

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
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EDITORIAL

Whew, nice to have that silly amalgamation thing off our back, eh?

The province's Tory government has inexplicably stilled the gong it has been banging since it first came to power in 1995 — eliminate duplication and excess baggage in municipal government by pooling resources.

The Tory shotgun-union record included 815 municipalities reduced to 447 in Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa and Sudbury.

But, now, the plate has been cleared of forced amalgamations in 905 territory — and, gosh, it's hard not to feel some glee just thinking about the apoplectic fit that announcement caused in Toronto Mayor Mel Lastman, who continues to proclaim his merged city's woes, thanks to the meddling Queen's Park.

As much as a relief as it is not to have a bigger government looming over us and arbitrarily deciding which of our neighbours we must hold hands with, perhaps the Tories were on to not-such-a-bad thing.

The mere threat of amalgamation prompted York Region politicians — admittedly after prolonged stalling — to do some painful navel-gazing. The region is now co-ordinating a public transit system and a merger of fire services is also a real possibility.

After hearing about the reversal at Queen's Park, regional chairperson Bill Fisch maintains his "vision" is to ensure York Region is efficient. (Good, that's his job.)

"If the best thing is to amalgamate, then fine, but we are trying to accomplish service alignment and restructuring. Quite frankly, that works fine," he said.

He's right, as long as our municipal politicians have the fortitude to stay on the path to effective and efficient government, even if it requires them to put their own jobs on the line. Can they be trusted to do that, once they've finished breathing their sighs of relief?

The savvy — and, some might venture to say, cynical — mayor of Markham says there's nothing to be relieved about.

Don Cousens is predicting Premier Mike Harris — who has recently re-connected with his right-wing agenda with a telling shuffle of his cabinet — is merely plotting another demise for regional government.

While saving political butt in the 905 for now, the Tories will shift gears by boosting the powers of the Greater Toronto Services Board, Cousens warns. If he's right, regional government should start running while it can — now the pressure's really on.

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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OPINION

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Tracy Kibble

One day the word 'gay' won't make people upset

Well, that's it. I might as well pack up my desk and bury myself in a deep, dark hole.

When we decided to run an article Feb. 10 about a group in York Region where young gays and lesbians meet and talk, there was some negative feedback in the newsroom. And that's to be expected. Journalists are a cynical bunch. Some are negative and pessimistic but usually more open-minded than the average Joe.

We have to be, it's our job to see all sides of an issue, present the facts and let the reader decide how he or she feels.

The York Region public health department created a youth group where gays, lesbians and bisexual teenagers, as young as 14, can congregate and talk about their lives without being judged.

Public health nurse Elaine Hampson, who co-ordinates the program, said young people often know they are gay as young as nine and suffer horrible mixed feelings throughout puberty.

One teenager said he has been threatened, his artwork defaced — his whole life has been "a torture" (I guess that's an acceptable way for society to treat someone who is different, as long as they don't come out?)

Readers bombarded the paper with letters after the story ran.

One reader accused us of encouraging teenagers to become gay. The scenario would go something like this, I suppose. Teenager reads article and decides to be gay so he can join the group — like it's a choice.

Another reader said "sexual troubles" shouldn't be discussed in a newspaper.

Another letter warned our circulation will drop because we made one woman feel "queer" about reading how teenagers meet people who are going through the same things they are.

These attitudes are regrettable. Being gay is one of those taboo topics that is not supposed to be discussed, along with religion, politics, abortion and, more recently, education.

It's sad some people never change their minds about how they feel about these topics — they've slammed the door and bolted the lock on life.

I've heard young children making fun of gays. They often refer to things that aren't cool as being gay. "That show is gay." "His pants are gay." That colour looks gay.

When I overheard two boys using the 'g' word, I told them it was as bad as using the 'n' word when I was a kid.

They looked at each other with puzzled expressions before one boy asked me: "What 'n' word, nincompoo?"

Now, that gave me hope. Maybe one day, if we're lucky, the 'g' word will no longer be acceptable.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Other ways to obtain information besides an expensive trip

Re: Markham council plans \$54,000 U.S. tour, *Economist & Sun*, Feb. 6

Could someone please explain why it's necessary for all 13 councillors plus additional town staff to visit various cities?

In this era of 'high-tech', why doesn't Markham engage in an expert videographer/journalist for a week to capture all aspects of urbanism that are required to inform the town of options. A great deal of this information could also be obtained by e-mail interviews.

This joy-trip seems to be an example of the constant irresponsible, frivolous spending by the Town of Markham, at taxpayer expense.

JOYCE RIETTI
Unionville

Sale of the 407 'not such a great deal for the taxpayer after all'

Re: 404 commuters pay up again, *Economist & Sun*, Feb. 1

I found this article to be interesting and I hope that all your readers took the time to read it carefully.

More and more, as time goes by, we see that the sale of Hwy 407 by the Harris government was not such a great deal for the taxpayer after all. Unending rate increases (three times in 15 months), a 30-year toll period

extended to 99 years and who knows what else that has not been made public.

There was one little piece of information in the article that was outdated. The \$2 administration fee was done away with in October 2000. It was reduced to \$1 and a \$1 monthly rental fee was added to the bill. Still \$2, right?

Look again. Rental fees are subject to the 8 per cent PST. The Harris government not only sold the taxpayers of this province down the highway, it is now taking its pound of flesh. It may only be eight cents on your bill, but multiply that by a conservative estimate of 400,000 transponders and that comes out to \$32,000 a month for the provincial coffers.

I wonder how many other little tax surprises this government has in store for us.

GORDON MACBRIDE
Markham

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