

Proposed law 'deregulation': official

From page 12.

government to remove this section from the bill.

Mr. Spatafora said he thinks an inspector paid by a builder is unlikely to contradict his employer.

"There's going to be a situation where they're going to side with the client and allow for certain building standards to slip. We could end up with some very serious problems," he said.

In other countries, the use of independent inspectors has led to some major failures such as the collapse of a heritage building in New York.

Richmond Hill's chief building official John DeVries called the proposed law a form of deregulation.

"What's at heart here is, who should be in control of it?"

Tom Parry, Stouffville's chief building official and director of development services, also fears the quality of inspection for building plans will suffer.

"The concern is whether the code consultant would be as qualified as our building inspectors. They might miss things that result in claims," he said.

Mr. Parry said the town will have to hire more staff to meet the extra workload.

"We're just on the edge of some major development happening in Stouffville community," he said. "But we'll have to

allow as well for the new legislation in deciding how much staff is needed."

John Wright, Markham's director of building standards and chairperson of Large Municipalities Chief Building Officials, said the regulatory role should not be transferred to the private sector.

"It strikes most observers as a rather obvious arrogation of a public interest," he said.

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Leo Grellette, Aurora's director of building administration, said it was difficult to judge the impact of the self-directed agents.

He said although councils may refuse to appoint code inspectors, builders may continue pressing councils to allow them, using the promise of quick building permit and development fees as leverage.

"They may come and say they have all these permits which need to be processed and offer tons of money for development charges," he said.

"So where do you go with that?"

Other aspects of Bill 124 that concern area municipalities include:

- New terms of liability. While the government has capped liability of all parties to 15 years, builders are liable for only seven years, leaving municipalities solely liable in the remaining eight years;

- The introduction of fixed time limits in which building permits are issued for various kinds of dwellings, proposing a 10-day limit for residential permits and 20-day limit on non-residential buildings. (In Richmond Hill, the current time taken for residential permits is about 10 weeks.);

- The establishment and enforcement of a code of ethics, which covers all officials involved in building except the builders themselves.

The proposed law also exempts builders from being trained in the building code, a requirement for building officials, designers and code agents.

"Their association said it would be too great an imposition on (builders) to become competent in the code. That's not right," Mr. Wright said.

Richmond Hill supported the recommendations of the AMO report, advising the provincial government to reject registered code agents.

Filming is 'disruptive'

From page 12.

everything from mansions in the country, to the real suburbia look.

"York Region can be anything from a suburb in Philadelphia to someplace out in Colorado."

The region has another important element in its favour, she said: proximity to Toronto. Costs in the film industry are huge and cutting travel and set-up time is considered by location managers.

"They're always looking for off-site locations," Ms. Blechman said. "And every inch is a dollar."

Of course, there are downsides. Location filming is disruptive and intrusive and is an inconvenience for people and merchants affected.

Helene Johnson, president and CEO of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Chamber of Commerce, remembers how a crew working on the now-defunct TV series Nikita took over the downtown core in Stouffville years ago.

"Things were closed off; the streets were closed off," she said.

"I think some downtown merchants thought this really wasn't in their best interests."

There was precious little in terms of money being spread around by the cast and crew, Ms. Johnson said.

The workers showed up in the morning, ate catered lunches and snacks and retired to Toronto at the end of the day, she said.

"What spin-offs? They come in, they do what they're supposed to do and they're gone."

Not everyone takes such a dim view of the industry. Eric Button, a Stouffville lawyer and president of the town's

Business Improvement Area, said shoots are more spectacle than economic opportunity, which is not necessarily a bad thing. Stouffville has hosted a number of feature film shoots in addition to the Nikita location.

"It's hard to tell," he said when asked about increased spending in town by film crews.

"Some of the merchants and restaurants gained business. I think overall it was a pretty neat experience."

Mr. Button said, all things considered, he regards hosting film crews as a positive experience for the community's merchants and residents.

"You may get some publicity out of it, which is good, and the merchants are going to benefit somewhat from the crews being in town," he said.

York Region should brace itself for more attention from the film industry, according to the Ontario Media Development Corp., a branch of the provincial culture ministry.

The corporation reported \$981.6 million in industry activity in Ontario for 2001, a slightly off-year that was affected by threatened writers' strikes and, of course, the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

But domestic and foreign projects are being promoted by the office, which helps facilitate projects in the province. And York Region, given its proximity to Toronto, will continue to be scouted for location shoots.

That means money, according to Ms. Blechman, who lists a number of York Region properties among her inventory of location potentials.

"Everyone (the industry) touches, it benefits them money-wise," she said.

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