

POLITICS: York Region subsidizes GTA programs to the tune of \$93.6 million

Peel brochure blasts Tory pooling

York's neighbour tells its taxpayers they're paying \$66 million to fund Toronto's social programs

BY LISA QUEEN
STAFF WRITER

Home owners could be enjoying a \$196 tax cut, or \$66 million worth of improved services, if they weren't being forced to help pay Toronto's social programs, according to a new regional brochure.

But the pamphlet wasn't produced by York Region, whose taxpayers are sending \$93.6 million a year to Toronto under the province's controversial program to pool social costs across the GTA.

Instead, the slick, hard-hitting brochure comes from Peel Region, which must pay Toronto \$66 million a year — \$27.6 million less than York.

At least two York mayors are wondering why their region isn't taking a more aggressive approach against pooling, since it is paying a lion's share of the costs.

Under the province's plan, York pays 46 per cent of the \$204-million annual pooling costs, Peel pays 32, Halton pays 19 and Durham pays 3.

"I would like to see my taxpayers in York Region get something (that explains) how they are being dealt with by the province of Ontario," Georgina Mayor Rob Grossi said.

"When I saw this (Peel pamphlet), the first thing I thought was, 'Why didn't we do this in York Region? I would love to see something like this from York. I can't fathom sending money outside this community.'"

Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Wayne Emmerson wants to see York produce a pamphlet explaining both the impact of pooling and changes to the property tax system.

He said councillors toyed with the idea of sending out information about taxes last fall, but abandoned the idea when the province introduced another slew of changes.

But other York mayors suggest Peel's pamphlet has gone too far.

Aurora Mayor Tim Jones and Markham Mayor Don Cousens argued York's opposition to pooling has been well-documented, through news stories and advertisements the region bought in local newspapers last year.

They said negative pamphlets like Peel's — more than a year after pooling was introduced — won't have any impact with the Mike Harris provincial government.

"They (the province) haven't listened to us on pooling and they're not listening to us much on anything else," Cousens said.

"I think the public has pretty much said, 'We're living with change, let's try to manage it as best we can.' The pamphlet doesn't show the (tax) problems we have to deal with right now."

Grossi suggested York mayors and councillors are reluctant to produce a pamphlet slamming pooling because they're afraid of offending Tory politicians at Queen's Park.

"Some people think you have to stay on a very friendly basis because they (the province) won't provide any funds. I'm past that. You got to do what you got to do. Some people are reticent about stepping on toes," he said.

"I'm not prepared to take this any more. I'm going to let my constituents know what the cost of services is, what we're subsidizing in the Greater Toronto Area."

Peel's brochure accuses Toronto of putting its region's taxpayers behind the eight ball.

"For \$66 million, there are a lot of things Peel could do to meet the needs of our growing community — hire 400 new police officers, fund 450 nursing home beds, create 2,000 new daycare spaces, resurface 160 kilometres of our roads or save \$196 on your property taxes," the brochure states.

The \$196 reference is how much a Peel homeowner with a house assessed at \$200,000 is paying for pooling. A York resident with a house assessed at the same amount is paying \$320.

The pamphlet urges taxpayers to lobby their MPPs, listing Peel's representatives by riding, and includes their phone and fax numbers.

It also disputes the Tories' claim that municipal restructuring was offset by the province's decision to remove half the education costs from residential property tax bills.

And the pamphlet warns the situation could get worse.

"Although Peel managed to avoid a tax increase due to pooling in 1998, there's no guarantee we'll be able to avoid it in the future. So, stay tuned because pooling costs may get higher."



Don't allow Ambulance Services to be the next casualty of the Health Care crisis: Ambulance Paramedics

Ambulance services have been in the news lately. Barely a night goes by when several hospitals in the GTA aren't on "redirect" and paramedics have to scramble to find a hospital that will take critically ill patients, or people with life-threatening injuries.

Overcrowded hospitals mean things are getting pretty scary!

Private, for-profit ambulance services are not the answer

Even scarier, the province recently downloaded ambulance service delivery to municipal governments, some of whom are seriously considering handing this vital service over to the private sector!

If you think services are stretched now, can you imagine what would happen if private companies were involved?

York, Durham and Halton considering their options

Wisely, the Regional governments in York, Durham and Halton have commissioned a joint study on the delivery of ambulance services before deciding what to do. They are considering a number of "delivery models," including — believe it or not — privatization.

We believe Regional Councillors have only one

choice to make — to keep the system public! Here's why:

- Experience in the U.S. and some Canadian provinces shows that while private companies may promise lower costs in order to get a contract, once successful they will demand more money or threaten a community with a loss of service.
- According to a report of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the average cost billed to American Medicare for ambulance services in 1995 was \$500 (U.S.). In contrast, the average cost for the public ambulance service in Ontario was \$200 (Canadian).
- Private operators will want a profit margin of 15% or more. This adds to the cost of ambulance service.

Call your York, Durham or Halton Regional Councillor

Ambulance services are a vital part of our health care system, not a consumer good. People in these three Regions currently can rely on some of the highest-trained ambulance paramedics anywhere in the world. Paramedics take great pride in their work and are there when you need them.

If you live in York, Durham or Halton Regions and believe ambulance services should not be for sale, call your Regional Councillor and tell them privatization is simply not an option!

A message from the Paramedics in York, Durham and Halton Regions

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