

Board members meet with the province

The York County School Board is still waiting for a reply from Provincial Housing Minister Claude Bennett in response to concerns over sites and plans of subdivision it presented in mid-May.

Chairman Don Cousens, several trustees and staff members were to have met collectively Monday morning with both Mr. Bennett and Education Minister Bette Stephenson.

Markham Mayor Tony Roman and his chief administrative officer were also asked to be present by the school board, since several of its school acquisition problems are based in different parts of that town.

"We hope this will be a collective and co-operative effort between the town and the school board to resolve the problems of some of the people in Markham. We're attending this meeting because the accommodation problems for students have become pretty serious," said Mayor Roman.

Mr. Cousens said a second meeting with Dr. Stephenson has been set for August for discussion of problems the board is having with funding and province's grant structure. The minister leaves for vacation this week, so the latter meeting had to be delayed.

The original delegation to the housing minister

was requested after the board had been impeded from acquiring two school sites in a Newmarket subdivision last February.

The developer, Heatherwoods Development Ltd., managed to get draft plan approval from the Region, without getting agreement from the board on the type of sites it needed.

Instead of paying a negotiated price for land at \$15,000-\$30,000 per acre, the board found it would have to pay the developer's prices, ranging up to \$80,000 for the same property. Extra costs would naturally be borne by ratepayers across the whole Region and fearing a dangerous precedent, trustees asked for an immediate meeting with Mr. Bennett.

The board has asked for the minister to change the Planning Act that not only should land required by boards for school sites be set aside (as the act now states) but that an

agreement of purchase and sale be signed by boards and developers as a condition of draft plan approval.

It was the lack of such an agreement that caused the York Board to lose its two proposed sites in Newmarket. Tacked onto this new proposal, would be a clause protecting developers from any land speculation by school boards.

Since the York County Board was amalgamated in 1969, it has negotiated prices for school sites prior to final plan approval. Local and regional councils have never recommended that approval until a signed agreement between the developer and board was available. The terms for such agreements saw prices of serviced land considerably lower than those available to paying \$25,000 per acre and as low as \$13,000-\$15,000 through Richmond Hill, Aurora and area further north.

At one time, the board

was paying the lower rate in Markham-Vaughan but when it came time to build Johnsville School, the developer claimed he was working in a confined area and that the school site took up an unusually large chunk of his lands.

The board agreed to \$25,000 per acre and since then no agreement in southern York Region has been for less than that amount, according to the board.

Because the board feels only the province benefits from a larger tax base (ministry grant structure) and that it gets no advantage from municipal lot levies, it wants the right to impose levies within certain reasonable limits.

Mr. Cousens said these issues may require special board meetings in the summer. It's likely talks with the high school teachers' federation will necessitate their own special sessions, which he can call with 48 hours' notice. There is one official meeting in July and

one in August. "I may have the same kind of delegations Mrs. Stephenson had last week if I don't do something about these critical issues," said Mr. Cousens.



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