

## Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper  
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### EDITORIAL

## Freezing growth in region a losing battle

York Region's growth continues to outstrip that of every other region in the Greater Toronto Area.

But some politicians want to put on the brakes.

Last year, 26,000 new residents moved to York Region or were born here, a 4-per-cent increase. The second-highest growth rate in the GTA is 2.4 per cent in Peel Region.

But that growth comes with a high price tag — an estimated \$2.5 billion over the next 25 years.

Municipal politicians complain that, because the province stopped them from collecting development charges for facilities such as hospitals, dumps and recreational facilities, those costs are landing on residential tax bills.

Which is why Aurora council has passed a resolution freezing residential development until services can be provided without excessive cost to taxpayers.

The resolution is being circulated to every municipality in Ontario.

York Region politicians have been threatening to stop growth since 1996, when developers first demanded a reduction in the thousands of dollars in fees they were paying on each new home to provide services for the residents they were bringing in to town.

"Growth must pay for growth" has been a rallying cry ever since.

Freezing growth in York Region is a losing battle.

It's likely the Aurora development freeze is a way to grab the attention of the housing industry, to convince developers to negotiate a way to provide services without soaking taxpayers.

If it succeeds, it will be well worthwhile.

York Region's school boards are also grappling with the development charge issue. The two boards' experience with provincial lot levy legislation has been a roller-coaster ride.

In the early '90s, they were the first boards to take advantage of new legislation allowing them to charge developers a fee on each home to help build new schools. But they were targeted by a series of court challenges, which they eventually won in 1996.

The victory was short-lived. In early 1998, the province took over full funding of education and stopped boards from collecting development charges for school construction.

It did, however, allow them to collect levies to buy land for schools. And with that came the right to target housing.

Under the previous development charge legislation, new industrial and commercial projects were charged education levies at the same rate as new housing — even though councillors were begging school trustees to give business a break.

Because business is much harder to attract than housing — and because business provides more taxes while using fewer municipal services — regional politicians wanted the housing sector to pay higher levies than industry. The province has changed the legislation to allow this.

This year, York Region's boards aren't planning to collect any development fees from business.

That means new homebuyers would pay the full shot — a cost of \$2,916 per house. That's considerably less than the \$3,849 homebuyers were being charged in 1996, but it's also considerably more than the \$1,763 new homebuyers were paying last year, when the rates were lower and commercial/industrial development was paying 25 per cent of the cost.

It's unlikely that a \$1,153 price hike will scare away buyers and bring the home building boom to a halt — although combined with the regional and town levies, it's a lot of money for someone entering the housing market. But it is a step toward making sure current residents aren't paying the tab for new development.

# OPINION



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### If Main Street dies, so does Stouffville

I attended an information meeting in May in the town council offices, regarding the proposed pool/library complex.

It's taken me this long to write about the issue because I've been busy at work. Residents were presented with poorly thought-out research which appeared to be structured to support decisions already made by council. Instead of allowing questions from the floor, in a public setting, council had allocated private working group meetings after the presentation.

This would effectively dilute any concerted opposition by preventing the transfer of ideas between members of the community who were present.

There are a number of questions that arose and which still have not been addressed.

Why build a complex like this on existing parkland which requires the additional expense of an access road?

Is the access road intended to service in the future, the proposed new subdivision to the south?

Why not build the pool as an addition to the existing recreation centre on Ninth Line?

Most of the services are already in place and the parking would probably be more than adequate. Traffic lights could service the access to Ninth Line.

Why is the new, improved library smaller than the existing one on Main Street?

The attitude of our elected representatives seems to be contrary to the wishes of its citizens and the good of the town.

Main Street is the hub of Stouffville.

Businesses depend on pedestrian traffic to survive, and in the era of mall shopping this is already difficult.

Recently, the town moved its office to new rented space on Sandford Drive from its old premises on Main Street, which it owned. The given reasons were lack of space and fire regulations.

Fire regulations are usually predicated upon occupancy versus the number of exits.

There is an empty office building immediately behind the old Main Street offices. Why was this not rented or bought and some of the staff moved there? The reduced occupancy would probably have solved the exit problem.

The offices on Sandford Drive are inconvenient to anyone without transportation.

Council was able, however, to spend lots of money on fancy furniture. And because of the move, there is now a vacant building on Main Street.

The existing library is central and convenient. If it is too small, add another storey. If additional parking is required, explore the use of the land behind it. The proposed library will be smaller than the existing and less accessible, especially to older people.

There are plans afoot to move the fire-hall. Presumably it will be a bigger and better facility. This will leave yet another empty space on Main Street. What would replace it? An empty lot?

If Main Street dies, so does Stouffville as we know it. If enough people make a fuss we will overcome.

If councillors do not listen, remember, they can all be voted out at the next election. This is called democracy.

ROGER DAINTON  
STOUFFVILLE

## Stouffville Tribune

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Brenda Larson

## Your opinion could make 2000 brighter

In the course of talking about the coming millennium, the changes it will bring for all of us, the excitement about new beginnings (somehow they seem even greater with 2000 attached to them), we agreed that our newspapers should undertake some special projects to mark the event.

We'll be producing special sections, we'll be highlighting people from the past 100 years who helped shape our communities and we'll be identifying some young people who will make a difference in the future.

But we wanted to do something more and, beginning in August, our Millennium Surveys project begins.

Each month, until the end of 1999, we'll be asking you for your opinion on important issues that affect your lives.

Our first reader survey, for example, deals with the issue of amalgamation and where you think the boundary lines of a new York Region for the year 2000 should be.

Should York be divided into three large cities? Four cities? Should all the municipalities just stay the same and should the region be disbanded in favour of the Greater Toronto Services Board? Do you care who collects your taxes?

Once we have collected your responses, we'll report your views in our newspapers and we'll turn over the results of our survey, along with your comments and suggestions, to the officials who are charged with making the changes that will make our communities better places to live.

Armed with your feelings and beliefs, elected officials will be able to develop plans and establish priorities for the future.

In addition to amalgamation, we'll be asking for your views on health-care services, the education system, social services and policing.

If you have strong views on how the system can be changed for the better, these surveys will be your opportunity to participate in planning for the future.

We're giving you a month's notice of the first survey. Start thinking about how you feel about your town, your region and the way it is governed.

We'll be entering all survey respondents into a random draw for prizes, including family movie passes.

Watch for the first Millennium Survey, on amalgamation, in the Saturday, Aug. 14 edition of your newspaper. We hope you'll participate in shaping your region's future — that's how we can all make the millennium brighter.

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