

Rouge news expected today

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

A pack of provincial cabinet ministers will descend on Milne Park in Markham this afternoon for news of the Rouge Park's expansion into York Region.

"I'm hoping this will be a major, major step forward," said Glenn De Baeremaeker, president of Save The Rouge Valley Systems.

If the provincial announcement includes a long-awaited wildlife corridor along part of the Little Rouge in Markham, "we'll be elated," he added.

SRVS and several area municipalities are partners in the Rouge Park North Management Plan, which seeks to protect the entire Rouge River system north of Steeles Avenue, where the existing park ends.

Protection for the Little Rouge, a major Rouge tributary in good condition, is the plan's centerpiece. Much of the extensive system, with headwaters in Stouffville and Richmond Hill, would be protected solely through stewardship or dealings with private owners.

Markham, Richmond Hill and Stouffville all approved the plan's final draft in 1997, and sent it to provincial cabinet for approval. The Rouge Alliance, which represents the towns and other municipalities around the park, fired off a letter last summer asking the cabinet to act so the process could continue.

To explain the delays, local politicians often pointed at the Ontario Realty Corporation, a provincial agency ordered to sell public land around Markham for maximum profit.

Management Board chairperson Chris Hodgson recently intervened — twice — when the ORC moved to sell parcels of land south of Milne Park for development. Local conservationists had hoped the lands, protected as part of Ontario's Parkway Belt West corridor, would become part of the future Rouge Park North.

Today, however, Hodgson is expected to join Christie for a major announcement in Milne Park, along with Markham MPP and Ontario Consumer Affairs Minister Dave Tsubouchi, Natural Resources Minister John Snobelen and Social Services Minister Janet Ecker.

Gas taxes wanted to boost transit

Business groups from five York Region municipalities will call on the province today to use some of its gasoline tax revenue to build or maintain highways.

Chambers from Aurora, Richmond Hill, Whitchurch-Stouffville and Vaughan will join the Markham Board of Trade this morning at the board's Markham office. Along with CAA Ontario, they plan to present findings of a study on provincial roads to the Tory government.

Meanwhile, York Regional chairperson Bill Fisch has received a report that states the Greater Toronto Areas transportation network needs a

drastic boost in spending.

"I believe it's come to a crisis level," Fisch said this week.

The report, Funding Transportation in the GTA, was prepared by consultants for GO Transit, Toronto and the surrounding regions. Fisch confirmed the report names the dedicated use of federal and provincial gas taxes as one possible way to improve area transportation.

So far, though, the federal and provincial governments have refused to consider putting money from sales at GTA gas pumps into local roads or transit.

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