

Tax deferral called slap

FROM PAGE 1.

shift the tax burden among municipalities. But the deferral program offers no comfort to many residents.



BILL FISCH

Tax deferral for seniors buys some more time

Last week, five dozen seniors packed the council chambers to demand the region phase in tax increases.

They pointed out the province has ordered regions to cap industrial and commercial tax increases at 20 per cent over three years.

There's no reason, the seniors argued, why homeowners facing tax increases of 10 per cent or more shouldn't enjoy a similar program.

Rather than treating all homeowners the same, seniors and the disabled will have to prove they're eligible for tax deferrals every year.

Anyone under the age of 55 won't qualify at all.

Under provincial legislation, the region would have to claw back other homeowners' tax decreases to cushion the blow for those facing increases.

Those homeowners expecting a decrease would get the full reduction — and those getting an increase would get the full hike — by the end of the phase-in period.

"We listened to what senior citizens and disabled persons were telling us and we did something about it"

But with 57 per cent of homeowners getting a tax reduction, seniors believe council was reluctant to clawback their taxes to cushion the blow for the 22 per cent of residents who saw their taxes jump by more than 10 per cent.

Unionville resident Glenn Baron, who is blind and hearing impaired, is offended he will have to "beg" council every year for a tax deferral.

"I should not be required to ask for a hand-out," he said, adding the region should have a standard policy for all homeowners.

Baron faces a tax increase of 169 per cent.

Markham Mayor Don Cousens admits the deferral plan will upset residents who were looking for a phase-in program.

"There is going to be a feeling out there we haven't done enough. I think that's unfortunate," said Cousens, who blamed the province's new property tax system for many of the problems.

"We have the hard job to implement legislation which wasn't just perfect."

Regional chairperson Bill Fisch said council implemented the deferral plan after listening to the concerns of seniors and the disabled.

"We listened to what senior citizens and disabled persons were telling us and we did something about it," he said.

"This certainly isn't the perfect solution but it will help some people stay in their homes and it buys them time."

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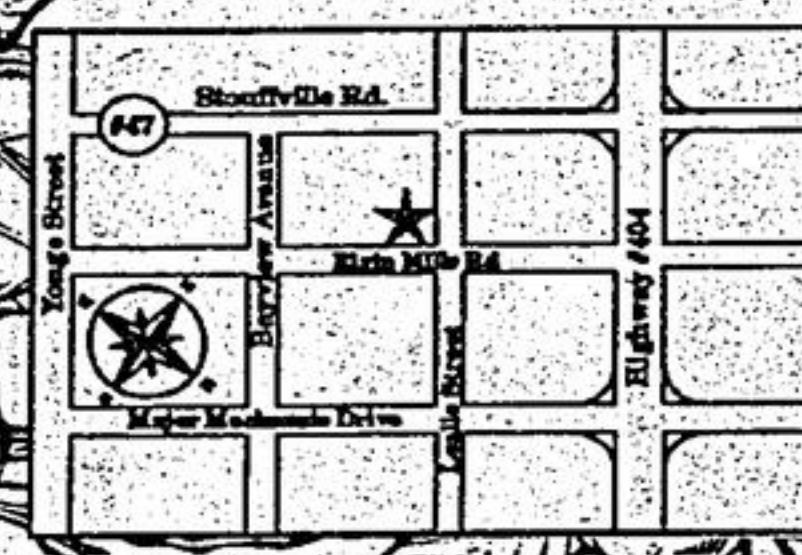
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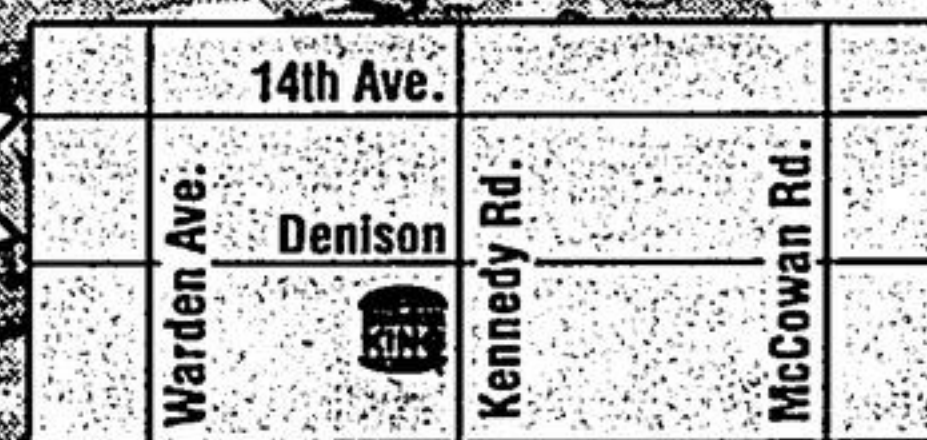
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