

REGIONAL NEWS

York businesses escape 30 per cent tax hike: province

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Metroland Staff

Businesses in York Region have escaped a 30-per cent tax increase now that the province has decided not to pool their education taxes, according to Markham Mayor Don Cousens.

Cousens credits an intense lobbying effort over the past two weeks for convincing the province to rethink a plan to pool business education taxes across the GTA.

"We were told by the province, 'I guess you're not too worried about it. Toronto's lobbying like made,'" Cousens said. "Metro was so busy putting the boots to them, we needed to show them quickly we were taking this seriously."

"They were startled we hadn't woken up to the impact. They rang our bell first and then said, 'I guess you do care.' We did care and we were able to mount a campaign."

The icing on the cake was the decision by the 905 business community to join the politicians' efforts.

The payoff came Thursday when Finance Minister Ernie Eves announced he won't force businesses outside Toronto to make up for the city's past mistakes.

"Toronto is asking us to make the rest of the province respon-

sible for the cumulative impact of decades of irresponsible spending decisions and questionable programs approved by successive Toronto councils and school boards," Eves said.

Over the past 50 years, Toronto politicians have kept residential taxes artificially low by boosting business taxes.

But when industries began relocating to the lower-taxed suburbs surrounding the city, Toronto politicians were left scrambling for a way to make up the lost taxes.

Eves warned Toronto to fix its own tax problems rather than looking for relief from beyond its borders.

"Toronto is asking us to make businesses and municipalities in the rest of the province pay the freight for the fact that Toronto politicians raised spending year after year and took the easy way to loading taxes on to businesses."

In addition to giving homeowners a tax break, Toronto politicians have been criticized for offering high-priced services such as free recreation programs and twice-a-week garbage pickup.

Meanwhile, York Region residents face user fees, higher taxes and limited services—especially when it comes to education.

Eves said all education taxes

paid by businesses will be frozen.

He also announced the province will move toward a uniform education rate for businesses over the next few years, as municipalities across the province address local tax discrepancies.

Toronto Mayor Mel Lastman lashed out at the province's decision.

"This is an unprecedented attack on the City of Toronto, with the sole purpose of gaining votes in the 905 region during the next provincial election."

Cousens doesn't argue the election is in the back of the government's minds, or that this decision will help them garner support in the suburbs.

But he insists the province was motivated more by fairness than campaigning.

"I wish people would stop saying it's because of the election. We made the point it would be inequitable and unfair for us to pay for (Toronto's education costs)," he said.

"They have junior kindergarten. We don't. We have far more kids in portables than they do. They have a better pupil-teacher ratio than we do. And they want us to put money in their coffers?"

Cousens credited suburban MPPs with helping convince the government to backtrack.

Commitment to Catholic schooling

The new year will bring a new set of challenges as separate school trustees are called upon to take the board into the new millennium, according to York Catholic District School Board chairperson Tina Rotondi Molinari.

"As trustees, the election allowed us to recommit to Catholic education," Molinari explained at a recent board meeting.

"We share not only a common commitment to Catholic education, but a commitment to our constituents to provide the best Catholic education in a cost-effective way."

Molinari said recent constitutional changes affecting Catholic education in Quebec and Newfoundland have set a dangerous precedent of minority educational rights.

However, both Molinari and education director Susan LaRosa commended teachers and staff members for making the board a leader in Catholic education. "We are in a time of change, of transition and promise," said LaRosa.

"The partners in education—the Bish-

op, pastors, trustees, parents, educators and staff—are all committed to living their faith."

TOWN OF WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS PROVISION OF

WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE MOBILITY TRANSIT

The Board of Directors of Whitchurch-Stouffville Mobility Transit invite proposals for the provision of a contracted accessible taxi service for residents eligible for Mobility Transit.

Proposals will be received by the Board of Directors, c/o Mrs. Michele Kennedy, Town Clerk, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, 19 Civic Avenue, Box 419, Stouffville, Ontario L4A 7Z6 until 3:00 p.m., February 26, 1998.

Proposal forms are available at the Clerk's Department in the municipal offices.

Margaret Britton
President, Whitchurch-Stouffville Mobility Transit

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TOWN OF WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE

INFORMATION REGARDING YOUR 1998 PROPERTY TAXES

The Province is introducing a new method of assessing property called **Current Value Assessment** or CVA. The reassessed value of property will now represent the estimated market value of the property as of June 30, 1996.

The new property tax system was introduced throughout Ontario on January 1, 1998. The Province will be notifying property owners of their new assessed values this month (February). The Province will deliver the new assessment information to the Town at the end of April 1998. This new assessment value will be the one used to determine your 1998 Final Tax Bill which will be mailed in June of this year.

The 1998 Interim Residential tax bill is approximately 50% of your 1997 total property tax bill. The Town will need to know the new assessed value of each property, adopt a 1998 budget, and set new tax policies before it can determine the final 1998 property taxes.

For the Commercial Property owners, normally the interim property taxes would be approximately 50% of the previous year's total taxes. However, since the Business Occupancy Tax has been eliminated for the 1998 interim taxes, the Province's legislation enables municipalities to raise up to 50% of the total 1997 business, commercial and industrial property taxes. As a result the 1998 interim tax bill will include the amount of the business tax.

The 1998 interim taxes are only an estimate and represent a deposit toward the total 1998 taxes. It is important that the Assessment Office is notified as soon as possible of any vacancies within a commercial unit so that this can be reflected on the notice of assessment. After the notices are mailed, there is still the opportunity to have the assessment adjusted through the Province and the individual will receive an amended notice. After the assessment roll has been produced the individual may still make application to the Town for this adjustment.

Since Business Occupancy Tax has been eliminated, business tenants will no longer be directly responsible for paying this tax. However, in 1998, an amount equivalent to the Business Tax will be incorporated into the property taxes paid by the property owner. Therefore, the Landlord of the Commercial Properties may increase the rent charged to the tenants to compensate the increase in the 1998 taxes.

The Assessment Department has scheduled Open House sessions to be held March 9th to 11th from 12:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the Ballantrae Community Centre, 5592 Aurora Road, Ballantrae, so that the property owner has an opportunity to present new information or correct misunderstandings regarding the assessment.

Any questions regarding assessments should be directed to:
REGIONAL ASSESSMENT OFFICE AT: 1-800-263-3224
Ruth Armstrong, A.M.C.T., C.M.T.C.
Tax Collector