

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
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EDITORIAL

Eye-opening report should spur mayors

We cannot allow six people to decide the future of York Region — or the rest of the 905-area municipalities, for that matter.

When Vaughan Mayor Lorna Jackson, Markham Mayor Don Cousens, Newmarket Mayor Tom Taylor, Burlington Mayor Rob MacIsaac, Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion and Burlington Mayor Peter Robinson gathered to develop their proposal for reforming the 905 municipalities and the Greater Toronto Services Board (GTSB), they demonstrated the kind of leadership that's been sadly lacking on this controversial issue.

But they were also taking a huge risk.

Their project, titled *Maintaining the Momentum*, would replace the current 24 municipal and four regional governments with eight to 12 megacities in the 905 area.

Not surprisingly, their plan conveniently leaves Markham, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Mississauga and Brampton as separate cities.

Their report suggests giving the GTSB greater powers to provide policy and service leadership across the GTA on services such as regional roads, social services, social housing, waste management, infrastructure planning, growth planning, transportation planning, economic development and tourism.

But what's lacking in the report is involvement from anyone other than the six mayors — and that opens it up to public criticism.

They do get top marks, though, for finally getting the amalgamation debate out of the starting blocks.

But, realistically, the mayors' report should be regarded as nothing more than a launching pad for discussion.

We certainly hope the mayors' plan is not being given too much weight by Municipal Affairs Minister Tony Clement.

That fear gained momentum this week with Clement's suggestion that November's municipal elections could be delayed so that 905-area amalgamations can be in place before voters go to the polls.

Intended or not, Clement's comment sends the strongest warning yet that chairperson Bill Fisch and other York Region politicians had better move quick to come up with a better amalgamation plan.

LETTERS POLICY

Stouffville Tribune welcomes your letters. All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The newspaper reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space.

Write: Letters to the Editor, 37 Sandiford Dr., Suite 306, Stouffville, Ont. L4A 7X5
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OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Scrapping regional government could improve wheelchair access

I read with great interest the article about doing away with regional government altogether.

I agree. This would be a better alternative to just amalgamating Thornhill, Vaughan and Markham.

The money saved having fewer politicians, better transit, social services, police, fire departments, sewage and roads could pay for upgrading roads and buying much-needed buses and vans.

The only letter I ever received from the York Region office was from chairperson Bill Fisch. He claimed the outlook for correcting worsening conditions of roads and transit systems would soon be better.

Where's the hard evidence?

I've phoned many times about unsafe walk signals for the disabled, seniors with walking aids and mothers with tots in strollers.

The standard reply from regional councillors and engineers was that these intersections are timed and found adequate.

I challenged them to accompany a person in a wheelchair at two intersections and was refused.

Are fatalities necessary before such concerns are addressed? Perhaps if the nine areas involved were a larger region we would not be

constantly told that these problems are in the jurisdiction of federal, provincial or an individual municipality, constantly passing the buck.

One large entity might have more clout.

MARTY SHULTZ
THORNHILL

Support of off-track betting will haunt local councillor

I think it was unconscionable that councillor Jack Heath would write to the Jockey Club and endorse a new gambling business that is to operate on Main Street, Markham.

Did Heath not consider consulting with the residents of Ward 5, his ward, on this serious matter?

I can well imagine what could escalate from this off-track betting establishment. It worries me, as it should worry all the voters in Ward 5.

This is not the way to revive the town's main street.

Surely there are other locations, much better suited and with more accessible parking, to accommodate this kind of business. Main Street is not it.

The next election is not too far off, and I hope that Heath's faux pas is remembered at that time and place.

J. SHAW
MARKHAM

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Dave Teetzel

Preserving moraine means declaring ownership

Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell won't believe this, but while watching TV footage last week of his council meeting on the Oak Ridges Moraine, I felt sorry for him and his council.

There they were, their backs against the wall, listening to hundreds of people demanding they not change the zoning designation on the moraine to urban, while eight of the nine councillors were convinced they had no choice.

It's not easy to explain how declaring a stretch of woods, lakes and farms as an urban area will actually protect the environment, which is what Richmond Hill did last week and what York Region will probably do, too.

It did so because, before the town had taken a formal position on the moraine, some developers took their plans to the Ontario Municipal Board.

The town needed to take a position. That position could have been the one the crowd that packed Richmond Hill's town hall wanted — that the area remain rural.

But Bell has characterized that as a big gamble — and, like it or not, he knows what he's talking about. He's learned by bitter experience.

The municipal board operates according to its own rules, one of which is that the will of the people doesn't mean squat.

Developers go into these hearings with expensive lawyers and studies from the best experts money can buy.

Because this is their business after all, developers know the rules and, generally, follow them to the letter.

But let's say the good guys win and the lands keep their rural planning designation.

That still doesn't mean they remain as they are. Remember that the government's powers to tell you what you can and can't do on your own property are limited — and that's a good thing.

It's still perfectly legal to build estate homes, or farms (which would require cutting down the trees), or perhaps a golf course (which could do more damage to the rivers than a subdivision).

What Richmond Hill and York Region councils are doing is approving a compromise that protects as much as they think is possible.

It's not going to save the Oak Ridges Moraine. To do that, the province has to adopt a formal strategy — and it's encouraging that Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees has endorsed this idea.

And I still maintain that Newmarket Mayor Tom Taylor's plan to start a land trust, which would raise money to buy up moraine land, holds out the best hope to save at least part of the forest.

Whether you're a citizen, a developer or a politician, you can't preserve anything until you own it.

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