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BUSINESS

Changes to building code cause alarm

Proposed law contains significant reforms

BY LINDA JOHNSON
Staff Writer

A proposed provincial law that changes Ontario's building code may lead to unsafe and defective buildings, York Region municipalities warn.

Bill 124, which is in second reading, includes the most significant building regulation reforms since 1975.

Based on recommendations from the Building Regulatory Reform Advisory Group, the law would allow builders to secure building permits 10 times quicker, cutting waiting periods from about 10 weeks to 10 days.

'There's going to be a situation where they're going to side with the client and allow for certain building standards to slip.'

The proposed bill has sparked alarm among municipal building officials, who say a provision to allow independent inspectors is a clear conflict of interest, which could lead to major safety problems for consumers.

Called registered code agents, the new inspectors must be appointed by a local council and can be hired by a municipality. In such a case, the town would maintain control over the inspection of plans and by buildings.

But the law also allows a builder or developer to hire their own code agents, once they're approved by a council.

"They will be taking on the municipality's responsibilities but their allegiance will be with the developer," said Councillor Vito Spatafora, a member of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. "There is a potential conflict of interest."

In a report to the provincial government, the association urges the

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York rising star in film industry

BY JEFF MITCHELL
Staff Writer

It's a sight that's become common to all of us: rows of huge trucks, gigantic lights, scores of scurrying workers. It's the film business and it's a billion-dollar industry in Ontario.

Increasingly, York Region is the beneficiary of its proximity to Toronto, the epicentre of the movie boom. While it's difficult to quantify the impact in dollars and cents, there is a general consensus movie shoots bring money when they venture north of Steeles Avenue.

"There are spin-off benefits; they do spend money," said Ruth Burkholder, president of the Markham Board of Trade.

Markham is a frequently scouted and used location for films, commercials and other video projects. Figures from the clerk's department indicate in 2001 there were 44 projects shot in town. Those projects resulted in revenue for the municipality, which charges \$500 per project and also demands a refundable \$2,500 deposit to cover any damage to town streets, as well as individual homeowners and merchants who cut deals with production companies.

An oft-used setting is Unionville's historic main street.

A film crew setting up there has to cover municipal fees and make deals with businesses inconvenienced during the shoot, in addition to hiring paid-duty cops and firefighters to provide safety and security.

An intangible benefit of the film business is the exposure a community is given; most often, towns here are disguised as American towns. But even dressed up, your town's

appearance in a feature film could trigger some recognition, Ms Burkholder said.

She said that, combined with the money spent by crews, talent and other movie people, should be the impetus for promotion of York Region and its municipalities as willing hosts for the film industry.

"It is economic development," she said. "It may not be as large as (other industries), but every little bit helps."

York Region is no secret to people in the film business, according to Shelley Blechman. Her company, Film Locations, helps connect film people with property owners willing to host shoots.

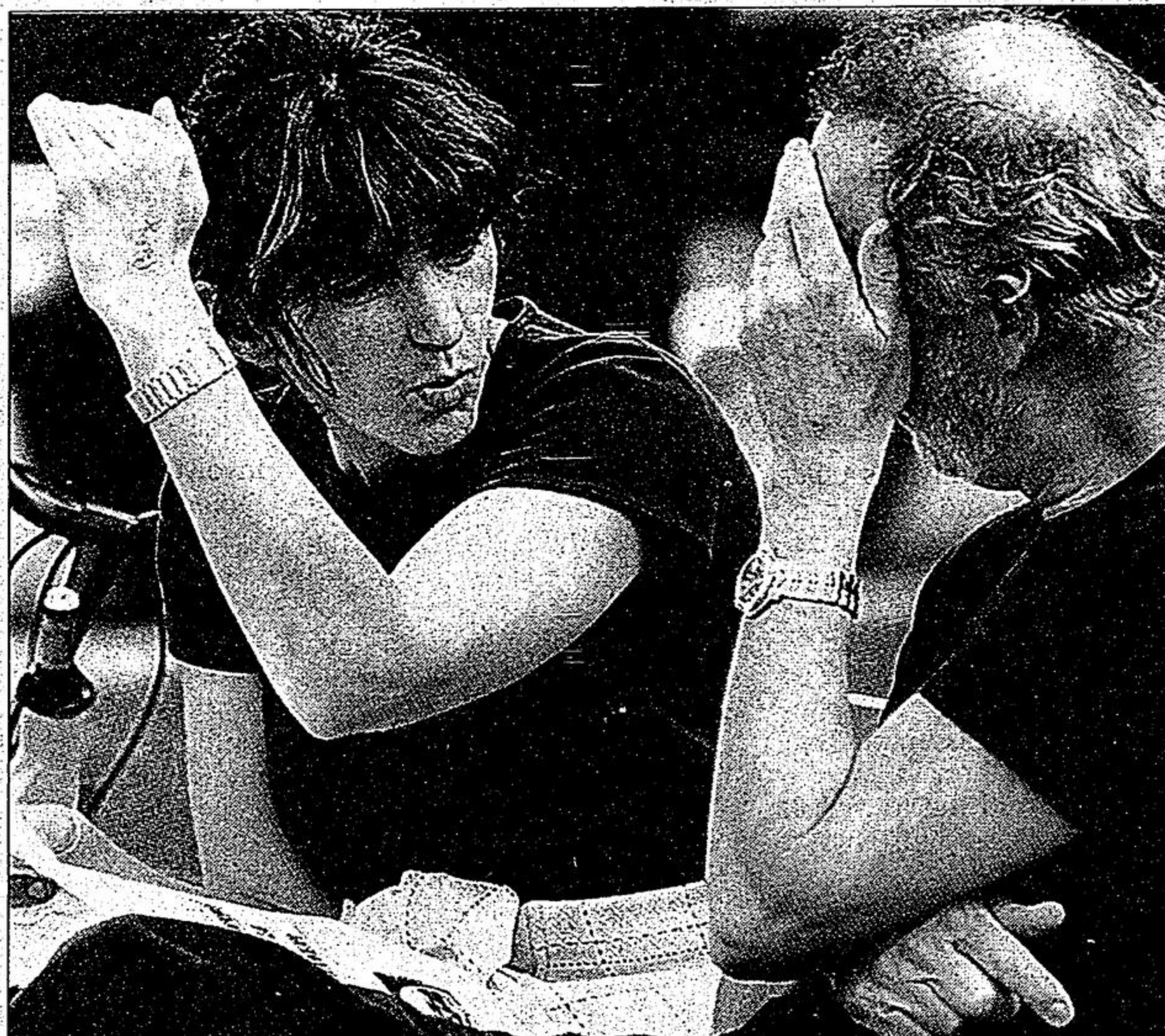
'(The region) offers a lot of space, a lot of variety. You can get everything from mansions in the country, to the real suburbia look.'

Ms Blechman deals primarily with prestige properties and open spaces, such as horse farms. Tomorrow, an ABC TV movie begins filming at a property she helped secure in the Elgin Mills and Leslie Street area.

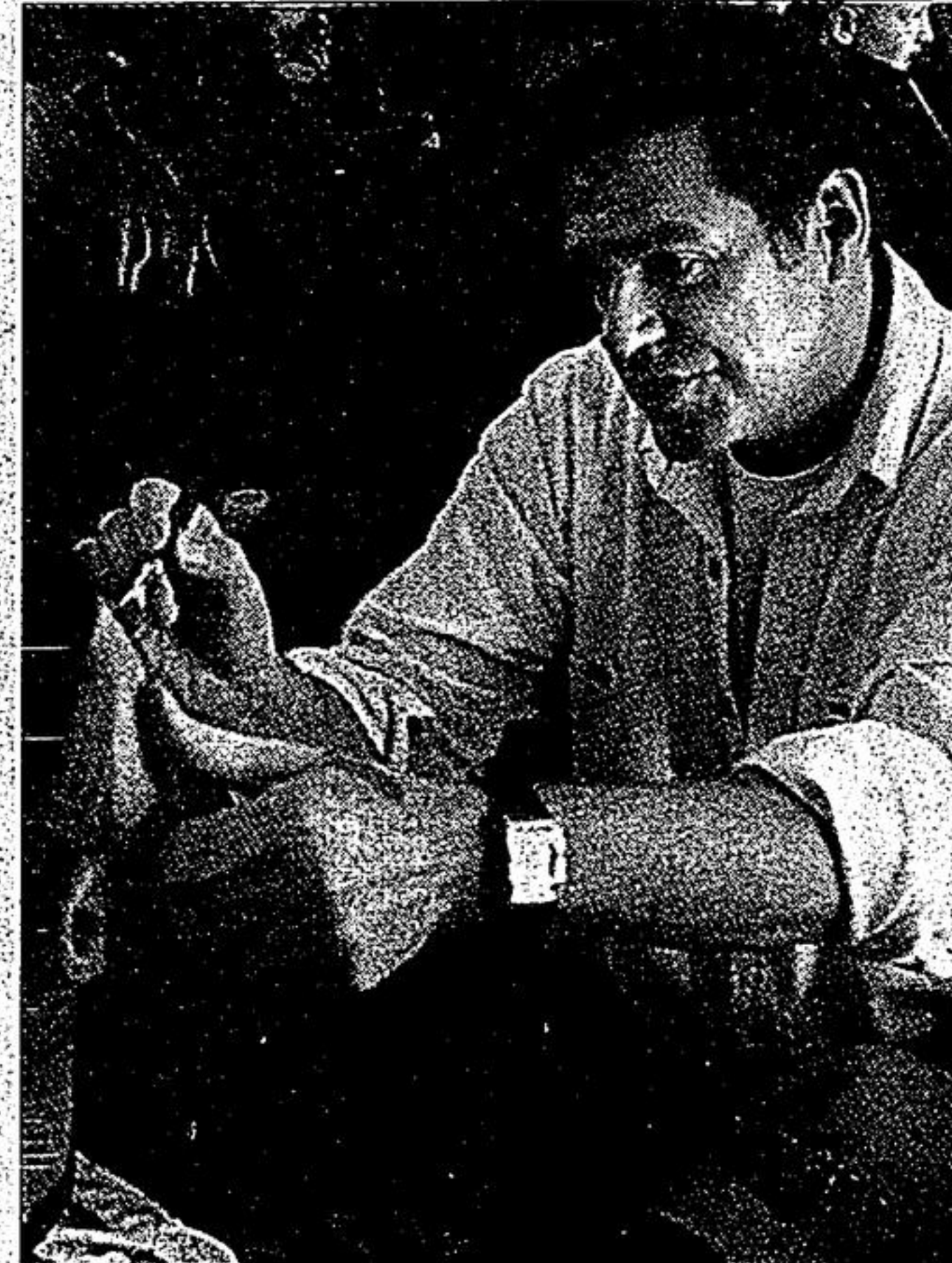
Ms Blechman said as the film business in Toronto continues to grow — and it will, given the favourable exchange rate and a deep pool of technical talent — York Region will continue to be scouted for location shoots.

"(The region) offers a lot of space, a lot of variety," she said. "You can get

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STAFF PHOTOS/SJOERD WITTEVEEN



The Disney TV movie *The Soul Patrol* was filmed on Main Street in Unionville last month, involving production designer Jasna Stefanovich and director Stuart Gillard (at top), makeup artist Roger Smith (above) and staffer Jeff Silver (left), among others.



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