



FRANK SCARPITTI: Markham councillor used fancy footwork to get bingo smoking changes passed at York Region.



JOYCE FRUSTAGLIO: Councillor who has campaigned against smoking in public places says law is being eroded.

Bingo halls get 'level playing field' they asked for in York Region

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tobacco livid.

"You're chipping away at the bylaw," she scolded the other councillors at Thursday's meeting in Newmarket.

Mrs. Frustaglio has steadfastly campaigned against making any concessions for bingo halls, bars or restaurants, whose operators complain the smoking bylaw has cut their business drastically since it came into effect last June.

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"Can somebody tell me what we're going to do next week, when we have the restaurants come before us and we have the bars come before us?" she asked.

But councillors voted to give a break to bingo halls, whose operators claim overly restrictive laws in York will force their clientele to play at halls in Toronto, where smoking rooms can take up 50 per cent of the occupiable space.

Mr. Scarpitti said Bingo Country in Markham, which has been closed since last June, is one of the halls that's adversely affected by the law.

"This bingo hall competes with other bingo halls in Toronto," he said.

"I think you're being unfair to this operator but more importantly, I think

you're being unfair to charities that benefit from the operation of this hall in Markham."

Lou Innocente, regional operations manager with Bingo Country, said all he's seeking is a level playing field with his competitors in other jurisdictions. He also said a smoking bylaw designed to protect patrons of restaurants and other public places isn't applicable to bingo halls.

"Only 8 per cent of the population of Ontario are bingo players; 70 per cent of those players are smokers," Mr. Innocente said during a recent meeting of the region's health committee.

Bingo Country spent \$450,000 building smoking rooms in its halls in Markham, Woodbridge and Newmarket in anticipation of the region's bylaw. Mr. Innocente was shocked when York brought in a law requiring smoking rooms half the size of those dictated in laws in Toronto and Peel Region. He said it would cost \$100,000 per hall to retrofit the rooms to comply with the bylaw.

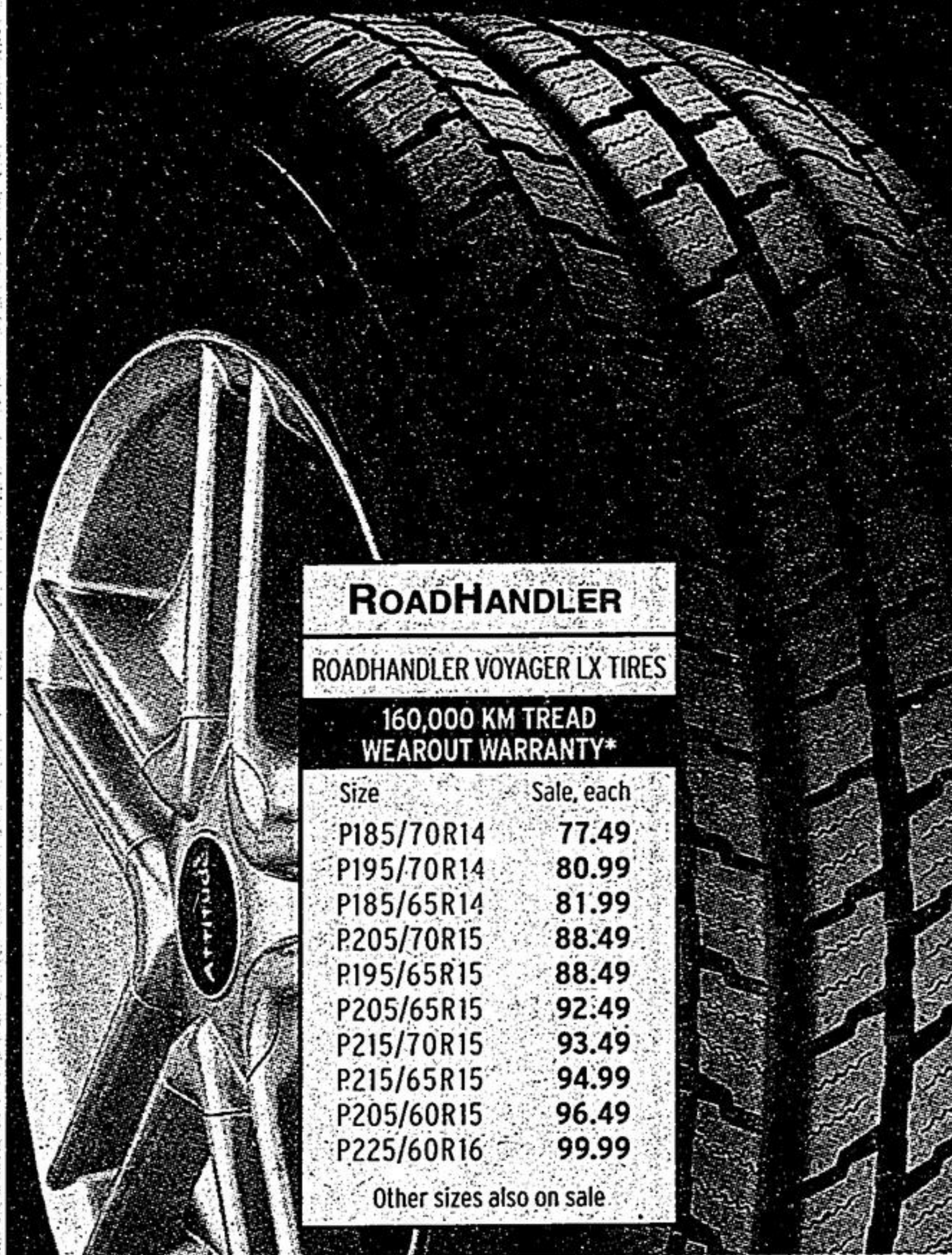
In an interview this week, Mr. Innocente announced plans to reopen Markham Bingo Country tomorrow.

The amended bylaw will come back to York Region council for final adoption next month.

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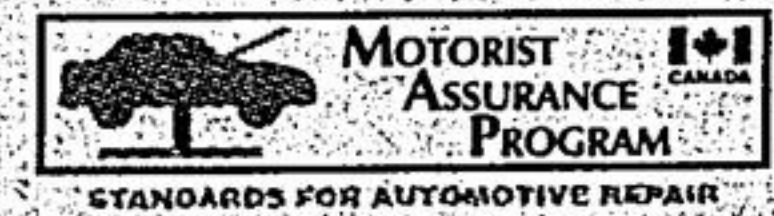
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