

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
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EDITORIAL

Smog reduction must be high priority

The air we breathe is smelly, dirty and dangerous to our health.

York Region ranked among the worst areas in Ontario for air quality this week, above Toronto and Hamilton in a Ministry of Environment air quality index reading released Monday.

York Region scored an alarming 59 Monday, which soared to 64 Tuesday, meaning air quality is poor. That means local residents are at greater risk of eye irritations, breathing problems and developing lung damage and heart disorders than those living in areas such as Thunder Bay, where air quality is good.

While local governments can't control air quality for all of Ontario, the latest air quality advisory emphasizes the need for politicians to step up efforts to promote better air.

Earlier this year, Newmarket, Markham, Richmond Hill, Stouffville and the region committed to measures to reduce greenhouse gases and smog-forming pollutants.

Newmarket will pass a tough anti-idling bylaw for vehicles and create a response plan for town employees and contractors on days with poor air quality. Markham has instituted a smog alert plan and is making town buildings more energy efficient.

While 2000 was cool, with York registering three smog alert days, the ministry has recorded 20 smoggy days in 2001 and 15 this year.

And with the Environment Ministry building smog detection equipment in Newmarket to test York and Durham's air quality more accurately, it's apparent the issue is finally earning widespread political attention.

Since poor air kills nearly 2,000 Ontarians a year, according to the Ontario Medical Association, it's clear changes are needed.

Ministry meteorologist Dr. David Yap said air quality changes constantly due to "transboundary pollution", a fancy term for whichever way the wind blows.

Coal-fired power plants are taking the heat for much of Ontario's pollution woes and while it's easy to demand more tax dollars be spent to update equipment, anyone who uses electricity contributes to the poor air problems.

As air quality becomes unbearable, energy capacities are reaching record proportions, which, in turn, puts greater demand on the very plants pumping out the pollution.

With a provincial election about a year away, it's time to make environment issues top priority at all political levels.

OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

More development will make Stouffville suburban nightmare

Five years ago, I moved into a small old home in the rural community of Musselman's Lake. Since that time, development in Stouffville has been frightening to behold.

I had hoped to escape the suburban wasteland forever, but it expands ever northward like an oozing fungal growth.

On my latest bicycle journey through town I saw an advertisement for a soon-to-open outlet of a restaurant chain. How many junk food joints can a town like Stouffville support? Not many, I would imagine, so I can only presume these projects indicate speculation future development will be rampant and unstoppable.

I strongly suspect this year's water ban is yet another sign of unchecked and poorly planned development in the region. The weather has been no worse than in recent summers and yet this is the first full water ban ever.

The real change in water-use is that now there are brand new golf courses and monster homes sprouting up everywhere. What ever happened to the proposed preservation of the Oak Ridges Moraine?

I see no evidence of that in and around Stouffville. If development is not halted soon, Stouffville will become the suburban nightmare I tried to leave behind.

INGRID SCHMELTER
STOUFFVILLE

Anonymous complainant had no sensitivity, kindness

Over the last month or so, my husband, along with our neighbour and a few other kind hearts, have worked endless hours in sweltering heat and humidity to build a shed in our back yard.

The shed, which stands between our two homes, looks like one but is divided in two inside. It is esthetically pleasing, with vinyl siding and a shingled roof. However, unbeknown to us, it doesn't comply with town bylaws.

After completing the shed, I received a knock on my door from a Town of Markham employee, saying one of the neighbours lodged an anonymous complaint regarding the shed. To our disbelief, we have to tear it down. Please understand we hold no grudge toward the town. It was evident the gentleman who was the bearer of bad news felt badly for us.

If the person who lodged the complaint had any sensitivity or kindness, he or she could have approached us before completion and we would have gladly complied. But it's clear this person chose to watch us waste our time, energy and money just to please himself.

To the person who has ruined all this, I say rather than wasting your time on other people's properties, perhaps you can look at the condition of your own home.

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Dave Teetzel

York commuters caught in middle of gas tax squabble

The bright side of an open rift in the federal Liberal caucus is new ideas are finally being voiced by federal politicians. The down side is these guys seem determined to divide the country the same way they are dividing themselves.

Take the dogfight over Transport Minister David Collette's suggestion GST or gas tax money be dedicated to help cities, particularly with public transit. Finance Minister John Manley quickly shut him down, declaring he would not increase gas taxes to pay for municipal programs.

City dwellers are likely to cheer Mr. Collette's efforts to, at long last, provide a steady source of transit funding.

But those in rural areas, most of whom will never have public transportation in their home towns, are going to be less than thrilled at paying even more for fuel. Right between these two factions sits York Region.

Our regional politicians have committed to creating a reliable, seamless transit system that will take 7 million trips a year off our burdened roadways.

The proposed five-year plan will increase operating costs to more than \$49 million in the next five years, more than doubling per-capita transit costs to \$40. The region is to spend more than \$200 million on transit over five years.

So you could say York Region might be able to use a cut from federal tax money.

But the idea is bitterly opposed by the current prime minister, the current finance minister and many provincial governments, most notably, Quebec.

Not that the federal government is adverse to sending a little cash the way of local governments from time to time. But that money comes in the form of one-time, job-creating infrastructure programs that tend to coincide with federal election calls.

We don't need to pay any more tax on gasoline. We're already paying 14.7 per cent provincial gas tax, 10 per cent federal excise tax and 7 per cent GST every time we fill up.

The feds get \$5 billion a year in taxes from gasoline and spend about 1/44th of that on transportation infrastructure.

So, maybe there's a little room in that pot for a dedicated transportation fund.

What's really lacking is the political will. Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion hit the nail on the head when she pointed out most MPs never receive a call from a constituent demanding their support for urban transit, so they don't attach the same priority to it as they do the squeaky-wheel issues.

If we want funding to improve public transit, reduce traffic and cut down on smog, our first step is to ask. Our next step is to keep asking until we get some action.

LETTERS POLICY

Stouffville Tribune welcomes your letters. All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The newspaper reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space.

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