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Building A Culture Of Control

As a Pickering City Councillor and the only elected official in Durham Region to attend the Durham Regional Police Service (DRPS) Drone as First Responder (DFR) Pilot Project community information night on Thursday, February 26, 2026, at the Education and Training Centre in Whitby, I witnessed first-hand the presentation of this program—already live and operational across our region.

No other municipal or regional representative was present, underscoring my ongoing commitment not only to the residents of Pickering but to the broader Durham Region. Unlike my counterparts, I serve without compensation, driven purely by a dedication to transparency, accountability, and protecting the freedoms of those I represent.

Durham Regional Police have launched one of Canada's first Drone as First Responder programs, with police-grade drones—manufactured by the American company Skydio—which will be docked strategically across the region. These are not recreational toys; they are advanced systems capable of launching and hovering over an incident scene in approximately 60 seconds—long before ground officers arrive. A drone could be filming your street, recording video, and transmitting live feeds at police discretion.

I must commend our Durham Regional Police Service—they are among the finest in the country, dedicated professionals who put their lives on the line daily to keep our communities safe. Their innovation in emergency response is admirable, but this program represents a slippery slope. Once we cross the line into expanded surveillance without ironclad safeguards, it's hard to turn back. History shows that tools introduced for "emergencies" often expand in scope, eroding privacy inch by inch.

Officials describe the program as a tool for emergencies and "operational incidents"—a term so vague and broad that deployment ultimately rests on police judgment. This raises serious questions: What if Quebec-style curfews returned, as we saw during COVID lockdowns? Could drones patrol neighborhoods to enforce compliance, monitor who is out after hours, or track individuals? During lawful peaceful assemblies—protests, marches, or community gatherings—might they hover overhead under the guise of "operational need" for situational awareness? We have already seen police drones deployed at large events elsewhere in Canada, and the potential for mission creep is undeniable when guidelines are this open-ended.

Consider the Million March for Children here in Durham a couple of years ago—a lawful assembly of parents and caregivers advocating for their kids. There was disturbing talk from City Hall, including straight from Mayor Ashe himself, questioning whether these protesters were "good or bad people." What would it take for DRPS to cross that line today? If a Chief Administrative Officer from any Durham municipality claimed they feared for their safety due to a legal protest, would drones be launched to surveil the participants? This isn't far-fetched; it's the logical extension of discretionary aerial monitoring in a region already leaning toward overreach.

Authorities assure us there is no facial recognition in use today. Yet footage can be recorded, stored, and subject to review. That data persists indefinitely. As artificial intelligence advances, future tools could analyze archived video for identification or patterns—especially with policies that evolve over time. Closer to home, Ontario Tech University is actively researching AI-coordinated drone swarms, where multiple drones operate autonomously. (Durham's Drones can also work autonomously together). Internationally, we see examples like China—the most surveilled country in the world—employing such technology for public monitoring and crowd control. Durham's program is not hypothetical; docks are installed, drones are flying, and the initiative is underway.

The community information night—featuring live demonstrations, discussions on privacy, and opportunities to meet operators—came after the fact. The decision to deploy was made without prior public consultation or meaningful input from residents. We were presented with a fait accompli: the program is here, now come learn about it.

This is not merely about faster emergency response; it is part of a broader pattern in Durham Region where policies increasingly tilt toward centralized oversight and data accumulation. Coupled with other initiatives—like the hate reporting line, essentially a snitch line allowing neighbors to anonymously report on neighbors or anyone for offensive comments, jokes, or perceived slights—it contributes to what can only be described as a culture of control. One where wide discretion allows surveillance tools to proliferate, personal privacy erodes incrementally, and meaningful oversight arrives only after implementation.

Durham residents deserve better. Is our region becoming a testing ground for always-on aerial monitoring? Are we comfortable with footage of our neighborhoods, homes, and families being captured, retained, and potentially integrated into more sophisticated systems down the line? Shouldn't citizens have had a real say before drones began launching over our streets, rather than being informed post-launch?

Public trust is built on transparency and genuine engagement, not retroactive briefings. I urge Durham residents to demand answers: full disclosure of deployment criteria, public access to flight logs, strict limits on data retention, and independent oversight to prevent overreach. Attend future sessions, contact your representatives, and voice your concerns. Our freedoms are not automatic—they require vigilance.

The truth matters. Let's keep pushing for it, together, before this "pilot" becomes permanent reality.

POLICE UNDER THE GUN... INAPPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

DURHAM - According to police reports a statement from Durham Police Chief Peter Moreira says it happened during a meeting of the Afro-Caribbean Canadian Internal Support Network. Moreira says the language was not directed at anyone, but it was still offensive and "inconsistent with our values."

The police chief says when he became aware of the incident, he notified the Durham Regional Police Service Board, which is responsible for the discipline of command. The board decided to suspend the deputy chief with pay while the investigation is underway.

A statement from the Police Service Board says they were notified of the incident February 25 and they had a special meeting to deal with it. The board says the deputy chief is accused of using a "racially inappropriate term" during an internal support network meeting that was attended by sworn and civilian members of the force. They say the independent third party investigating the incident will have the firm objective of "ensuring accountability and demonstrating the board's unwavering commitment to the importance of equity, diversity and inclusion."

The Deputy Chief is alleged to have used a racially inappropriate term during an internal support network meeting, attended by sworn and civilian members of the DRPS. This alleged misconduct will be investigated by an independent third party with the firm objective of ensuring accountability and demonstrating the Board's unwavering commitment to the importance of equity, diversity and inclusion. The Deputy Chief has been suspended with pay pursuant to the provisions of the CSPA, while the investigation occurs.

Statement from John Henry, Regional Chair and Chief Executive Officer for The Regional Municipality of Durham: Durham Region remains committed to fostering a community of inclusivity and respect. Racism is not tolerated in any form. Language plays a role in creating safe spaces; building up those around us through respect and understanding.

I have communicated with Chief Moreira about the recent statements from the Police Chief and the Durham Regional Police Services Board. The incident refers to language that is not acceptable and on behalf of Durham Region, I condemn its use in the strongest terms.

The Region is not part of the legislative process, but I have been assured the investigation will be fair, comprehensive and impartial. The Region will not comment on the investigation and we request that all inquiries be redirected to the Durham Regional Police Service."



THE **Mr. Files**

By **John Mutton**
CENTRAL EXCLUSIVE

Karmageddon

By Mr. 'X' ~ John Mutton
CENTRAL EXCLUSIVE

The YAR Factor: When Planning Debate Becomes Character Assassination

There was a time when land-use planning debates in Clarington revolved around traffic studies, air quality modeling, servicing capacity and waterfront access.

Now we have something new.

I'm calling it the YAR Factor — You're All Racists.

It emerged during discussion of the Courtice South Secondary Plan — the lands south of Highway 401, west of Darlington Provincial Park and east of Energy Drive, adjacent to the Clarington Energy from Waste Facility.

For those unfamiliar with planning law, a secondary plan is not a building permit. It is the blueprint that dictates what will eventually rise from the ground. It sets height. Density. Employment lands. Park configuration. Road alignments. Phasing triggers. It is where a community's bones are drawn long before cranes arrive.

And this one is complicated.

We are talking about lands that:

- Sit beside a provincial park.
- Border an incinerator facility with potential expansion.
- Exist within the shadow of approved small modular reactor development.
- Will require updated nuclear emergency planning.
- Will demand new air quality studies.
- Will trigger development charge recalculations.
- Will intersect with GO expansion timelines and Courtice Road/401 upgrades.
- Contain significant employment lands tied to the energy sector.

This area is likely 13–15 years from full realization. But the policy groundwork happens now.

That's why residents showed up.

They raised concerns about:

- Waterfront access.
- Condo tower height and density in the Kemp subdivision.
- Industrial adjacency.
- Whether the municipality missed an opportunity years ago to acquire the entire waterfront for roughly \$2 million.
- Infrastructure sequencing before residential intensification.

These are not fringe objections. They are textbook planning questions.

And yet, instead of rebutting those concerns with studies, reports, and evidence, the debate veered into something else entirely.

Regional Councillor Granville Anderson publicly suggested that those opposing the residential component of the secondary plan are racist and Islamophobic.

That is not a planning rebuttal. That is amoral indictment.

Let's be clear: racism exists. It must be confronted wherever it appears. But to broadly characterize policy opposition as racism — absent explicit discriminatory statements — is not anti-racism leadership. It is rhetorical escalation.

When elected officials label dissenters instead of answering them, three things happen:

1. Public participation declines.
2. Trust in process erodes.
3. Real anti-racism work is trivialized.

The irony here is profound. When planning debates are reframed as moral purity tests, we stop debating policy altogether. We stop asking whether the development charge by-law is updated. Whether emergency plans align with approved reactor development.

Whether employment lands are being quietly eroded. Whether air modeling has been completed. Whether phasing matches infrastructure capacity.

Instead, we debate who is virtuous. That is governance drift.

There is also another uncomfortable layer. Repeated public praise of a developer's philanthropy during statutory planning meetings does not strengthen a file — it weakens it. Philanthropy is commendable. It should not be weaponized as political insulation.

Developers deserve fair process, not performative adoration.

Planning decisions must stand on the Planning Act, the Official Plan, and evidence — not applause.

When I served in office and faced controversial development files, I did not dismiss residents. I demanded studies. I ensured staff reports addressed legitimate concerns. I made my case with data.

Calling the public racist because they question density is not data.

The YAR Factor is dangerous because it shuts down debate by redefining disagreement as prejudice.

A municipality cannot build trust if residents fear being morally smeared for asking about building heights.

Clarington stands at a crossroads. The Courtice South lands will shape our waterfront, employment base, and infrastructure load for generations. These decisions deserve rigorous analysis — not rhetorical shortcuts.

If council believes the residential intensification is sound policy, make the case:

- Show the servicing capacity.
- Demonstrate the emergency preparedness.
- Produce the air quality modeling.
- Update the capital forecast.
- Align the development charges.

Win the argument. But do not silence it.

Because once public consultation becomes avenue for character assassination, participation becomes a liability — and democracy becomes performative.

The YAR Factor may win a news cycle. It will not build a community.