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Sunday shopping discussed at Nov. 25 meeting

Merchants to decide the Christmas shopping issue in Whitchurch-Stouffville in time for holiday rush

SAL BOMMARITO
Staff Reporter

Whitchurch-Stouffville merchants will be given the opportunity to voice their opinions on the Sunday shopping issue at the Stouffville Downtown (Business Improvement Area) meeting on November 25.

"We're leaving it up to the membership to decide whether they want to open on Sunday," said Stouffville Downtown chairperson Sandra Stronach.

The BIA's executive board met on November 13 when the Sunday shopping issue was discussed, said Stronach, who favors opening on Sundays prior to Christmas.

"I'm going to be open," said Stronach, owner of Freckles on Main Street.

"I think we need to try and promote Sunday shopping. We have to keep people in Stouffville," she said.

Meanwhile, legislation which would allow stores in Ontario to stay open on Sundays during the Christmas shopping season isn't expected to be passed until December 1.

The whole issue of Sunday shopping has become a political football between the province and its municipalities.

In some municipalities, during the municipal elections voters were asked if they were for or against

Sunday shopping. In some cases, voters were strongly in favor of allowing Sunday shopping.

Stronach is hoping Whitchurch-Stouffville merchants will support Sunday shopping, at least for the four Sundays prior to Christmas.

However, the issue is much more complicated than that. Stronach would eventually like to see shops staying open on Sundays year-round.

"There are some who aren't in agreement, but there's a lot of people who come to the flea market on Saturdays and Sundays," said Stronach.



ROGALSKI

Chamber of Commerce president Larry Rogalski is very enthusiastic about the issue.

He said merchants who want to open Sundays should have the option, especially in light of the sharp decline in retail sales.

"By all means, I support it if it benefits the merchants," said Rogalski.

He said opening the four Sundays before Christmas "is a fantastic idea."

The enormous amount of traffic which passes through Stouffville on weekends shows there is a demand for business on Sundays.

The popularity of the flea market on weekends also reflects the demand, he said.

"We have to know how to tap into it," he said.

"We're a tourist town, we have attractions we don't know what to do with," said Rogalski, who sat on the town's economic development

committee.

A solution to the issue will only be achieved with the chamber, the BIA and the town working closely together, he said.

"We've just recently started (working together)," said Rogalski.

Rogalski acknowledges, however, the difficulty in convincing all mer-

chants of the benefits of staying open on Sundays.

Opposition to Sunday shopping has been voiced by "one-owner" businesses who refuse to stay open seven days a week, he said.

"They would have to hire someone to work (Sundays)," said Rogalski.



PHOTO/ANWETE LUCHOWSKI

Facial fun

Andre Dion, 10, gets her face painted by Melissa at the Orchard Park Public School Fun Fair last Saturday. In the background, Vanessa Parsons, 9, and Nikki Parsons, 6, watch in the background.

Municipal election turn-out pegged at 45 per cent

SAL BOMMARITO
Staff Reporter

The good news is more Whitchurch-Stouffville residents exercised their right to vote in this week's election than in the last one. The bad news is voters are more frustrated and dissatisfied with the democratic process.

Overall, 45 per cent of the 14,000 residents eligible voted in Tuesday's election, said Bob Panizza, the town's chief administrative officer.

That number is high compared to other municipalities. The average voter turnout in most municipalities usually ranges between 35 and 45 per cent, he said.

"Some have less depending on the issues and the candidates," said Panizza. "When there are two or more candidates running

for mayor it results in good voter turnout. We also had a number of good candidates in the wards," he said. While the figures are encouraging, the reasons for the high numbers of people who went to the polls this week may not be. A high voter turnout is also a good indicator of voter dissatisfaction and tough economic times, said Panizza. The correlation between high voter turnout and bad times is evident "if you look at the numbers for the last provincial election," said Panizza.

"When the economy is sluggish people participate a lot more than when things are good," he said.

Panizza believes if a federal election were held, the same would hold true. A community such as Stouffville, which has a high ethnic population, usually has a high voter turnout, he said. The same is true for other communities in and around Metro Toronto, he said.

"Some people take (the right to vote) for granted," he said.

The actual number of Whitchurch-Stouffville citizens who voted is between 6,500 and 6,800, something Panizza attributes partly to a good race between Mayor Fran Sainsbury and challenger Wayne Emmerson. When all the votes were in, Sainsbury came out on top by less than 300 votes, after Emmerson took the lead early in the voting.

"Can you imagine what would have happened if another 4,000 had come out to vote. Who knows what the impact could have been," added Panizza. A voter turnout of 100 per cent would be ideal, said Panizza, but unrealistic.

"People should take time to exercise their franchise (the right to vote) and get involved with their municipalities," he said. "People who don't take the time can't complain when a certain candidate gets voted in," he added.

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