

# Region starts 'putting lid on hiring'

From page 1.

Richmond Hill and Markham.

Councillors had asked the development industry to approve a voluntary levy to raise nearly \$21 million for the work, but when they refused, the region was left responsible for the entire tab.

Surprisingly, the region cut developers a break in February, reducing a planned increase in residential development charges by \$105, 1.1 per cent less than the maximum amount allowed in the Development Charges Act.

The \$9.3-million balance of the tax increase will go to York Regional Police for 41 new officers and enhancements to the region's transit and transportation initiatives.

"We knew police and emergency services needed to expand because they are essential services," said Alan Wells, the region's chief administrative officer.

"The region operates and directs one of the most efficient government operations in the province of Ontario. Our costs are the lowest of all

2001 York Region budget: Gross expenditures		
	2000	2001
Capital programs:	\$258.0 M	\$339.3 M
Regional operations:	\$367.2 M	\$405.0 M
Police services:	\$92.3 M	\$100.5 M
Pooling:	\$83.7 M	\$85.8 M
GO Transit:	\$13.4 M	\$14.5 M
Property Assessment:	\$9.1 M	\$9.3 M
<b>Sub Total Regional Services:</b>	<b>\$823.7 M</b>	<b>\$954.4 M</b>
Hospital Capital Funding:	0	\$7.3 M
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$823.7 M</b>	<b>\$961.7 M</b>

municipalities in the GTA."

The region also jacked its rates for wastewater up a penny to 37.89 cents per cubic metre. Water rates remain unchanged at 41.34 cents each cubic metre.

The budget includes an increase of \$3.1 million due to economic pressures, such as higher snow clearing costs, road maintenance contracts and fuel charges.

Another \$3.8 million is needed to handle new transit and social housing responsibilities, while \$3.8 million pays for increases for police and protective services.

The region also approved 267 new employees.

However, Markham Mayor Don Cousens worked with Wells to cut six new hires from 22 planned for the finance department. In addition, the finance committee will begin studying the effects of freezing staff levels

by the end of the year.

"We have to begin to put the lid on hiring in the future," Cousens said. "We are doing well, but we have to do it even better."

But Markham Regional Councillor Gord Landon said a recession is coming and a two or three-year plan is needed to keep spending in check.

"Rather than slack, hack and burn, we have to develop a policy that makes us even more efficient," he said.

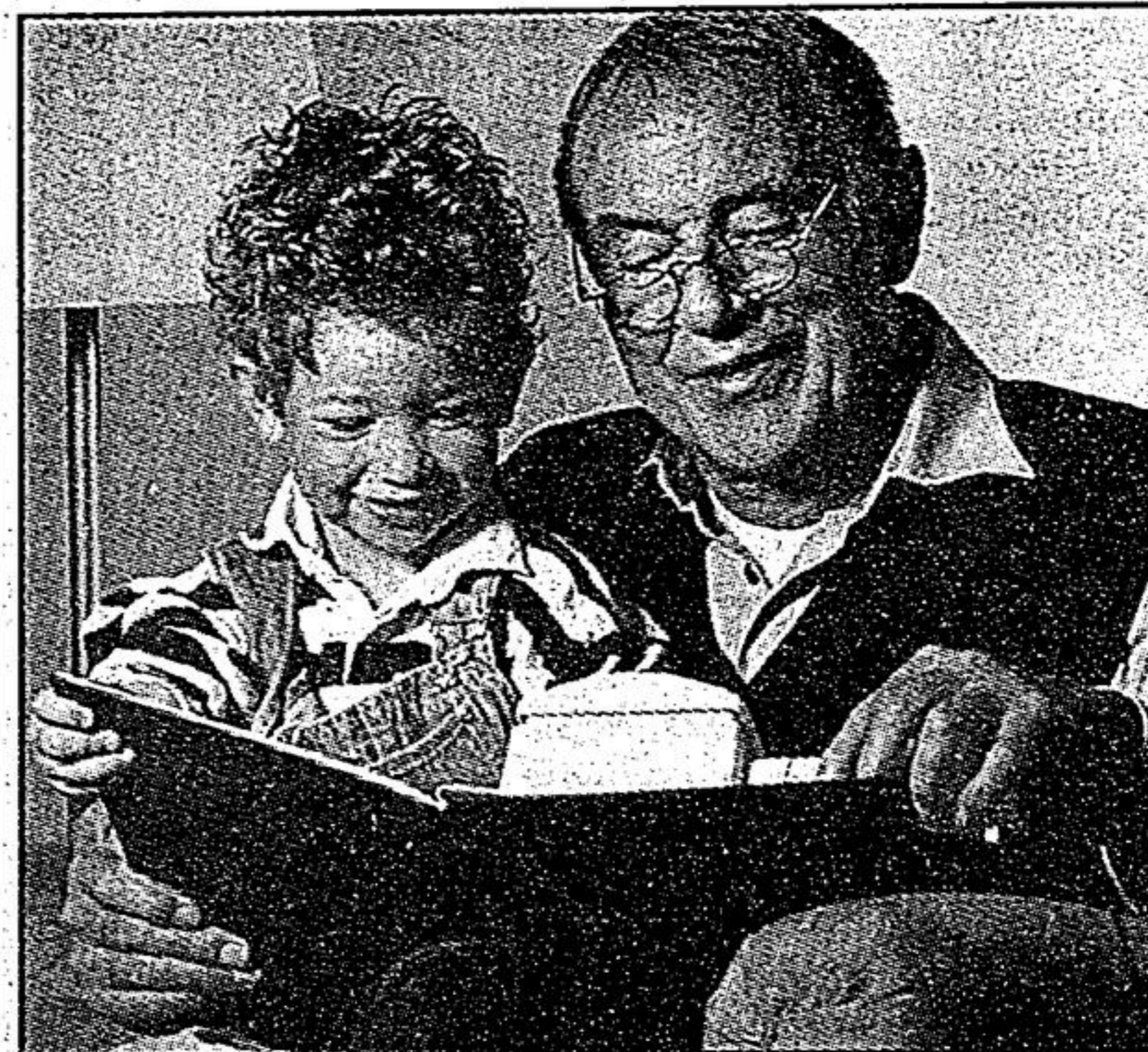
A final word of warning to area residents: Tax hikes will be commonplace for the next three years.

Regional officials are already forecasting another 4.5-per-cent tax jump next year and another 5.5 per cent in 2003.

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