

Region's businesses face huge tax hikes

Newmarket mayor says council decision will have lasting impact on business community

BY LISA QUEEN
STAFF WRITER

A rash political decision will mean huge tax increases for hundreds of businesses across York Region, Newmarket Mayor Tom Taylor warns.

As part of a province-wide reassessment of properties, the province gave regions and counties the responsibility for setting tax ratios, which determine the portion of the tax burden different property classes pay.

Within limits, municipal politicians can make residents pay more than businesses, or commercial properties pay more than factories. They can also set different ratios within a property class so a shopping mall pays more than a strip plaza.

While the province handed the responsibility for setting ratios to regions and counties, it allowed them to delegate the authority to their local municipalities.

York and Peel were the only regions in the province to delegate that authority, according to York financial planning director Ed Hankins.

But at the time, York politicians were unaware the province had prohibited local towns from offering tax caps for commercial properties - a power it gave regions and counties in an effort to soften the blow of reassessment over the next three years.

"The problem was when we made the first decision (to delegate), the second ramification was not known," Taylor said. "We have precluded ourselves, the same as Peel, from using capping."

As a result, York businesses will have no protection from soaring tax rates due to reassessment, while businesses in Toronto and other regions will.

The province didn't spell out why local towns were banned from using tax caps. But Hankins suspects the Tories didn't want different tax policies within the same region.

The idea behind reassessment was to make the property tax system as standard and understandable as possible across the province.

It would make little sense then, Hankins said, to offer a commercial tax cap in one town but not in its next-door neighbor.

Taylor admitted the region and towns bungled the decision by delegating authority to local councils. He doesn't know why councils made the decision before they had all the facts.

"In retrospect, it was a mistake doing that."

Taylor denied suggestions local politicians were just trying to wrestle a bit of power away from the region.

"There was a consensus at the regional and municipal levels for it to be handled at the municipal level. There wasn't any animosity," he said.

The region has written to Finance Minister Ernie Eves, demanding he extend the tax cap option to local municipalities.

If Eves doesn't respond soon, Taylor is planning a public meeting, hoping political pressure will force the change.

He admitted businesses enjoying a tax decrease from reassessment would have to continue paying more than their fair share if a cap was put in place for those facing increases.

Markham Mayor Don Cousens, head of the region's finance and administration committee, argued tax caps aren't necessary in York.

While Toronto is facing huge adjustments in its taxes, Cousens argued property assessments here have been more current.



COUSENS
York doesn't need tax rate caps

Politicians want 407 'cloverleaf'

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
STAFF WRITER

A 'cloverleaf' ramp could be built at Hwy 407 and York/Durham Road 30, if the province agrees to the plan.

Councils from both Whitchurch-Stouffville and Markham have asked the province to consider installing the cloverleaf as a way to handle increased traffic on the new east-west toll route.

The formal request by both councils has been sent to Transportation Minister Tony Clement and Durham-York MPP Julia Munro.

TRAFFIC INCREASING STEADILY

In the letter, Markham clerk Bob Panizza stressed that since Hwy. 407 is open at McCowan Road in Markham and soon will be open at Hwy. 48 and that it may be opening at the Ninth Line, traffic is increasing steadily and will continue to do so.

Whitchurch-Stouffville Ward 6 Councillor Sue Sherban said local politicians are in full support of the request for this cloverleaf.

"Of course, we (Whitchurch-Stouffville Council) supported this," said Sherban. "We want the traffic to keep moving."

Most vehicles, after leaving the Markham and Stouffville area, head in a north-east direction, Panizza has stressed.

The installation of a cloverleaf would also allow considerable traffic to by-pass the already congested traffic in both communities, Sherban added.

CRIME: Devastated family begs for community's co-operation to help solve a woman's murder

Woman's killer still at large

FROM PAGE 1

they are still always crying.

"The mother is so important," he said. "Nobody can replace a mother."

He asked people to think about their own children, nephews, babies.

"We need information. I am begging to the public to please come forward and solve this case. Call the police, please."

Lead investigator Paul Pedersen said eight investigators are working hard to solve the brutal slaying, but they need a witness or witnesses with direct knowledge of the crime.

"I know there are persons who have the information necessary to secure an arrest and conviction," he said.

The trail has not gone cold. This is a clear message from police and the Police Services Board that this kind of activity will not be tolerated in this community.

A profile of the killer has been put together by Ontario Provincial Police Behavioral Sciences Unit, describing him as a cold-hearted person who has likely committed violent crimes in the past like robbery, theft and assault.

"He might have a record, he might be continuing his criminal behaviour. That's why it's so important to get this guy before it happens again."

Pedersen still believes the murder was robbery-related.

Khan was working alone in the store after her husband stepped out to a nearby coffee shop, sometime after 10:15 p.m. When he returned, he discovered her dead, lying on the floor in a pool of blood. Cause of death was blunt force trauma to the head.

Cigarettes, cash and lottery tickets were missing. At about 10:50 a bright



Police released this composite sketch of the suspect wanted in connection with Alberta Khan's death.

red sporty car with tinted windows was seen leaving the plaza with two occupants inside. They are described as young black men, clean-shaven, with short hair.

Markham Mayor Don Cousens and Police Services Board chair Eldred King lent their support to yesterday's appeal as well.

"Our community is still in shock over this horrendous homicide," Cousens said. "If this is the incentive that leads to an arrest of the perpetrator it will go a long way in cleansing the community. If someone can come forward it will mean so very much."

"This situation cannot be tolerated," added King. "It's \$50,000. We're hoping someone just needs that little nudge."

Teens want new facility

FROM PAGE 1

And this suits local teens just fine.

In late May, about 40 Stouffville teens had already lobbied council to bring a proper facility to the town.

With a place to go, kids won't be a nuisance, said teen John Maguire. "We're always getting chased away," he said.

Rob Shannon, manager of the Country Market, said the skateboard

ers are busy raising money for the cause. "As far as I know things are fine," said Shannon.

Saunders recommended skateboarding in the rec complex parking lot be prohibited, but council will wait until a new ramp is built first, it was decided Tuesday.

Hopefully, skateboarders making a nuisance of themselves will soon be a thing of the past in Stouffville, said Sherban.

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