

Smoking bylaw finally decided

BY JEFF MITCHELL
Staff Writer

Charities will benefit from York Region council's decision to relax smoking rules in bingo halls, one fundraiser says.

"This will enable our charities to go forward and continue their work in the community," Harvey Meek, a member of the Markham Bingo Country Sponsors Association, said after Thursday's meeting in Newmarket.

The group represents more than 30 charities that raise up to \$1 million a year through bingo proceeds.

"Hopefully, this (vote) will finalize this issue for the time being."

Thursday's debate was the latest skirmish in an ongoing battle over the region's tough anti-smoking bylaw and the effect it may have on bingo halls.

Bingo operators and charities sought an amendment allowing smoking in designated smoking rooms that take up 50 per cent of the occupiable floor space in the halls, an increase from the 25 per cent allowed in the origi-

nal bylaw.

Proponents said the move would align York Region's bylaw with those in Toronto and Peel Region, where 50 per cent smoking areas are allowed.

'Hopefully, this (vote) will finalize this issue for the time being.'

They claimed York's prohibitive rules would send bingo players to other jurisdictions, taking with them the money charities depend on so much.

Opponents — most notably Vaughan Regional Councillor Joyce Frustaglio, chair of the region's health committee and a vocal crusader for stringent anti-smoking legislation argued relaxing the law would open the door to similar challenges from other businesses affected by the legislation.

"There is no question that if we change this bylaw today, it will open up the

doors for bars and restaurants to come in and say, 'What about me?' Ms Frustaglio argued Thursday.

"This is not about charities," she added. "This is about doing the right thing for the health of our residents."

She said the charities had brought to bear "influence and pressure" on Markham representatives, who led the battle for relaxed laws.

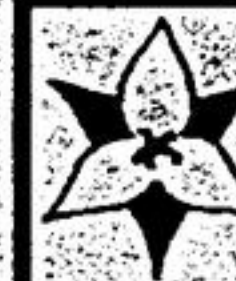
Markham Regional Councillor Frank Scarpitti replied the amendment makes the law less assailable

because it creates an even playing field for halls here as they vie with establishments elsewhere for a dwindling customer base.

The laws here and in Toronto are identical regarding regulations in restaurants and bars, he said.

"I think it strengthens our bylaw," he said. "I think it can be said we treated each sector fairly."

Councillors voted 10-8 in favour of the amendment, over the objections of Ms Frustaglio and health department officials.



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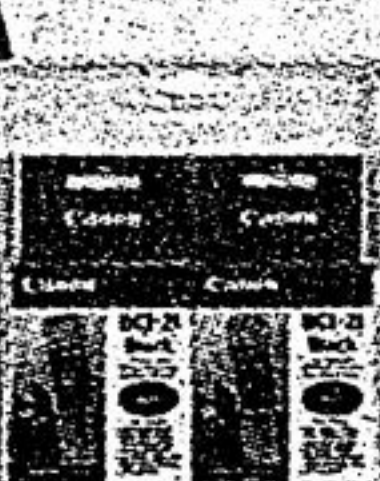
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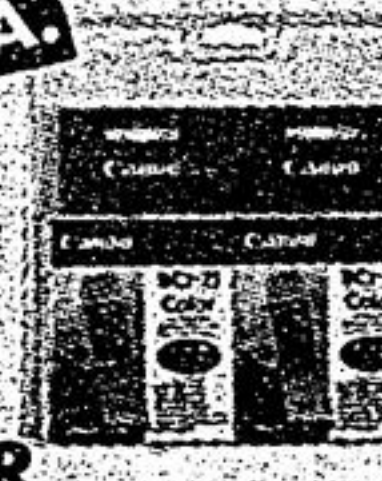
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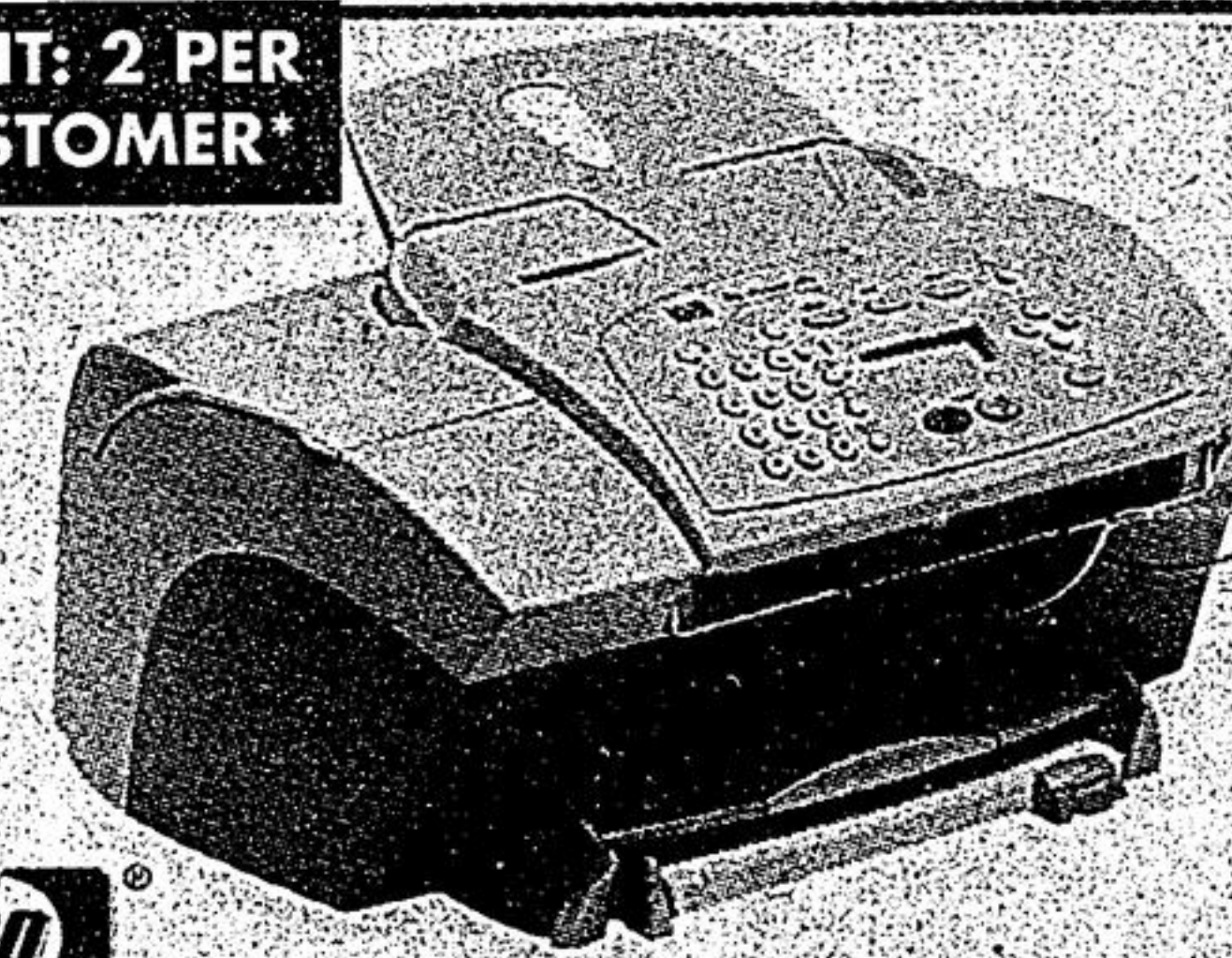
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