

OPINION

PUBLISHER: IAN PROUDFOOT

TELEPHONE: 905-640-2612 • FAX: 905-640-8778
Email: jmason@ymg.com • website: www.yorkregion.com

Editorial

Public has right to know about sewage treatment

With yet more reports of problems at York Region's sewage treatment plants, one would think the region would be going out of its way to assure residents this is not a public health and safety issue.

Most recently, three of York Region's seven sewage treatment plants failed Ministry of Environment inspections.

At Mount Albert and Stouffville plants, effluent was being released into the environment.

In an exclusive news story in today's newspaper, former York Region employee Steve Young, who acted as a Class 4 operator in the water and wastewater department, tells how concerns he had about processes at York's sewage treatment plants fell on deaf ears.

Just one more incident in a litany of concerns.

This spring, the region was fined \$16,000 on four administrative charges.

A legal battle is to proceed Jan. 22 over ministry charges resulting from a spill in Sutton in May 2001.

Last August, 200,000 litres of sewage spilled into Tannery Creek. The ministry continues to investigate. The region was previously fined \$35,000 over a large sewage spill in Markham.

Rather than assure the public steps are being taken to address what appears to be systemic problems with its sewage treatment facilities, regional officials have yet to even acknowledge problems exist.

Instead of assuring residents the environment is safe, however, York Region has refused to answer even the most rudimentary questions. It even refused to disclose how many treatment plants it operates and where they are located, using the hapless excuse of the upcoming court case over the Woodrider Bend mishap in Sutton.

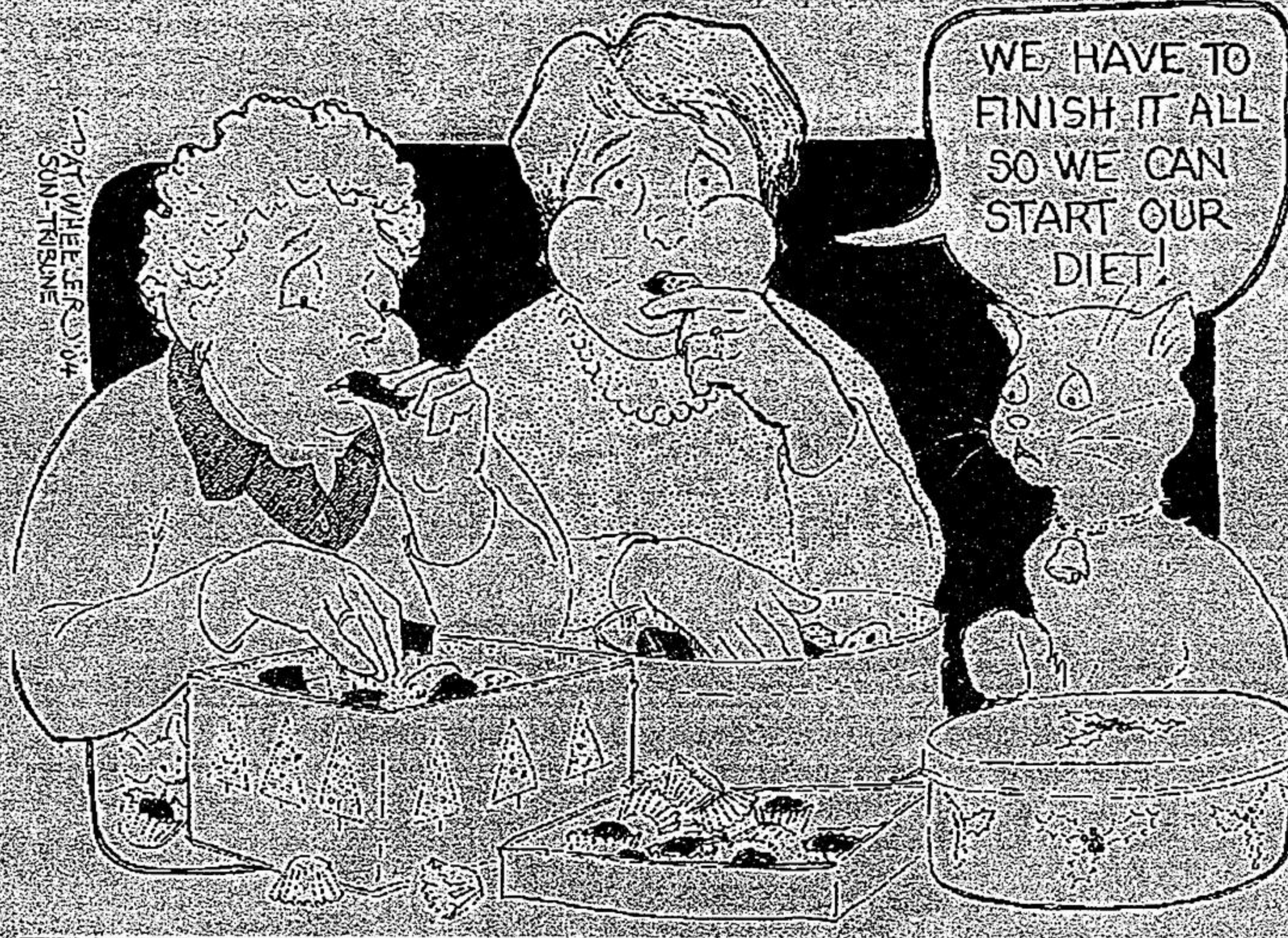
York Region has clearly forgotten for whom it works — us.

Fortunately for the public, we are finding out about the problems due to the ministry's tough new stance — as disturbing as that may be to a region that prefers to keep things under wraps.

Let's not ignore the lesson of Walkerton.

The ministry has cracked down on water filtration plants, clearly it's time to take a tougher look at sewage treatment.

Instead of focusing on fighting ministry charges, the region should be answering questions about the reliability of the sewage treatment system.



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

Beyond facade of Main Street growth

An old friend popped into Whitchurch-Stouffville over the Christmas holidays.

He left flabbergasted. "What have they done with our town?" he said.

A resident of the community in the 1960s and 1970s, he was on the anti-prohibition forces that fought for liquor and beer stores in Stouffville. (They eventually won, doing away with the days of Stouffvillites driving to Markham for potable favourites.)

Now living in Durham Region, our friend has been back to the old hometown, but not in the last two years.

"I don't like it," he said. "Too much, too fast."

Those of us who drive Main Street every day take for granted the changes that have occurred on the strip.

Call it the shift west. Twenty-one years ago, downtown Stouffville had two hardware stores, a shoe store, three clothing stores and a grocery store. All were mom and pop operations. No more.

Now, west-end Stouffville looks pretty much like the entrance to Orillia, Sault Ste. Marie or Belleville, with the same fast food, video and grocery stores.

Despite my friend's reservations, there's little anyone could have done to alter the look.

My concern is less esthetic. Sobey's, A&P, Giant, Tiger, Blockbuster, Burger King and the others didn't pour millions of dollars into the Main Street strip to service the 12,000 or so folks who now call Stouffville home.

They're after the business from hundreds of new homes that will be built here after the Big Pipe sewage system is hooked to Stouffville later this year.

And with those homes will come thousands of newcomers looking to register their kids in minor sports, take night school courses and go out for an evening.

Are we ready for them and the fallout? What about the social consequences of growth?

Will the Markham Stouffville Family Life Centre offer more courses here? Will Neighbourhood Watch have a revival in a town where vandalism and theft are already the biggest troubles? Will we get the additional police patrols residents want?

We'll see, very soon.
Jim Mason is editor of the Stouffville Sun-Tribune.

Letters to the Editor

Stouffville sewage plant example of growth problems

If one was properly motivated, it seems unlikely it would take a whole lot of time or effort in perusing the recent archives of this publication before one would come across a trend.

One would find accounts of a concerned individual or group telling the council of the day the process of approving every residential, retail or commercial development brought before them without first ensuring the proper infrastructure existed would return in the not-so-distant future and bite us on a fleshy place where we would prefer not to be bitten.

Judging by the story *Trouble Brewing at York Plants* in the Dec. 26 Sun-Tribune, that exact scenario has reared its ugly head before us.

Stouffville's waste treatment plant apparently is prone to causing some environmental damage and may lead to charges laid. Hmm.

No doubt this legal effluent will stick to the hapless operators of the facility and not the politicians whose lack of foresight caused the problems of under capacity in the first place.

Sadly, these days, far too many politicians suffer from the unfortunate malady that allows them to make hastily imprudent deci-

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sions without at least some small part of their brains considering the possible ramifications.

Too much waste created for the sewage plant to handle. Not enough water in the summer for basic needs, prompting rationing and shortages.

Gridlock-inducing traffic. Noise. Pollution. Blackouts. Crime.

Need I go on? One thing is for sure, though. Rampant growth, without the proper safeguards in place, is a recipe for disaster and in some cases may even border on criminal.

Even more sadly, however, it is usually someone or something else who ends up paying the price for the lack of consideration given to such matters.

And as for those who are really at fault? They are lucky to have two things going for them. Elections are years apart. And voters have frighteningly short memories.

HUGO T. KROON
BETHESDA

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34 Civic Ave., 3rd Floor, Stouffville, Ontario L4A 7Z5

Phone: 905-640-2612 • Fax: 905-640-8778
Classified: 1-800-743-3353 • Distribution: 905-294-8244
Website: www.yorkregion.com • Email: jmason@ymg.com

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