

Town needs money from Parkview project: Smith

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have to be stepped up.

Council first turned down Parkview's request for a fees exemption in August. Mayor Sue Sherban asked town staff in December to come up with a creative solution allowing Parkview Home some financial relief.

Councillors couldn't agree on a solution at Tuesday's meeting. Councillors Rob Hargrave and Phil Bannon favoured total exemption from the fees.

"When do we stop supporting our seniors?" Councillor Bannon said in an emotional plea. "The answer is: we don't."

The people currently living at

Parkview Home gave "100 per cent of their time" as leaders of the community, Councillor Hargrave said. "We will fail as a council if we do not give them a full exemption."

ALMOST CRIMINAL

The decision to charge the fees came after much soul searching by the rest of the councillors. There should be more support by regional and provincial levels of government for such facilities, Councillor Clyde Smith said. He called their lack of support "almost criminal".

He was looking to the needs of the entire municipality when he made his decision, noting the town needs development charge revenues to build and upgrade its infrastructure for the boom in development to

come over the next 10 years. He said Parkview Home was receiving a huge benefit from the town already by not paying taxes for regular town services and infrastructure.

Councillors Bannon and Susanne Hilton tried to get other councillors on board for partial exemptions, but without success. Councillor Hilton, too, was concerned about a potential shortfall in town revenue of around \$18 million over the next decade due to rapid development.

It wouldn't be fair to grant the exemption to just one facility, Councillor Ken Ferdinands noted. Parkview Home is tax-sheltered, he said, while he's heard from seniors living in their own homes who are worried about losing them due to

high taxes.

Every taxpayer already supports Parkview to some extent, he said, adding, "the community has not abandoned Parkview."

Noting he's supported Parkview Home over the years, even to the extent of providing a loan of his own money in the early years, Councillor Harry Bowes wasn't able to support an exemption.

"We have to maintain the financial integrity of the community," he said. "I have to think again about spending the money of taxpayers of Whitchurch-Stouffville."

Mayor Sue Sherban was disappointed at the outcome, saying, "Again, we have not provided our seniors with assistance from the municipality."



ROB HARGRAVE: Stouffville councillor supported full exemption from fees for new Parkview Home.

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Poverty, poor health affect literacy level

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"In school, if I didn't understand, they pass me over," said the young mother. "Here, I have to do it until I get it. It's wonderful."

She has aspirations of taking college courses and become an emergency operator.

"My prime motivation to be here is my daughter," she said. "I felt I needed to do something for both of us, to make us both proud and to earn a living that isn't minimum wage."

IMPROVE SKILLS

Margaret is an unemployed 42-year old Newmarket resident looking to improve her math, computer and spelling. Ultimately, she wants a full-time administrative position.

"I went to public school in Toronto," she said. "If I had a problem, they just didn't take the time to teach me properly like they do here. I've been here three months and I have made good progress."

At 25, Laura could not multiply or divide numbers.

"I failed Grade 11 math and it was hard to get extra help," she said. "The classes were ridiculous. There were too many students. Here it's awesome. I hope to get my graduate equivalency diploma."

The diploma is also 17-year old Ryan's quest. Having left school in Grade 8, the teenager was aware his limited math and English skills would hamper entry to the working world.

"I've been here three months and I'm doing well," he said. "It's a great environment and I like the personalized instruction."

The literacy council serves up to 130 adult students annually with the help of two full-time staff, a pair of

part time employees and 50 volunteer tutors, executive director Trisha Muise said. The bulk of students are aged 25 to 45, though some are in their 70s.

"The number of students may sound small, but these are the people who know about us," she said. "One of our greatest challenges is to tell people we exist."

Citing International Adult Literacy and Statistics Canada surveys, Ms Muise said 16 per cent of Canadians have reading skills too limited to allow them to deal with the majority of written material and adults with low literacy skills are likely to be unemployed. Literacy problems impact negatively on health and standards of living.

Contributing factors are varied, she said.

"Although they were part of the school system, some people didn't get fundamentals and basics," said Ms Muise. "They may not have received special attention or had learning disabilities. Poverty and health are also issues that relate to low literacy skills."

PROGRAMS TONIGHT

The council, in tandem with public libraries in Aurora, Newmarket and Bradford, will celebrate Family Literacy Day with special programs beginning tonight at 7 p.m. at each location.

Literacy Council York Simcoe information is available by calling 905-853-6279 or visiting www.lcys.ca on line. Literacy Council York South in Thornhill can be reached at 905-771-7323. The Learning Centre for Georgina can be accessed 905-476-9900. York's literacy councils are members of the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy, a network resource for literacy practitioners. For information call 416-961-4013.