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Volatile SOS meeting draws 125

ANDREW MAIR
Editor

The snowball of taxpayer discontent gained a little more momentum and a little more strength Tuesday at the Lemonville Community Centre as the group Save Our Stouffville (SOS) held an information night that attracted about 125 disgruntled ratepayers.

The mood of the meeting was often volatile, as SOS spokesman Marion Wells chaired debate on the proposed purchase of a half-million dollar fire truck, salaries for town employees, and spending by the board of education.

Wells received a hearty ovation when she opened the meeting with the line, "Good evening friends, I'm Marion Wells, and I'm the farmer's wife," in reference to the comments made by Mayor Fran Sainsbury in the Jan. 16 *Weekender*.

However, the mood soured quickly when resident Doug Benedict accused SOS of not having its facts straight on the fire truck issue, and that the leaders of the group were inciting unrest.

"This meeting is an absolute total disgrace," he said. "You do not know the facts and you're using scare tactics on people who do not know the facts either."

After some rather lively debate, Benedict was soundly rebuked by the crowd when he admitted he didn't know the facts of the fire truck issue either.

The meeting was originally called to enlarge the grass roots base of the SOS group and to receive feedback on the group's initiatives with town council and the public school board. Uxbridge Taxpayers Coalition member Barrie Clulow was the guest speaker, and he urged the group to learn everything possible about the taxation process at all levels of government. "Is it possible to affect government? Each and everyone of you affect government everytime you vote. But there are other ways. Write letters to the editor, Bob Rae and the Fair Taxation Commission. Get on the council agenda and

speak out." Clulow said to learn about future tax bills and the new assessment process because local governments "can put you and your children into debt forever."

Wells said it would cost \$400,000 just to store, maintain and provide man hours up-keep on the fire truck, she admitted while her source for this information was "reliable" she was still awaiting confirmation from Stouffville officials. "The politicians are thumbing their noses

at the rest of us. I don't think this is fair, and we can no longer be armchair critics."

The truck was by far the largest concern of those in attendance, prompting several Pine Orchard and Cedar Valley residents to claim the truck would not even be able to service them. Resident Archie Low said "if this truck is unique and one-of-a-kind, who's going to repair it."

"There's nothing worse to handle than state-of-the-art

until the bugs get out of it," Wells concurred.

Former councillor Margot Marshall said, "There might be a need in the future. This is a long-range plan. But I don't know if we need a Cadillac or Rolls Royce."

"Especially when all we can afford is a Chev," Wells added.

Marshall rose again to address concerns of staff salaries. Following a raise of \$266,000 over two years, she said the town was overstaffed

now and salaries should have been frozen.

To counter the raises, a suggestion to hold taxes was rejected by Clulow, who noted that the town can now legally sell property after three years on homeowners who are in arrears, and that there would have to be one-half of the population withholding taxes for it to have an impact.

As a protest, Clulow said paying your tax bill in dollar coins is often effective. The group was then given a mandate to approach the York Region Board of Education to confront trustees on their fiscal policies.

Education short-changes kids despite rising costs, charges SOS

JULIE CASPERSEN
Staff Reporter

A no frills, discipline-heavy approach to education is being championed by Stouffville taxpayers as the York Region Board of Education plans its 1993 budget.

The Save Our Stouffville (SOS) ratepayers group presented a wish list of money-saving suggestions to the budget committee meeting Wednesday.

The group asked for cuts to administration, an increase in the number of students per classroom, and strict punishment for "truancy and problem students," said Jean Nauta. She also promoted a move to a 12-month school year with no school-sponsored field trips and no computers or calculators allowed for primary children.

"The cost of education is out of control," said SOS spokesperson Marion Wells. "We continue to spend millions of dollars on education to improve opportunity, quality and choice, when in fact, we are short-changing our children."

(See 'SOS' on Page 3)



Above, former councillor Margot Marshall explains council's recommendation of staff salary increases at the public forum Tuesday held by SOS. About 125 attended the meeting. Below, Jean Nauta and Marion Wells of the SOS group present concerns to York school board trustee Harry Bowes Wednesday at the Jefferson Building in Richmond Hill.



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