

# Property tax rebate changes irk local farmer

The Ontario government's proposed changes to the Farm Property Tax Rebate program will cause serious problems for those struggling to make ends meet, local farmers say.

"These changes will definitely affect farmers who depend on the rebate to pay the taxes," Ontario Federation of Agriculture member and local farmer Brian Gibson said in an interview last

week. "How can a farmer pay the taxes if he can't afford it? I don't think farmers on the whole are very happy with the changes because most need the rebate."

The Farm Property Tax rebate is paid to owners of farmlands and buildings to protect them from bearing disproportionately heavy municipal and school taxes, Gibson said.

Because farm families own

more land than urban families, they often pay more municipal and school taxes, despite using the same amount of general municipal services as urban landowners.

And to compensate for the discrepancy, the Ontario government passed legislation two years ago to give farmers a tax rebate to balance the system.

But in June, the provincial

government revamped the rebate policy, making it more difficult for certain farmers to obtain the tax rebate.

Under the new legislation, multiple income farmers and farmers renting their land will receive significantly smaller rebates.

For these part-time farmers, the rebate will fall five per cent for every \$1,000 over \$40,000 the farmer makes outside the farm. And the rebate will be zero when off-farm income reaches \$60,000.

But to many local farmers who depend on multiple incomes and renting land to survive, the new changes seem unfair.

"Many local farmers need a second income to offset expenses," said Ted Barry, a local market farmer. "Many farmers rent their land but these changes penalize you for that."

Barry said many young couples interested in starting family farms will be hurt by the rebate changes because start-up

costs are very high.

"Young couples often need two incomes to make it," he said. "And it's pretty hard to take something away once you've had it."

"The government gave this without people asking and now they want to take it back. Well, they're going to have quite a fight."

Local farmer Harvey Brown thinks the government's decision to alter the rebate system will hurt some Ontario farmers. But he doesn't think the changes will force farmers to alter their profession.

"I don't think it will drive farmers out of farming," Brown said. "But it will put up the cost of farming. Farmers actually are the hardest people to drive out, and this new policy just makes it harder."

Brown said agricultural groups across the province are currently fighting the proposed rebate changes.

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## No school buses allowed to park on street overnight

School buses will not be allowed to park on city streets for an extended period of time, Whitchurch-Stouffville council determined Aug 8.

In a lively debate near the end of a long, tiring council meeting, councillors agreed to disallow bus drivers the right to park their

vehicles on the streets because it would set "an undesirable precedent."

"The buses take up six or seven spaces which is too much," Mayor Fran Sainsbury told council. "And do you know what we will end up with in the future? Transport trucks will park on streets too."

Mayor Sainsbury said a similar problem is cropping up in Scarborough, where parked buses are becoming a threat to driver safety.

"They just shouldn't be on the streets," she said.

But Councillor Ron Robb disagreed with the mayor, saying he supported the bus drivers' right to park near their own home.

"This isn't Kingston Rd. this is Whitchurch-Stouffville," Robb said. "We're still a small community and I just think it's unfair. All bus drivers want is to park their vehicles near their homes."

Robb said he could think of no justifiable reason to disallow buses on the streets.

"They're not bothering anybody," he said. "What's next? Are you going to tell me I won't be able to park my car in my bloody driveway?"

Council voted in favor of banning the buses despite Councillor Robb's protest.

## Council holds on retirement lot decision

Whitchurch-Stouffville council will wait until early October before voting on revisions to the town's Official Plan concerning retirement lots on farms.

Town Planner Michael Saunders told the Tribune this week that council will make a decision after the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food votes on the issue in late September or early October.

The Ministry was supposed to vote on the issue in the spring, but a new policy was not proposed, Mr. Saunders said.

"There's no use in proceeding with this issue until the Ministry of Agriculture and Food votes on it," Mr. Saunders said. "It would be a waste of time for council to vote until a new policy comes out."

The decision to implement a new policy regarding retirement lots for full-time farmers is a touchy issue with many local farmers, Mr. Saunders said.

Some local representatives of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture have expressed an interest in obtaining a special policy for retiring farmers, while other members want to prohibit retirement lots off active farming operations.

Previous councils have also been divided on the issue, Mr. Saunders said.



Photo/MATT NICHOLLS

Ollie Pellett smooths out screenings and gravel in front of his home on Hawthorn Ave. The 40-year resident grew tired of waiting for the town to fix the rough spots on his street and, like some of his neighbors, he took matters into his own hands.

## Stouffville man makes street repairs himself

A Stouffville man took matters into his own hands last week and fixed the damaged street in front of his home.

Ollie Pellett, 60, of Hawthorn Ave. spent over an hour last Wednesday patching up part of the badly-eroded street in front of his home because the town failed to do so.

"I just didn't like the way it looked," the 40-year resident said in an interview. "I like the looks of my house and something like that doesn't improve it."

Pellett says the condition of Hawthorn Ave. is terrible and both it and other streets in Ward 5 should be repaired.

"And he thinks the town has a responsibility to do something about it as soon as possible."

"I don't blame the town at all," but "something had to be done so I did it," he said.

Pellett, who works for Markham-based Miller Paving Ltd., said other Hawthorn residents have made similar repairs to the street.

"I'm not the only one who has done something," he said. "My neighbors just put in their own culvert and others have patched up the road."

Ward 5 Councillor Doug Alles, who lives on nearby North St., said the problems will be addressed very soon.

Alles said the town's road repairs budget for 1990 is large enough to cover the costs of fixing damaged roads in the area.

"I definitely want to get the roads fixed," Alles said. "It's a very expensive procedure but we will try to fix the bad spots."

One of the main reasons improvements to the roads have not been made is because a new traffic light at Stouffer St. and Main St. is being installed, Alles said.

"That's a priority and it took up a lot of our budget. But soon we will work on the roads."



Photo/RICK MADONIK

## Movie mayhem

A joint Canadian-French-German production of Nick Francis' novel Bloodsport is underway. The film, In The Frame, has been in production for six weeks in Canada. Last Saturday the film crew blew up a farm house on Bethesda Rd. west of Kennedy Rd. as part of one scene. The project is set to return to Germany for more shooting next week.

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