

YORK'S MOST POWERFUL MAYORS WANT THE REGION CARVED UP INTO TWO TO FOUR CITIES

# Kill regions, mayors say

BY LISA QUEEN  
Staff Writer

The Greater Toronto Area's most influential suburban mayors plan to send a report to Premier Mike Harris tomorrow demanding the province wipe out regional governments and establish eight to 12 powerful cities.

The mayors, who didn't run the proposal by their local councils, haven't drawn a map because they can't agree on exact boundaries. But York Region would be carved up into two to four cities.

"If there is any unanimity, it's that we don't want region-cities," said Vaughan Mayor Lorna Jackson, who, along with Markham Mayor Don Cousens and Newmarket Mayor Tom Taylor, formed the coalition which began meeting privately last month.

The mayors claim the new structure would save taxpayers \$100 million a year. The estimate is based on studies conducted in other regions which have concluded amalgamation can save between \$25 and \$100 per capita.

Under the proposal presented Friday at Markham's Embassy Suites hotel, the Greater Toronto Services Board would become a body responsible for setting service standards. But it wouldn't have any taxing authority and the cities would deliver services ranging from recreation and planning to transit and fire protection.

However, existing police services boards would stay intact, which means forces like York Regional Police would be preserved.

Meanwhile, other towns can decide for themselves whether they want to be swallowed up by the new cities, or break off and set up their own regions or join existing counties like Simcoe.

The mayors say the new structure would protect the environment because development would be concentrated in the cities, rather than "leapfrogging" into rural areas.

"They're asking the province to appoint a special adviser to help with the restructuring. The adviser would submit a report by April so changes would be in place for the November municipal elections.

If that timetable is too ambitious, the mayors suggest the province delay the elections for a year.

Cousens defended the mayors proposal, even though Queen's Park has indicated it won't act on municipal restructuring in the 905 regions until the GTSB completes a review of services and governance models

by December.

But after the province forced amalgamations in four Ontario regions last month, the mayors argue a momentum has been created that they intend to capitalize on.

"We saw an opportunity for ourselves to give leadership for what needs to be done. It's not something we take lightly," Cousens said.

"We will be agents of change for good for the whole of the community. We want to be partners with the province and everybody else."

According to Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion, municipalities

must structure themselves into appropriately sized cities to be able to afford downloaded provincial services and pooling, the controversial program where taxpayers in the 905 regions contribute to social services in Toronto.

The eight mayors agree cities must have more than 100,000 residents to deliver services effectively.

After witnessing five years of futile amalgamation talks, Jackson argued big-city mayors can't allow the prospect of restructuring to simmer on the backburner forever.

"There is a great deal of uncer-

tainty. We are working in a void. Everybody is looking over their shoulder wondering what is going to happen. It's time they (the province) put us out of our misery."

Jackson defended the fact the mayors have hashed out their plan behind closed doors, arguing rural mayors and regional chairpersons meet regularly to discuss issues of common interest, including their visions for municipal restructuring.

"We're being accused of secret meetings. We're just mayors of a like mind that have come together to see if we can create a plan," she said.

## Region aiming for tax freeze

No thanks to Toronto, which takes \$80 million a year from York's coffers

BY PATRICK CASEY  
Staff Writer

York Region councillors are aiming to spend more than \$250 million on capital programs this year without raising taxes.

Chief administrative officer Alan Wells and treasurer Sandra Cartwright recommended a tax freeze after providing an overview of the proposed 2000 operating budget at a regional council meeting Thursday morning.

It would mark the second consecutive tax freeze, made possible by 4.4-per-cent growth that increased the total collected in taxes to \$356.6 million.

However, regional politicians continue to be stung by the fact they must contribute \$80.1 million — or 10 per cent of their \$814.2 million total budget — to Toronto's social service costs.

Vaughan Councillor Joyce Frustaglio said the provincial scheme does not work, pointing out the plight of a Vaughan single mother of five who pays \$1,200 in rent each month but receives less than that in social support.

"We have to really and truly continue to fight against this," said Frustaglio. "I appreciate why the province put this in place, but we should fight it because it should not come against our residents."

"We have to pursue the government at least for a time frame. We can do it for a number of years, but then it stops. It has to stop sometime. If our growth slows down, the problem will still be there and then what will happen?"

Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell



ALAN WELLS: Recommending tax freeze.

said the idea of sending regional money to Toronto disgusts people because local politicians have no say how the money is spent.

And since the \$80.1-million pooling figure could still fluctuate, he warned against using the region's capital reserve fund to help finance Toronto's social programs.

"I just want to be assured that we get into trouble with pooling, we won't dip into the reserves and send them south of Steeles Avenue," said Bell. "We better bring this back to the finance committee."

York, Durham, Peel and Halton regions, all pay into the costs of Toronto's subsidized housing and social programs.

Included in the \$250.1-million capital programs for this year are plans for:

- \$125 million in water and wastewater projects, including new sewers in Richmond Hill, Markham, Maple and Woodbridge,

construction of a water supply infrastructure in Georgina and the extension of Toronto's water supply to York Region;

- \$108 million in the transportation services budget, including \$82 million in new projects and more than \$25 million in tendered work deferred from 1999. Major projects will include the first stage of the Markham Bypass from Hwy. 407 to Hwy. 7 (\$2.7 million) and the widening of a dangerous stretch of Hwy. 9 between Hwy. 400 and Bathurst Street in Newmarket (\$7.3 million);

- \$7.8 million in capital financing as part of the \$90.8-million York Regional Police budget will support an additional 21 new officers, enhancements to existing services and departments, plus new programs that include a year-round RIDE unit;

- \$750,000 to construct an integrated solid waste processing and transfer facility to handle the region's solid waste as a result of the impending closure of the Keele Valley dump.

"We have a continued growth of population," said Wells, noting the region will grow this year by 30,000 residents.

"The item that is not an easy one to solve is the management of the solid waste system. The clock is ticking and we have some decisions that have to be made in order to move on with the solutions."

The region's finance committee will review various departmental budget recommendations at a special meeting Feb. 3, before the budget is expected to be passed by council on Feb. 10.

### REGIONAL News Digest



#### WHAT'S HAPPENING

Event: Snow Smash

Date: Saturday, Jan. 22, 3 to 4:30 p.m.  
Location: Newmarket Youth Centre  
Address: 244 Main St. S., Newmarket

Jamie Dunlop, 15, practises on a formation of snow in preparation for the Newmarket Youth Centre's Snow Smash event on Jan. 22 featuring sculpting and other winter fun.

#### York men part of drug ring

Three York Region men could face lengthy prison terms in the United States after being linked to a multi-million-dollar drug-smuggling and money-laundering ring.

Daniel Carlo Cappa, 38, of Maple, Arthur Alajajian, 38, of Newmarket and Maurice Catenacci, 35, of Newmarket were all indicted by an Alexandria, Va. grand jury on charges related to smuggling cocaine into Canada and returning drug-related assets back to the United States.

The men were charged along with Nestor Fonseca, 32, of Brampton, who investigators consider the ringleader.

Cappa, who lives on Tarrell Close in Maple, is a manager at Pearson International Airport's Terminal 3. He was arrested while he was on the job Wednesday morning.

Although Cappa works at the airport, he is not considered to be the head of the organization.

Catenacci, a car salesman, was arrested at his Binns Avenue home in Newmarket Wednesday.

Alajajian, also a Newmarket resident, was arrested at home. RCMP Insp. Ron Allen said about \$15 million of cocaine was purchased in south Florida and was smuggled into Canada in 1998 to be sold in the GTA and Toronto.

The FBI became involved in the summer of 1998 when about 10 kilograms of cocaine were seized from a train passing through Washington D.C. The train was on its way to Toronto from south Florida.

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