

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
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EDITORIAL

York Region's municipal leaders fear a public relations nightmare when, in June, they issue the results of a report on services, at the request of the province.

The report examines the quality of services available in nine key areas in each municipality. There are 35 detailed questions for the municipalities to provide answers to, covering garbage collection costs, recycling costs, operating costs for sewage treatment and disposal, operating costs for water treatment, transportation and transit costs and issues, fire services costs, police services costs, operating costs for municipal administration, planning information and social service issues.

Some regional councillors fear it's a no-win project, as some municipalities are able to provide stellar services at lower costs than their neighbours. Heaven forbid you, as a resident of King, for instance, find out residents in Markham may have access to more cost-effective public transit than you do!

Yes, residents will discover there are disparities in service. Yes, residents will learn there are greater cost efficiencies in some municipalities than in others.

Yes, residents will be tempted to compare their services against their neighbouring community's services and think about what they're truly getting for their tax dollars.

But councillors who fear the report will not recognize the unique traits of each municipality should not underestimate the intelligence of the people who put them in office.

Residents understand the nature of their communities. The unique traits, such as the green, rural aspect of life in King and Whichurch-Stouffville or the bustling, high-tech, vibrant lifestyle in Vaughan or Richmond Hill, may have drawn the resident to the community in the first place.

What the study may provide is basic information to share among the municipalities. Perhaps processes that are effective in Markham could be of value to bureaucrats in Richmond Hill or Vaughan.

Perhaps the smaller, rural municipalities have insight to offer in areas such as maintaining unpaved roads.

The study is not designed to lay blame for outrageous spending or unacceptable cost efficiencies. It is, as regional chairperson Bill Fisch said, simply good business practice.

Markham Mayor Don Cousens wants the province to complete its own report card on how it is performing in various areas.

That's not a bad suggestion.

OPINION



"THE CLINTONATOR"

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The real issue — that taxes are too high altogether — is ignored

Re: Property tax break stays, Jan. 16, and editorial, Jan. 18

I was very disappointed to note that your recent editorial regarding York Region's small business property taxation policies did not even mention what is really wrong with them.

Specifically, the fact that they continue to ignore the fact that the citizens of Canada, and Markham, are severely overtaxed.

Canadian municipal property taxes are already among the highest in the industrialized world. But to liberal politicians like mayor Cousens, a "fair" tax system is merely one that can best sell the latest money-grabbing rate increase to the average citizen.

Granted, he's no Mel Lastman, but he certainly seems to be trying harder. Even the tremendous amount of cash the town will collect from the excessive industrial and residential development they continue to approve isn't enough; they always need more.

The businesses and citizens of Markham are already being saddled with unprecedented tax increases this year, like the GST charged on natural gas, home heating oil and gasoline.

On top of all that, we're all forced to pay the latest increase in CPP contributions. But do you see even the slightest acknowledgement from our local politicians of any of this? Not one bit.

All we continue to get is this annual song

and dance geared to take even more of our money from us.

It is about time for responsible members of the media like the Economist & Sun/Tribune to give their readers the property tax whole story. It is about time for us readers to get outraged about it, and tell our politicians to stop their profligate spending habits.

FRANK GRAY
Unionville

Children's Aid says thanks for successful gift wrapping campaign

The Children's Aid Foundation of York Region and CHATS wish to thank everyone who helped to make the gift-wrapping at Markville Shopping Centre in December such a great success.

We express our thanks to Markville Shopping Centre for generously providing the space and supplies, to Grand and Toy Ltd., Markville, to Fran Piercey who coordinated the project, to the many volunteers who wrapped gifts, and to the shoppers who made donations. Thanks to the kindness and generosity shown, the gift-wrapping raised more than \$14,000.

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Tracy Kibble

We're slowly starting to understand the value of water

Flush the toilet as much as the next person. Sometimes, I leave the water running full force while I brush my teeth and, several times, while wiping the kitchen table, I've even left hot water running in the sink.

I bet I waste gallons of clean water every week rinsing out the piles of tins and glass jars I recycle and throw in the blue box. (Kind of ironic, isn't it — wasting one resource to conserve another?)

Sometimes, I take long showers and, if I can find the time, indulge in the odd water-up-to-the-neck-don't-bother-me bubble bath.

A few times a week, I may even throw less than a full load of laundry into the washing machine.

Water. It's the most precious resource in the world and the one we seem to take most for granted.

I read a report last weekend about a woman living in a Rio de Janeiro favela, a ghetto.

Three million poor people there live among rats, garbage and disease — fresh running water for many of these impoverished families is only a dream, a luxury for the rich.

And in Africa, another woman tells a horrific story of how she spends her days searching desperately for clean water so her family can eat parasite free.

Their lives are like one never-ending Walkerton tragedy minus the leadership, ability and money to fix the problem.

While these stories make me grateful for the industrialized lifestyle I take for granted, I feel selfish, as well, for I wouldn't want the tables to turn.

What I want is to protect the one most valuable natural resource in my life — and the power to keep disease, starvation and sickness from my door.

And, thankfully, steps are being taken by all levels of government to ensure we don't destroy our own precious supplies.

The region announced last week it will spend \$725,000 this year to comply with the province's tough new regulations for staff training and water testing.

Newmarket Regional Councillor Diane Humeniuk is also trying to protect water supplies in her demands for a reduction in the use of road salt.

Humeniuk says road salt and other groundwater run-off poses a threat to our wells and the infrastructure that manages the system.

In another encouraging initiative, the region has committed \$30 million to construct a new Lake Simcoe water facility (replacing its outdated plant built in 1958) for Georgina residents.

Provincial officials vow to be fierce watchdogs when it comes to keeping our water clean and that's good news.

We have to ensure our governments at all levels continue to keep the cash freely flowing when it comes to minding our water.

Life without it would sink.

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.

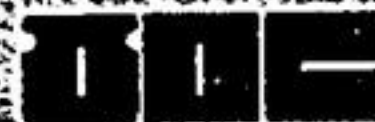
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Stouffville Tribune

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