

Farmers, mayor differ on Stouffville's future

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Street, shares Mr. Forsyth's melancholy.

"The best farmland is under houses," he said.

Mr. Grant, with other family members, sold and then leased back their 150-acre farm in 1987 to an Ontario numbered company.

Mr. Grant, who still lives next to the farm, thought it would be developed into a golf course and was saddened when he learned houses would be built on it.

"To know that the soil is going to be pushed into a pile and the only thing it's going to push up is somebody's lawn, it's hard to see," Mr. Grant said.

"I wished I sold my house a long time ago so that I wouldn't have to see all this development in my back yard."

But for Mr. Grant and Mr. Forsyth it's more than the loss of good agricultural land.

They're concerned the character of Stouffville will change for the worse.

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Gary Grant
former farm owner

"I don't think we (Stouffville residents) can really understand what's going to happen here," Mr. Grant said.

"The change will be massive. The character of the town will be gone. We'll need to drive down O'Brien Avenue or up Church Street to remember what the town was like. We'll just be another town, a small city," he said.

"My wife's always thought she'd like to live in town. I said 'If we sit here long enough we'll be in it.' The town's com-



SUE SHERBAN: Small-town feeling can remain in Stouffville with growth, mayor says.

ing out to meet me."

"It's the end of an era. Stouffville was once a great farming community," Mr. Forsyth said, predicting the town will soon be just a bedroom community of Toronto.

"The children growing up today are going to see a different Stouffville from what we dreamed it would be."

While acknowledging growth will be fast, Ms. Sherban said the small-town heritage will remain important.

"That is the most important part of the growing community," she said.

"I don't believe there will be a change in the actual feel of this community. We're still small. We have the opportunity to be country, to still have that kind of connectivity. But you have to want it."

"If you're going to wish it away then it's going to go. But if you are going to wish it to stay, then I believe you're going to keep it."

"There's no reason why you can't walk down our main street and say hi to your school friends or your neighbours."

Not all farmers look negatively on the planned development.

Frank Hulshof, 77, and his family have a 50-acre vegetable farm on Bloomington Road east of Hwy. 48.

He sells produce directly to the public and is pleased Whitchurch-Stouffville's population is going to grow.

"I like people moving in. The more cars on the road the more you sell," he said. "It's good for business."

Mr. Hulshof is not concerned with houses occupying farmland.

"It doesn't bother me a bit," he said. "There's lots of land. This will stay as farmland for a long time yet," he said referring to his farm.

While Mr. Hulshof described the housing development as progress, he is not so keen to embrace it all.

A power centre of big box stores planned off Hwy. 48 south of Ringwood road bothers him.

"It's going to kill Stouffville downtown. There'll be no downtown at all," he said.

Just the opposite, said Ms. Sherban.

For the downtown area to thrive, it needs a larger business and industrial base around the town to provide the market it needs, she said.

'It doesn't bother me a bit. There's lots of land. This will stay as farmland for a long time yet.'

Frank Hulshof,
farmer

"Look at Unionville. It's active and alive because of the corporate community that surrounds it. Not because of the residential base," she said.

Meanwhile Mr. Grant looks wistfully at the fields he farmed until last August.

"It really hits home when you take off your last crop and you know that's it," he said.

"It's provided me with everything I've got in my life."

In a voice quivering with emotion he adds, "It's just going to be really tough."

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