

YORK REGION

Tax rebate plan approved for small businesses

BY LISA QUEEN
STAFF WRITER

York Region councillors are painting the Tories as enemies of small business in an effort to convince the province to participate in a property tax rebate plan for retailers.

Council agreed Thursday to a one-time rebate for any business facing a tax increase more than 25 per cent, providing the increase is at least \$1,500.

The refund, which will be capped at \$25,000, will apply only to the first \$1 million of assessment for each business.

The increases are a result of Ontario's new property tax system, which assigned a new

value to every property in the province.

But councillors argued the rebate will be of little help to businesses, because only 31 per cent of non-residential taxes go to the region and local municipalities.

The province takes 69 per cent in education taxes. And so far, the province has indicated it won't rebate any portion of those taxes.

The region's share of the \$7.8-million cost of the rebate plan will be \$1.6 million, while the nine municipalities must contribute about \$800,000. The province's share would be \$5.4 million.

Vaughan Mayor Lorna

Jackson said Premier Mike Harris stood before party members a week ago in Concord and bragged that Ontario small businesses will soon have the lowest taxes in Canada. But she argued businesses are paying higher property taxes as a result of provincial policies.

"Small business has only one pocket," Jackson said. "To reduce their taxes on one hand but to stick it to them on the property tax end is not acceptable."

Markham Councillor Frank Scarpitti said it's ironic the Conservatives, who portray themselves as friends of small business, are hurting retailers

by failing to participate in the rebate plan and by refusing to remove education from the property tax bill.

"In one tax policy, they have done more damage to small business than anything the NDP did collectively. They're putting small business out of business."

Scarpitti suggested York's MPPs aren't doing enough to help merchants.

Scarpitti admitted the rebate is only a short-term solution to businesses' pleas for tax relief.

"Yes, what we're doing is a Band-Aid solution. I guess we're all uncomfortable (with that)," he said. "When one of

my kids gets hurt, I have to put a Band-Aid on. But long-term, I have to make sure they don't keep skinning their knee."

Kleinburg landlord Frank Greco applauded the region for approving the rebate.

"I can go back to our BIA and tell them the good news," he said. "It will mean most of our Main Street businesses will have a tax increase of 25 per cent or \$1,500, which is something I think most of us can live with. We don't like it, but we can live with it."

Andy Munro, chairperson of Unionville's BIA, agreed the one-time rebate is a good first start. But he urged politicians to find long-term solutions.



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