

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
37 Sandford Dr., Suite 306, Stouffville, Ont., L4A 7X5

Publisher - Ian Proudfoot
General Manager - Alvin Brouwer

Editor-in-chief Brenda Larson
Advertising Director Debra Weller
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Regional Editor Brian Kirlik
Classified Manager Stacey Allen
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EDITORIAL

Transit taskforce has work cut out

It's no secret that York Region's public transit service is a mess. Not only do less than 5 per cent of the region's more than half a million people use public transit, but buses heading between municipalities don't link. Without cross-border bus routes, it is near impossible for someone living at one end of the region to work in another end. But things are going to get better, says the region's transit task force, which met last week. The meeting proved to be the first significant move to actually improve this dismal situation — a situation which will only get worse as the population swells to its forecasted 1.2 million by 2020. The committee has a target — to get one-third of the population using public transit. That's a far cry from the targeted seven per cent four years ago, when York Region passed its Official Plan. And it's a far cry from the drop in transit use today, at about 4 per cent.

This taskforce hopes to come up with real ways of getting transit to work better, by the end of January. Some of the biggest deficiencies noted include:

- GO Transit off-peak service to downtown Toronto serving Markham, Unionville, Milliken and Stouffville areas;
- No continuous east-west service to Vaughan, especially to industrial areas;
- Gaps in service between Markham and Richmond Hill.

The deficiencies were determined after meetings with the five transit managers in their municipalities and are based on discussions with transit users as well as general observations.

The committee says major trip destinations in York Region include Paramount Canada's Wonderland, hospitals, industrial areas, business parks and the Yonge Street and Hwy. 7 corridors, and service needs to be greatly improved to accommodate this need.

While the information is preliminary and open for discussion, it's good to see a taskforce set up to deal with this very real problem. As it stands now, most people can't be bothered using regional transit because of the many road blocks which prevent an efficient journey from point A to point B. Users often need transfers, suffer long waits and walks from one route to another. In some cases, the service simply doesn't exist.

This committee has its work cut out, as it attempts to hike ridership by 28 per cent and works to rebuild an almost non-existent service. Without seamless transit, and as growth continues in and around the region, it is imperative we link and unify our bus services.

CHEERS & JEERS

- **CHEERS:** To both the York Region District School Board and its teachers for finally reaching a deal — for a few years, anyway.
- **CHEERS:** To the province for committing more than \$1.2 billion for 20,000 long-term beds for new facilities across Ontario over the next seven years. York Region will get 420 beds immediately and \$97 million for new long-term care facilities and expanded community care.
- **JEERS:** To Markham Stouffville Hospital for turning away a comatose B.C. woman, whose family lives in Markham. The hospital says she isn't a priority because she doesn't live here. She is being forced to give up her hospital bed out west.

OPINION



Brenda Larson

Kidnappers are jailbirds, not lovebirds

Is it just me, or is the grand welcome home for convicted kidnapers Christine Lamont and David Spencer a little over the top? The Canadian couple, who initially denied any knowledge of, or involvement in, the kidnapping of a Brazilian businessman (who was kept in the basement of the Sao Paulo home they had leased), were convicted of the crime and served time in a horrible Brazilian jail. They later admitted their participation in the crime and, so, were rightly in jail. But unhappy in their Brazilian lock-up, the couple and their families back home lobbied for their transfer to a Canadian jail. Lamont and Spencer even undertook hunger strikes to further their cause.

Finally, Brazilian officials agreed to send the couple home to serve the last stage of their nine-year sentences. They will, in all likelihood, be free in a year or so, their Brazilian criminal record a thing of the past.

At the airport, they were greeted by weepy family members, who said it was a shame that Lamont and Spencer were incarcerated, separately, for so long, that they loved each other so much and it was sad they couldn't be together right away.

I can only imagine how traumatic it must be to have a family member incarcerated in a foreign country — who knows how the prisoners are really treated?

But the fact is, if you commit a crime, at home or abroad, you should be prepared to pay the price for it if you are caught.

It seemed to me, from the newspaper and television stories, that Lamont and Spencer, and their families, have dismissed the crime they committed. They seem to want to believe it never occurred and that they are entitled to the same rights and freedoms you and I have the privilege to exercise.

They're criminals; for heaven's sake. They chose to commit a heinous crime, they violated an individual's right to freedom.

Their litany of demands, from that perspective, is offensive: They want to be jailed close to home; they want to be together; they want to be free.

How pathetic they are. And how pathetic we are, for treating them as some kind of sad love story gone wrong.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tree bylaw long overdue

How can we take it seriously when Whitchurch-Stouffville council says it wants a bylaw to stop developers from removing trees?

Just days before the hoopla over the trees on Ninth Line being removed, council passed the clearcutting of two large (formerly) protected mature woodlots and a portion of a third hardwood forest as a part of the Schickendanz development in Ballantrae.

This project has enough space that the forests could have been preserved.

Residents pleaded to have them saved, but to no avail. Council chose to destroy them and the habitat they provide.

Council has a moral responsibility to treat every developer and constituent equally.

It has also been a proven fact that when town staff recommends preserving these areas, it is not wise to vote against that recommendation.

It is great to see the subject of a tree bylaw come up, and it is long overdue.

However, council has the authority to waive its own bylaws and has exercised this authority on many occasions over the years.

What we need is a mayor and a council with the actual moral power and backbone to treat everyone equally when exercising bylaws.

If council really cares about trees, it should stop permitting mass destruction and set up a maintenance program for the ones we have on town proper-

ties. The longer we wait, the worse shape they become, the more expensive they will be to maintain, and the higher liability they become to the town.

I congratulate Councillor Sue Sherban for her efforts, and I know she is genuine. But some of the other councillors need to show some backbone and back her up.

You have been there for a year; now start standing up and earn the respect I know some of you are capable of.

MIKE WATSON
MUSSELMAN'S LAKE

Local hospital is first-rate, patient says

One hears so much negative comment regarding all aspects of our health care system that I am compelled to relate my recent experience.

After being diagnosed as needing an operation which was performed at Markham Stouffville Hospital, I have nothing but the very highest praise for all the people involved — my general practitioner, my specialist/surgeon, and all the doctors, nurses and auxiliary staff at the hospital.

I was treated very promptly and efficiently in all respects, and come to the conclusion that I am very fortunate to have had the first-class care and attention that I received in Markham.

My thanks again to all who treated me.

MICHAEL BUSSE
UNIONVILLE

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Serving the community since 1888

Phone: (905) 640-2100 • Classified: 1-800-743-3353 • Distribution: (905) 640-2100 • E-mail: thetrib@istar.ca

The Stouffville Tribune, published every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, is one of the Metroland Printing, Publishing and Distributing Ltd. group of newspapers, which includes the Ajax/Pickering News Advertiser, Alliston Herald/Courier, Barrie Advance, Barry's Bay This Week, Bolton Enterprise, Brampton Guardian, Burlington Shopping News, Burlington Post, City Parent, Collingwood/Wasaga Connection, East York Mirror, Erin Advocate/Country Routes, Etobicoke Guardian, Flamborough Post, Georgetown Independent/Acton Free Press, Kingston This Week, Lindsay This Week, Markham Economist & Sun, Midland/Penatanguishene Mirror, Milton Canadian Champion, Milton Shopping News, Mississauga News, Newmarket-Aurora, Georgina Era-Banner, Northumberland News, North York Mirror, Oakville Beaver, Oakville Shopping News, Orillia Today, Oshawa/Whitby/Claughton/Port Perry This Week, Peterborough This Week, Richmond Hill/Thornhill/Vaughan Liberal, Scarborough Mirror, Today's Seniors, Uxbridge Tribune and City of York Guardian.

