

Tax on new homes jumps \$1,600

21% increase leaves region's residential lot levy at \$9,070

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Staff Reporter

Although the cost of building a new house in York Region jumped almost \$1,600 Friday, the development industry isn't fighting the 21-per-cent hike.

York has become the first region in Ontario to adopt new lot levies under the province's Development Charges Act approved last year.

The regional tax on a detached or semi-detached house has jumped to \$9,070, up from the current fee of \$7,480.

The tax will climb even higher in coming months as the region acquires new projects, such as taking over Teston Road, extending the York-Durham sewage system to King City and Stouffville and reconstructing Hwy 9.

Meanwhile, the charge on building retail space climbed almost 100 per cent to \$2.50 a square foot, up from \$1.29.

The region is holding the line on industrial charges at \$1.29 a square foot as a way of attracting new businesses to York.

The region argues it needs higher taxes to pay for \$3-billion of new infrastructure to accommodate more than 400,000 new residents over the next 20 years.

Developers also face charges from local municipalities and school boards. The total lot levies on a new home in York will now total about \$19,000, depending on the town.

But, surprisingly, Stephen Kaiser, president of a developers' lobby group, the Urban Development Institute, accepts

the region's tax hike.

"Certainly, we're concerned every time a charge or tax goes up. It's alarming for the industry," he said Friday.

"But I'd be surprised if the industry appealed. We understand the scenario, as far as the region is concerned."

Kaiser pointed to the provincial downloading of services, which saw York's budget triple to about \$330 million this year.

He's hoping developers will catch a break when towns and cities bring in their development charges.

All regions and municipalities must have a bylaw by September 1999.

"It (the region's increase) is a bitter pill to swallow, but the quantum is easy to understand," Kaiser said.

He praised the region for including the development industry in the two-year process.

"This is certainly the way a development charges bylaw should be built," Kaiser said.

"I'm not sitting here saying we're happy with the charges going up, but we certainly understand the method of the charge going up. I was going to say the method and the madness, but it hasn't been madness."

SLIDING SCALE

The conciliatory tone is a far cry from the standoff between the development industry and municipal leaders last year.

Mayors across the Greater Toronto Area threatened to stop new development when the province unveiled its Development Charges Act, accusing the Tories of caving in to developers.

Insisting that growth should pay for growth, mayors said existing property taxpayers would face huge tax increases if lot levies were decreased.

"Now they have gone too far. Now they have laid down to the development industry," Georgina Mayor Rob Grossi said at the time.

But Kaiser and Municipal Affairs Minister Al Leach argued municipalities had started looking at development charges as a way of paying for "gold-plated" services in their communities.

Markham Mayor Don Cousens was part of a joint municipal-provincial-development industry team that eventually hashed out a compromise.

Meanwhile, York has left the door open to review its development charges in the future.

In four months, councillors will investigate whether to introduce a sliding scale for large retail developments, such as the 73-acre mall planned at Hwy 400 and Rutherford Road in Vaughan and a 300,000-square-foot expansion to Newmarket's Upper Canada Mall.

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