

Snow clean-ups cost region extra \$500,000

Unseasonably long winter blows \$6.7 million budget — and that doesn't include December

BY PATRICK CASEY
Staff Writer

Winter has taken a \$6.7-million bite out of York Region's operating budget.

While the region continues to fine-tune its 2001 budget, finance officials must now unearth an additional \$532,000 after an unseasonably long winter quickly polished off its snow removal budget.

"I'm hoping we have seen the last of the major snowstorms now that we are into spring," explained Sandra Cartwright, the region's finance commissioner.

"Our winter maintenance budget has been really pressed by unprecedented snowstorms."

After spending \$5.7 million last year, the region had originally budgeted nearly \$6.2 million to take care of its snow-covered roads in 2001.

But even with the extra half-million dollars, the \$6.7 million merely covers the winter maintenance budget for the first three months of the year and does not take into account October, November and December when the cold air marks its return.

"This money just brings us up to where we are," Cartwright confirmed.

"Our mid-year report in June will look at other ways of mitigating the budget rather than setting an increase now."

Meanwhile, Cartwright unveiled more than \$1.8 million worth of additions to the total bud-

get, projected at \$960.7 million.

However, even with the changes, the region's tax hike will remain at 4.5 per cent, or an extra \$60 in taxes this year for the average homeowner.

The modifications include:

- \$137,000 to help implement new priority transit services.
- \$104,000 to add 500 new day-care spaces.
- \$82,000 for an additional prosecutor for court administration.
- \$101,000 for the economic development department's new industrial research assistance program.
- \$94,000 to the Greater Toronto Services Board budget.

Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Wayne Emmerson said more funds for the fledging GTSB is simply a sign of the times.

"If you think the GTSB budget is big money now, it will be bigger money later on," he said.

"That money will come from the 905 area because there is no money in Toronto."

Meanwhile, the region will shift \$20 million from its capital reserve budget and transfer the money into three separate reserve funds — \$10 million to social assistance and \$5 million into both social housing and working capital reserves.

"The working capital is used during the year to help with shortfalls with our cash flows," added Cartwright.

"It can reduce pressures on our

budgets and gives us an opportunity to re-allocate funds."

The region's budget, which includes \$338 million in capital programs and a net tax levy of \$397.2 million, will not be officially

passed until next month.

Although council members had originally expected to ratify the budget on Thursday, they will wait an extra two weeks in hopes the province will tell the region how

much they owe Toronto in annual pooling costs.

The estimated figure is \$85.8 million, \$1.8 million more than last year.

JUST HELPIN' OUT



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEN

The onset of spring means plenty of natural hazards. Here, four-year-old Harrison Roy helps Marlene Dunsmoor, 2, rescue her baby carriage from a wet ditch on Harold Avenue in Stouffville. Much of the snow in Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville has disappeared.

Pizza project could return when threat ends

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O'Connor.

The decision to pull the plug on this year's Pizza Project also involved the two school boards in York Region.

"This news is very disappointing, but it is the right thing to do," said project volunteer and Whitchurch-Stouffville Councillor Harry Bowes.

Having the Pizza Project without the animals wouldn't work, stressed project chairman Elson Miles.

"This is a hands-on project. It needed the animals. The animals can't come. We understand. We just can't take a chance," said Miles.

Ross Virgo, communications director for the York Region District

School Board, explained that the project's planning committee determined that the event will be cancelled due to concerns about the health of animals in the world due to the news about hoof and mouth.

Having the Pizza Project without the animals wouldn't work, stressed project chairman Elson Miles.

"The agricultural world is taking a very cautious approach to protecting their animals," Virgo added.

Notice of the project's cancellation has been forwarded to schools in Markham, Unionville, Whitchurch-Stouffville, Richmond Hill, Newmarket, Sharon, Kettleby and Holland Landing.

It is hoped that once the foot and mouth health threat is over, the Pizza Project will return.

"It's cancelled this year. But, hopefully, it will be back in the future," said Virgo.

It's a wonderful project, very popular with the students," said Dr. O'Connor. "I'll return."

The Pizza Project involves adult volunteers leading the students through a variety of hands-on activities related to vegetables, dairy, beef, pork and grains.

The farm-related experiences along with classroom activities,

provided the students with a greater understanding of a "food they love, the technologies they use in its production and a positive image of the people who produce it," explained Kyn Barker of the York Region District School Board.

Other agricultural projects, including those linked to schools, are being canceled all over the world. Food and mouth has the world on alert.

Here in Ontario, the disease that does not affect humans and only affects hoofed animals, has forced the cancellation of the Pizza Project in London.

Meanwhile, project officials in Victoria County are meeting today to determine the fate of its pizza project.



HARRY BOWES: Cancelling event "is the right thing to do," says former board of education trustee.

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