

AROUND THE REGION

Newmarket planner quits after 16 years

BY RICK VANDERLINDE
STAFF WRITER

Newmarket's head planner has left the town after 16 years on the job.

Katherine Emerson said she resigned Tuesday for "personal reasons."

"There was nothing else to it," the Newmarket resident said. "I'll be spending more time with my family and my three children."

Emerson helped guide the town through explosive growth, both as an assistant planner and head planner.

"I've seen a lot of changes in town," she said. "It's been a really

exciting time." Residential, commercial and industrial development has boomed to the point where the town is about to outgrow its boundaries.

Emerson left the town following a six-week leave of absence.

Mayor Tom Taylor refused to comment on the settlement or the reasons behind Emerson's departure.

"She is resigning with a negotiated settlement and a letter of reference from the town and that is all I'm saying," Taylor said.

Councillor Bob Scott, chairperson of council's planning commit-

tee, said there had been "a few problems," but he refused to elaborate.

"We worked out something with her," Scott said. "We talked it out with her and she decided to leave."

Scott said he didn't want to reveal what led to the sudden departure, for "legal reasons."

Councillor Ray Snow said Emerson has made "an excellent contribution" to the town during a hectic era.

"There's always been a heavy workload in that department," he said. "She's done a good job for the town."

Snow added any suggestion that council wanted to replace Emerson is untrue. He added that the Emerson's resignation package was not excessive.

"I would say it was very fair for the amount of time she has put in for us," Snow said.

Emerson kept a low public profile as she helped guide council through major developments.

But she did find herself embroiled in some controversy when her husband, Michael Larkin, worked as a planner for developers in the town's northwest quadrant last year.

Former councillor Pam

MacDonald recalled council was concerned about a possible conflict of interest.

But MacDonald said there was never a specific incident that led to council becoming wary of the relationship.

"I had concerns myself," MacDonald said. "But in the end, I felt comfortable that all the final decisions were being made by council."

Larkin said two lawyers agreed his wife was not in a position of conflict. He added he no longer provides consulting services on developments within Newmarket's boundaries.

Businesses will suffer with new mega-theatre: councillor

BY DAWN LIERSCH
STAFF WRITER

East Gwillimbury council was expected to approve a mega-theatre and large commercial centre at Yonge Street and Green Lane last night, despite one councillor's warning that the big box stores could put smaller shops out of business.

East Gwillimbury's planning committee voted earlier yesterday to amend the town's official plan to allow for a large Famous Players theatre and surrounding buildings for retail use in that area. Council

was expected to give the final nod last night.

Mayor Jim Mortonson said he expected the project would be approved, despite intense opposition from Newmarket residents living near the site.

"It's not very often that our council has to deal with a project that involves a neighboring community. This will have an impact on them, there's no question about it," he said.

But this is East Gwillimbury council, and we're dealing with a project for East Gwillimbury. I

hope, for the sake of the residents in Newmarket, that all of your concerns will be addressed."

Newmarket residents have voiced concerns about noise, pollution and traffic, arguing that the theatre site is too close their homes. The project's developer is offering a 40-foot buffer zone, which the town's planning staff assured council was adequate. Residents had requested a 200-foot buffer.

Council didn't have a problem with the size of the buffer, but Councillor Jim Howard said he's

concerned about the size of the retail units proposed in the plan. The plan allows for units up to 60,000 square feet in size, larger than any other stores in the town.

Howard asked council to limit the size to 40,000 square feet, roughly the size of the town's existing Beaver Lumber outlet. His motion was defeated.

"I'm concerned about the effect on existing retail businesses. If we allow the opportunity for larger big box to continue, there will be significant impact. It's already tough for them to compete with what's

going on," Howard stressed.

"I don't want us to have to rebuild our downtown as Newmarket has had to."

Councillor Jamie Young countered that big box stores will be good for business.

"If we didn't have bigger retail stores, we'd be hard-pressed for business — you can't get everything in East Gwillimbury," he said.

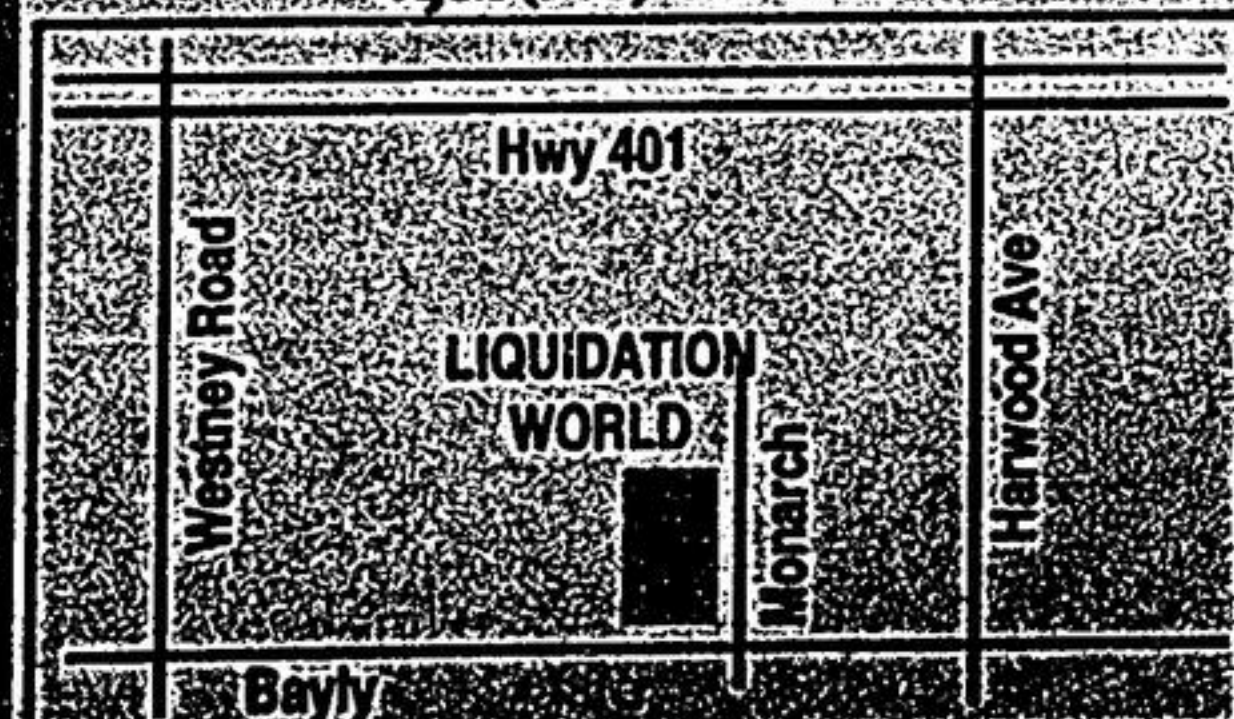
"It's an opportunity for the residents and it's an opportunity to bring in some commercial assessment so we don't have the highest residential (tax) rates in the region

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