

Stouffville Says

By Hannelore Volpe

Do you think 2004 will be better or worse than last year? Why?

— Asked in Stouffville

Stephanie OLDHAM



There is a lot of change in the air, a lot of it good. With more people coming into town, maybe they will shop and dine in Stouffville.

Edy ZEMP



With SARS, war and mad cow, we got every thing in 2003. With the stock market and mutual funds going up, there are good signs.

Eileen BELGUE

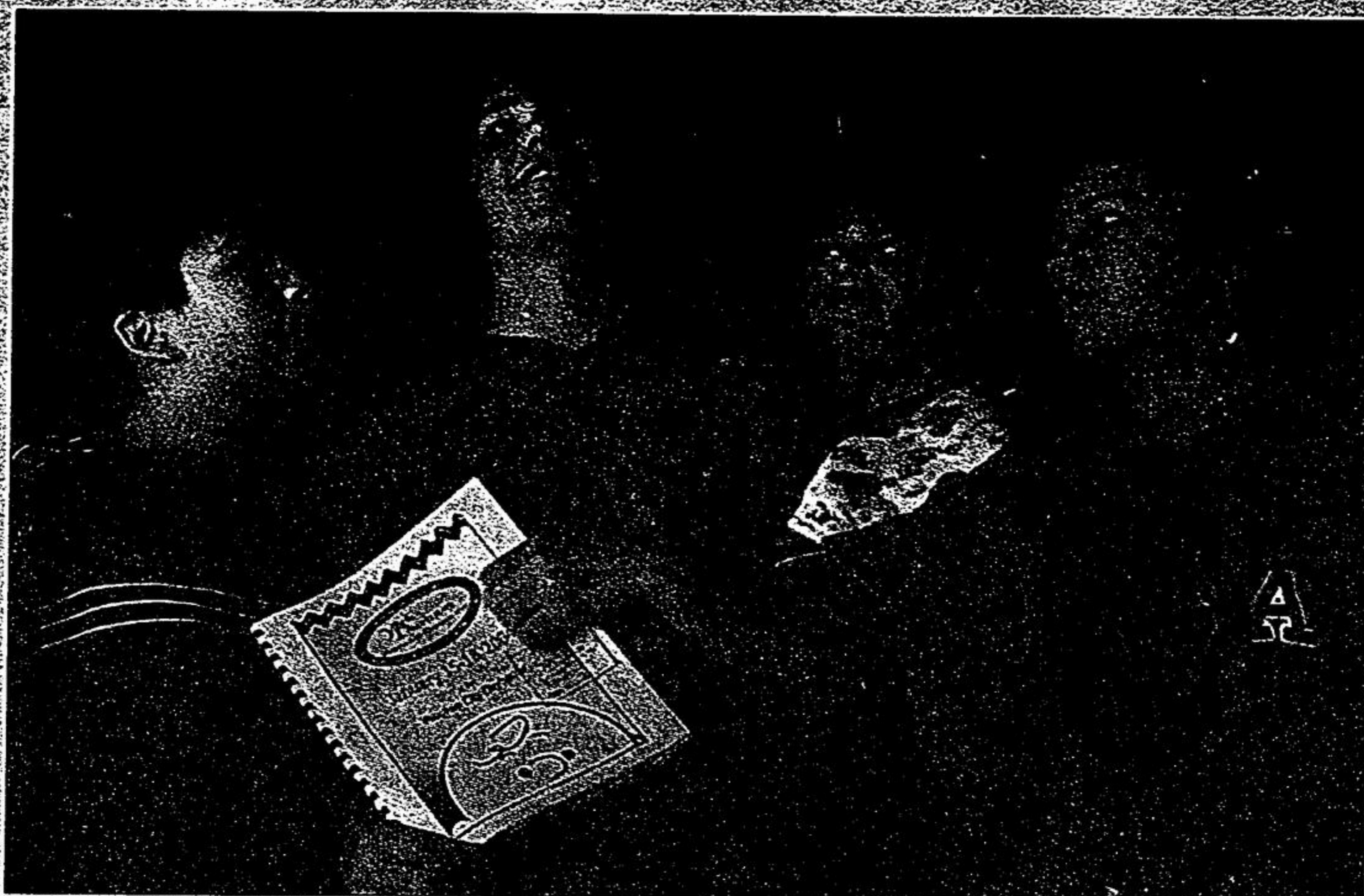


We are looking forward to local politicians having infrastructure in place to maintain new subdivisions before building in 2004.

Jake FULLERTON



I think 2004 will be better because my brother is saying my name and my mom's name he's starting to talk.



STAFF PHOTO/BILL ROBERTS

Almost show time

Adam Paulikot (left), Braedon Quarles, Geordie Hill and Kimiko Carter of the York Durham Academy for the Performing Arts rehearse at Christ Church Anglican in Stouffville. The academy presents *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown* and *A Chorus Line* at the Vaughan City Playhouse Jan. 16 to 18. For tickets, call 905-882-7469.

New park, road work in budget

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

The average homeowner in Whitchurch-Stouffville will see the municipal portion of their tax bill shoot up by \$30 in 2004, if the new mayor's predictions come true.

Mayor Sue Sherban's desk is covered in preliminary budget work. Elected in November, the mayor and six councillors are busy preparing to strike their first budget. Talks to cover the capital budget will be held Tuesday, while the operating budget is expected to be delivered Feb. 24.

The hike will not exceed three per cent, the mayor said. The 2003 budget totaled \$14.2 million and reflected a 2.9 per cent tax hike. "We'll try to keep it down as much as possible, but it will come in about the same as it did last year. The increase will be somewhere between 2.5 and 3 per cent," she said.

The average house in Whitchurch-Stouffville, valued at \$250,000, received a tax bill totaling just over \$3,000 last year. That included \$768 for the municipal portion, \$1,390 for York Region and \$932 for education. If the mayor's prediction proves true, the municipal portion for 2004 will be approximately \$800.

While trying to keep a lid on taxes and maintain levels of service, Whitchurch-Stouffville council is facing some new challenges.

As was expected, items slated to show up on the capital budget include a theatre complex. It's been valued at about \$1.5 million.

"We are definitely looking at the theatre," Mrs. Sherban said. "I'd like to see it somewhere on the five-year forecast."

'We are definitely looking at the theatre.'

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Hoover Park Drive residents will be pleased to see \$500,000 earmarked to build Byers Pond Park.

About \$500,000 is expected to be set aside for reconstruction of Main Street. Meanwhile, another \$500,000 will be needed to reconstruct West Lawn Crescent, the mayor said.

The operating budget will definitely take some extra work. About \$200,000 must be carved out to pay for contributions to

the town's employee pension fund. The town's 84 full-time employees will also contribute \$200,000 to the fund. "This is a huge increase to our operating cost," Mrs. Sherban said.

Taxpayers can expect to hand over an additional \$30,000 in rent for the municipal offices on Sandiford Drive.

A four per cent increase means the rent will be \$142,000 a year or \$15,000 a month. As well, \$1 million is expected to be spent on roads again this year.

Since fire calls were up in 2003, the cost of delivering fire services is on the increase, she said. Since there's been a decrease in revenues linked to waste disposal, garbage continues to be a high-cost item.

To save \$10,000 last year, council ended such services as street vacuuming and leaf blowing. There's been no move to reinstate either service.

"We had a few comments at the beginning," she said, "but I haven't heard any hue and cry. There have been no petitions or letter-writing tied to either (service)."

The town's reserve fund sits at about \$8.5 million. "Yes, our reserves are in good shape," Mrs. Sherban said. "I haven't heard that there's any big item to touch the reserve money."

Briefly

Oh, Christmas tree, what lovely mulch you make

Christmas tree today — mulch tomorrow.

That is the fate of about 2,000 discarded Christmas trees left at the curb for pick up in Whitchurch-Stouffville this week. The trees, which should have all decorations and tinsel removed, are being picked up on regular collection days.

They will be transported to a composting facility on Bloomington Road near Leslie Street, run by Miller Waste Systems, where they will be chipped to be sold as mulch and bedding for summer gardens and parks.

In January 2002, around 2,000 Christmas trees were collected from the municipality's curbs, Paul Whitehouse, director of public works, said. The collection is part of the town's yard waste program.

Throughout York Region, 200 tons of yard waste (mostly Christmas trees) were collected in January 2002. That figure jumped to 300 tons for January 2003.

Year-round yard waste collection for 2003 was up substantially over the previous year, with just under 15,000 tons collected in 2002 and about 19,500 tons in 2003. Andy Campbell, director of waste management for York Region, said.

York Region used less than 50 per cent of the Bloomington Road composting facility's capacity, he added. The growth in yard waste volume is partly due to the Region's four per cent annual growth rate. About 40,000 new people come to York Region each year, Mr. Campbell said.

The destination of next year's Christmas trees is uncertain. With the three-month extension to Miller Waste Systems' contract expiring at the end of March, York Region council will decide in the spring who will handle the region's waste programs, which may include household waste composting.

—Hannelore Volpe

Quoteworthy

'The acoustics are perfect there.'

David Duggan, Men of Note chorus, on recording new CD. See story on page 7.

Contacting Us

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