

Heritage Language program shelved

Not knowing if there is sufficient demand or need, the York Board of Education has voted against establishing a Heritage Language program in its schools by a count of 9-8.

A two-hour debate Monday night brought forth a number of different views on multiculturalism, its aims and its benefits but failed to show a clear consensus on recommendations from the Program Committee.

Those recommendations included that the Board show its willingness to advertise and initiate the Ministry's Heritage Language program, authorize classes in other than English or French where 10 or more pupils show an interest in attending.

Thornhill Trustee Margaret McDonald immediately tried to get that figure amended to 15 students, claiming it would be a "safer number" in terms of grants offered by the Ministry.

SHOT DOWN
Her suggestion was shot down even after Director Sam Chapman said the grants per student increase as the number of students increase above the minimum 10. The basic grant is \$13.50 per student per instructional hour of Heritage Languages.

"The bigger the class the better the likelihood of having no net cost to the board," said Mr. Chapman. "The question is where the ministry says the minimum number must be 10, do you want to change that number? There is some politics involved in the decision."

Unionville Trustee John Myers was bitterly opposed to the concept of the

program. He was concerned about normal operation of the school day and the extra time taken from teachers for preparation and evaluation. He also suggested such a program could serve to increase vandalism because of displays, books and additional materials needed to keep the program going.

ETHNIC GROUPS
"I wonder about the funding for this — the minister could at some future date cut funds for the program like we've seen happen elsewhere. I'm against the idea of catering to specific ethnic groups. John Diefenbaker spoke about being a hyphenated Canadian. I am not a French-speaking Canadian, nor am I an English-speaking Canadian. I am a Canadian. I support this idea but the Ministry in its wisdom has seen fit to exclude those whose original language is French or English from the program," he said.

Stouffville Trustee Harry Bowes attacked the course from a purely economic point of view. He stressed the province's demonstrated lack of funds through cuts in education grants and spending, a cutback in the teachers' superannuation program and the trickle of funds available for capital expenditures.

"I'm against any polarization of racial or ethnic groups within our schools. There is a situation in Toronto where two groups just can't seem to get together and we don't need that here," he said.

ARMSTRONG SAYS YES
Of the Richmond Hill Trustees, only June Armstrong was in favor of getting a sampling of

public opinion. Bill Monroe said he found many of the speakers suspect because most of them had nothing to say until a recent (May) memorandum came out from the Ministry announcing changes in the policy and procedure for the HLP.

"If they think the lack of such a program on multiculturalism is so devisive, then where were they before the Ministry began them? I can't support it," he said. Beverley Breslow said the only type of program she could support is one for new Canadians — those children who don't speak English at all and could get the HLP in their own language. She later said she was raised in a

multicultural environment, though it was segregated, and felt there were few benefits.

"... we have to find some way to ameliorate these people in our midst or those on their way," said Mrs. Armstrong in support of the program.

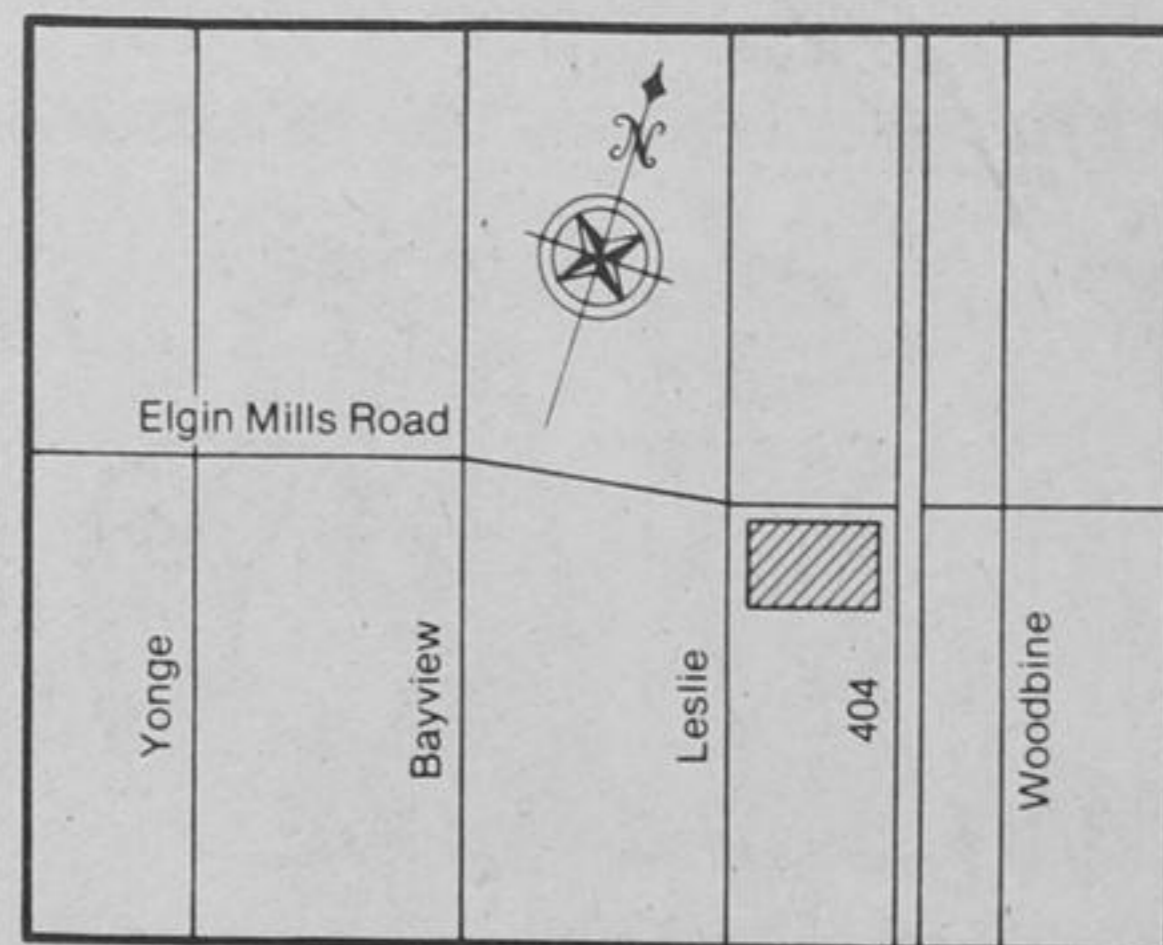
FELL SHORT
"The least we can do is advertise this program to find out if there is sufficient demand — people aren't going to know these things exist unless we advertise them."

Thornhill Trustee John Stephens launched a tirade that likely won a few trustees over, but his effort fell short. Listening to the views, he said, he had the feeling Canadians are living in a dream world.

"If you look at statistics since 1971, only 42 per cent of Canadians have roots in the United Kingdom... since 1967 we have lost an awful understanding of just who Canadians are. If there ever was a time for a program like Heritage Languages, I'd say it is now."

"For a long time we have looked at Canada as a country with people coming from England who are primarily white. Today that is not the case. The future of this country will be defined by those people who can stand up and say who and what they are... trustees should take a long look at this program," he said. They did, and they shelved it.

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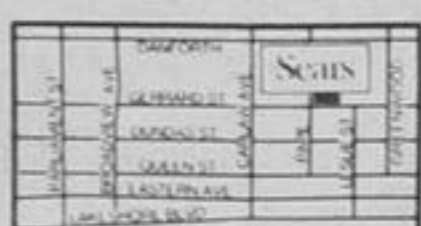
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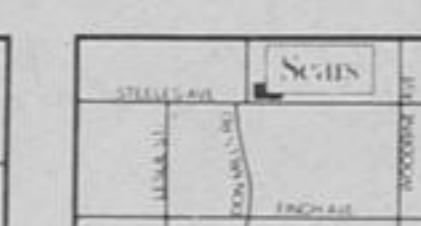
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