives easier?" Ms Parrott asked, adding that her Liberal opponent seems to think money grows on trees.

Green candidate Lloyd Helferty chose to focus on pay-for-distance fares and said there are other solutions other than a subway.

Residents also asked candidates if they were in favour of Mixed Proportional Representation, the newer system, which residents can vote for in the referendum.

It was a mixed bag of responses, with Conservative Peter Shurman backing the current system.

"Absolutely not, if you're not elected you don't represent," Mr. Shurman said.

Mr. Racco remained coy about his thoughts on the two systems. "I will not try to influence anyone," Mr. Racco said, adding this was time for constituents to speak their mind, amid some jeers from the crowd to answer the question.

Independent candidate Malcolm Kojokaro is in favour of it, donning several shirts throughout the evening showing his support for the new system.

Ms Parrott is also in favour of the new system as is Mr. Helferty.

Residents did ask how each candidate would vote on faith-based funding, given that Conservative leader John Tory has announced it would be a free vote on the issue should he be elected.

"I would not support it," Mr. Racco said, adding he has been clear from the beginning about his party's stand on the issue.

Ms Parrott believes the funding formula should be the first priority in education.

Mr. Kojokaro opposes funding faith-based schools all together.

"I wouldn't be for this. Don't give funding to anybody," Mr. Kojokaro said.

Lindsay King, the candidate running for the Freedom Party supports charter schools.

Mr. Shurman was vocal in telling residents that he would vote in favour of expanding funding to faith-based schools.

"We already have faith-based schools. They're called Catholic schools. I will vote for it," Mr. Shurman said.

As for the controversial health-care premium, residents asked why the Liberals brought in the health tax.

"Our system is doing better now than it was before," Mr. Racco said.

Mr. Shurman was skeptical of Mr. Racco's answer.

"This is the largest tax grab in Ontario history," Mr. Shurman said. "Isn't it miraculous that finance minister, Mr. Sorbara, recently announced a surplus?"

The election is Oct. 10.