



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Whitchurch-Stouffville Councillor Mark Carroll at the eastern end of Musselman's Lake, which some say is being contaminated by faulty sewage septic systems. Money is available in York Region from the area conservation authorities to fix them up.

# Cleaning up unfit septic systems

## Rural homeowners offered cash to replace leaky sewage equipment

BY JOAN RANSBERRY  
Staff Writer

Property owners across York Region are being offered up to \$6,500 each to help breathe some life back into area lakes, rivers and streams by fixing their faulty septic systems.

Some systems on residential properties, especially those at Musselman's Lake and Preston Lake in Whitchurch-Stouffville and in sections of Georgina and King, are in terrible shape.

Many septic systems are broken, while most, built from the '30s through the '50s, are too small for their properties, Whitchurch-Stouffville Ward 2 councillor Mark Carroll said in an interview.

Councillor Carroll is leading the charge to have septic systems brought up to standard. With the support of the two conservation authorities serving York Region, Councillor Carroll is informing the public that a cash-wrapped package is available to help residents fix underground systems.

Defective septic systems have been identified as a major culprit making area lakes, rivers and streams sick, said Councillor Carroll. The problem is so severe it is threatening the health of York Region residents, he said.

"Nitrates and phosphates are getting into the lakes, causing cancer-causing blue-green algae growth," said Councillor Carroll. "One of the sources of the pollution problem comes from faulty sewage systems. It has to be fixed. We have to partner up and get the job done before it's too late."

Water experts say algae contributes to the loss of oxygen in lake water resulting in the death of fish. It causes flu-like symptoms in swimmers if the water is ingested. It is often responsible for beach closures. The first line of attack is to correct the cause of the problem, rather than the symptoms, Councillor Carroll said. "The most effective solution is reducing the phosphorus (a chemical found in sewage and fertilizer)," he said.

Water samples taken in the past few years from Musselman's Lake have shown a high level of phosphorus, states a report published by the Friends of Musselman's Lake, a citizens group.

"Cancer-causing blue-green algae showed up in Musselman's Lake a few years ago. It's been clean of it the last two years but it could come back. The stage is set for it," said Councillor Carroll, who lives at the lake.

Both area conservation authorities have launched water quality improvement programs. Offering \$5,000 grants, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) covers Markham, Richmond Hill, southern Whitchurch-Stouffville, Vaughan and part of King Township.

With a grant worth up to \$6,500, the Lake Simcoe and Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) oversees Aurora, Newmarket, northern Whitchurch-Stouffville, East Gwillimbury, Georgina and parts of King. The cost to replace an

average-sized private septic system is between \$10,000 and \$12,000.

Nobody knows exactly how many systems are buried in York Region. But officials do know private septic systems number in the thousands. And they know faulty septic systems, while out of sight, are seeping time bombs.

Councillor Carroll will ask Whitchurch-Stouffville council to lend residents money to cover the remaining 50 per cent for the septic systems.

Whitchurch-Stouffville alone has about 5,000 private systems, he said. There are 1,200 in Musselman's Lake and neighbouring Ballantrae. Most of the houses at Musselman's Lake are summer cottages that were converted about 40 years ago with little or nothing done to upgrade the septic systems.

The same situation applies to about 100 properties at Preston Lake, at Woodbine Avenue and Bloomington Road. Newer homes on the west side of the lake are fine. Homes on the north side of

Preston Lake were cottages. "They were built in the 1930s and could be suspect," said Councillor Carroll. "Tests carried out in Preston Lake last year showed cancer-causing blue-green algae. This is a critical situation."

"Faulty systems are adding to the contamination of rivers, streams and kettle lakes. Together, government and citizens alike have to assume the responsibility and find a remedy."

The process to receive funding for Whitchurch-Stouffville residents is simple, Councillor Carroll pointed out. The first step is to contact the municipality's planning department and request an inspector come to the property and inspect the system.

"The homeowner shouldn't feel pressured in any way," said Councillor Carroll. The town is not going to force anyone to repair their system. The town will only report the findings to the property owner.

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## PREVENTION ~ STILL THE BEST CURE

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