

**TAXES**

# Tools 'could not' work: Cousens

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planner Ed Hankins insist that while the tools may help one group of taxpayers, they hurt another. Other tools are virtually useless.

Klees stressed he's still willing to work with mayors and councillors to resolve the tax ruckus.

He has tentatively scheduled a meeting Wednesday morning between ministry and regional employees and is working on setting up a public meeting between provincial and regional politicians.

But Klees also made it clear he won't sit on the sidelines if the region refuses to act.

"I certainly can't stand by and allow a circumstance to exist that allows business people to pay taxes they can't afford to pay," he said.

"If the region refuses to deal with the matter effectively, the province may have no other choice but to look for a way to deal with the matter unilaterally."

He's not sure how York's other

three MPPs or the government will respond to his idea.

Klees said the province may have been mistaken in allowing regions to decide whether they wanted to use the tools.

"In retrospect, I'm not sure that was a good idea. In retrospect, it might have been better for the province to mandate phasing and capping. We wouldn't be in this situation today," he said.

"Perhaps, we should not have allowed as many options to municipalities as we did. We anticipated municipalities would take the option to implement them in the best interests of the taxpayer and property owner. The evidence is clear that didn't happen."

Although Klees is willing to discuss the province contributing to the region's rebate plan, he indicated it's unlikely the Tories will refund any education taxes to businesses.

Markham Mayor Don Cousens who have liked to see the region do more to help hard-hit businesses.

Cousens wanted a three-year plan to help business owners.

"I think we're winning the big battle, but we've got to have a three-year program. We can't solve this problem all at once," said Cousens in an interview Friday.

He rejected suggestions that York Region could have avoided this tax crisis, if it had used the provincial tools.

"We didn't have enough information," he said. "The tools did not, and could not solve the problem."

However, Klees questioned why it took so long for the region to consider using rebates, one of the tools the province provided.

If York had agreed a few months ago, the province would probably have rebated the education tax to businesses, as it did in other regions such as Halton and Ottawa-Carleton.

Klees denied the province is punishing business owners because the region failed to use the rebates by last summer's deadline.

— with files from staff

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