

OPINION

Stouffville
Sun-Tribune

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Editorial

Solutions needed to battle tax hikes

You buy a home in York Region, check your annual tax bill and expect it to remain relatively static.

Not so fast. It's getting harder and harder for municipalities to avoid significant tax increases.

The reality is York's relatively stable tax bills have been fueled by development charges, the double-edged sword of the budget process.

The one-time fees, charged on all new homes, pay for the new sewers, roads, recreation centres, libraries and other services new residents require. It's often described as "growth paying for growth".

York Region had \$425 million in development charges banked a year ago.

Fair enough.

But eventually roads and sewers need to be repaired, recreation centres and libraries need to be staffed and those costs must come from the tax bill.

When growth slows down, it leaves existing homeowners to pick up the tab.

There are signs the pendulum is reversing and taxpayers must pay the price for what has been built or implemented to accommodate growth.

York Region council wrestled a proposed 8.9-per-cent tax hike to 6.1 per cent last week. That's still not enough for some councillors. The regional budget committee is looking for more cuts at a meeting today.

It's important to note last week's cuts were made to proposed improvements to roads, transit and police, not existing services. But there is still reason to be concerned, according to the York Regional Police Association. Police are already stretched to their limit, association president John Miskiw said.

As Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Sue Sherban says, residents are unlikely to accept a plan that appears to compromise public safety.

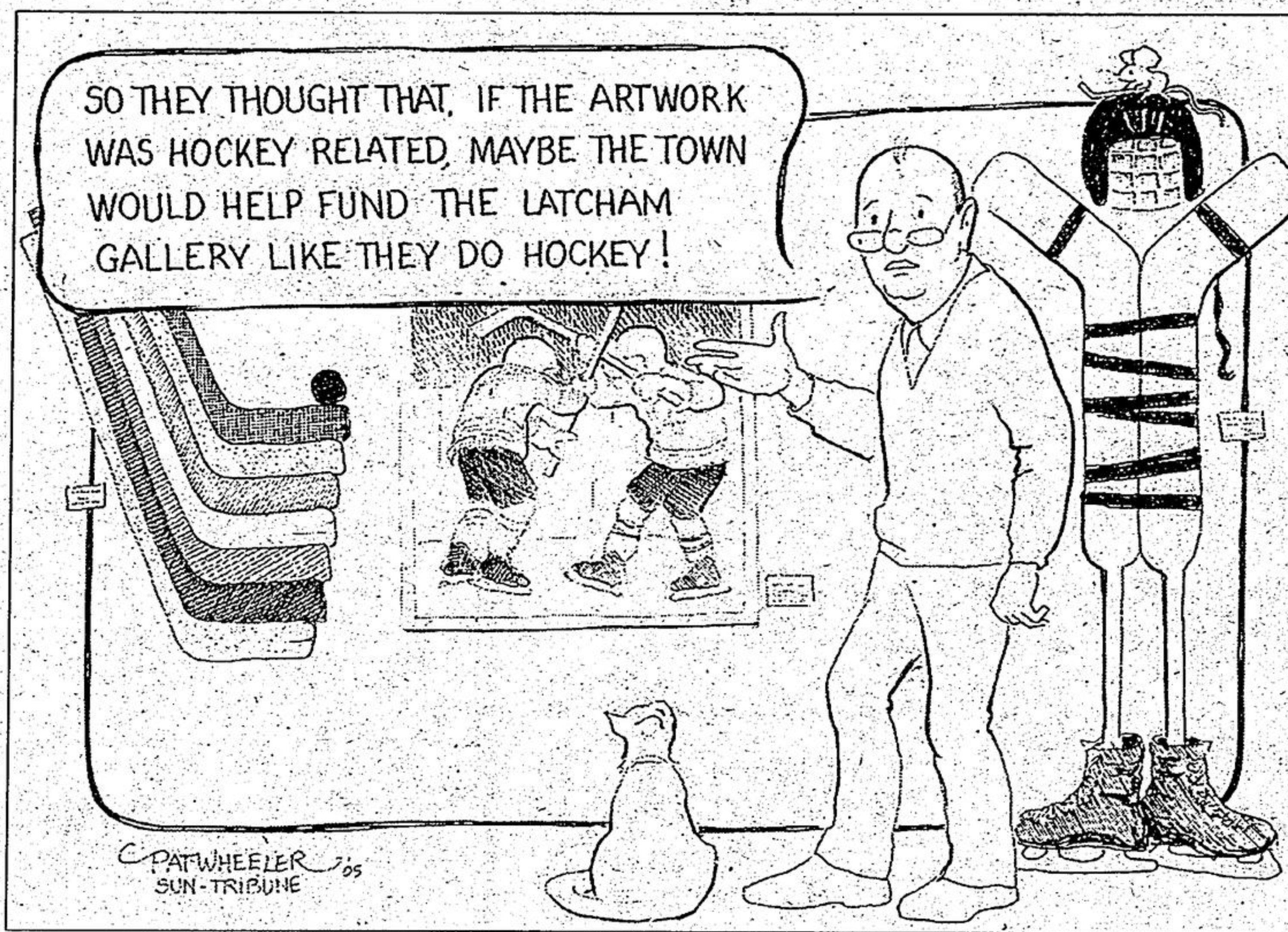
But it's increasingly difficult to find areas that can be cut. And there's a limit to how much taxes can be increased. York Region residents already pay their fair share. Taxes on a median-valued home in 2003 were \$2,853 in Toronto, \$3,373 in Mississauga and \$4,411 in Markham.

What's the answer?

For starters, drop the GTA pooling of taxes that sees York residents subsidize social programs in Toronto.

Maybe development charges aren't high enough, despite the lobbying of the building industry.

York residents can't afford to continue tinkering with budgets to bring down massive tax increases year after year.



Letters to the Editor

Don't privatize LCBO like Tories did with Hwy. 407, McGuinty

Re: *Industry lauds LCBO review, Jan. 20.*

Elio Radocchia, owner of Al Casale Ristorante in Newmarket, believes "privatizing alcohol sales is the answer". To what I'm not sure.

The suggestion infuriates me more every time I hear it.

The Liquor Control Board of Ontario generates billions in revenue year after year and will continue to do so. The thought of selling this now to balance the budget for one or two years defies logic.

This could make the sale of Hwy. 407 look like a good deal. Mr. Harris received \$2 billion to \$3 billion a few years ago for the 407 and I suspect most of us can't even remember what year that enabled him to balance the budget. All we know is that it didn't last long.

Now, for the next 90 years, our children and grandchildren will be paying billions annually to a private corporation, money that could have been government revenue to lower taxes.

How could it possibly be good for Ontario to terminate jobs that pay a decent wage and replace them with minimum-wage jobs?

How could it possibly be good for Ontario to give up control over liquor distribution, particularly to minors?

Do we really want to become like Buffalo or Niagara Falls, N. Y., with rather seedy "package" stores on every corner?

The sale of the LCBO makes no economic sense and would be a betrayal by Dalton McGuinty of every taxpayer who voted for a Liberal government.

BLAKE TUFFORD
WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE

The Stouffville Sun-Tribune welcomes your letters. All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The Stouffville Sun-Tribune reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space. Write: Letters to the Editor, 34 Civic Ave., P.O. Box 154, Stouffville, L4A 7Z5, e-mail jmason@yrng.com

Councillors let town down on Parkview Home fees

Re: *Council won't back down on Parkview, Jan. 27.* Whitchurch-Stouffville council let down the community once again Jan. 25.

It could have voted for a reduced development fee for the construction of the new Parkview non-profit nursing home in Stouffville, thus encouraging York Region to cancel its development fee of \$267,000.

Now, however, due to the shortsightedness of four council members, the home must pay full local development fees of \$324,000.

It has taken two years of hard work and dedication to raise the initial \$2 million for this project. Now nearly \$600,000 of that must be paid for development fees when it had been possible to cancel much of that amount.

I thank Mayor Sue Sherban for her support of this project and hope the four councillors who objected will never need the excellent care this nursing home will provide.

MARY MARTIN
STOUFFVILLE



Off The Top

with *Jim Mason*

Greetings from the new Hockeyville

For an afternoon, Stouffville was at the centre of the hockey universe. If Detroit is still Hockey Town, we were Hockeyville.

The crews from the Toronto newspapers, Leafs TV, TSN and other media outlets packed the Stouffville Arena with 1,300 fans and volunteers for a rare sight: NHLers playing a game during the year of the lockout.

If that wasn't weird enough, management (Toronto Maple Leafs general manager John Ferguson Jr.) was on the same side as the union (Leafs Tie Domi, Gary Roberts, Joe Nieuwendyk and Ed Belfour and Red Wing Steve Thomas) this day.

But as Nieuwendyk, he of three Stanley Cups from three different teams, told the microphones and notepads, this day wasn't about labour unrest.

It was all about Woody.

Keith 'Woody' Acton, assistant coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs, cancer survivor and local hero.

He invited his pals from almost 25 years in pro hockey and put on The Game Of Our Lives II in his hometown rink Sunday. Fans scooped up more than 1,000 tickets in 19 minutes the previous weekend.

They bought raffle tickets and game-worn jerseys, pushing the purse, to be divided by Markham Stouffville Hospital and the UFCW Leukemia Fund, to \$30,000.

He invited son Will's team, the Stouffville Spirit Jr. A squad, to provide the opposition, just like the Washington Generals challenge the Harlem Globetrotters.

Woody would say it's all about community and family and there was plenty of both.

Eddie Belfour's son, Dayn, a junior A goalie himself with Streetsville, played with his dad on Keith's team. Gary Roberts played with his brother, Greg, a Stouffville minor hockey coach, who claims he taught his brother all he knows.

As the arena emptied and Green Day's Time Of Your Life wafted down from the speakers, some of the NHLers signed paraphernalia hung over the glass.

A giddy young lad showed his dad the Tie Domi signature on his jersey as they left the rink.

All was right in Hockeyville on this day.

Jim Mason is editor of the Sun-Tribune and was an organizer of the Game Of Our Lives II.

EDITORIAL

Editor
Jim Mason
jmason@yrng.com

ADMINISTRATION

Office Manager
Vivian O'Neil
vooneil@yrng.com

EVENTS MANAGEMENT

Shows
Shouws
shouws@yrng.com

PRODUCTION

Manager
Pam Nichols
pnichols@yrng.com

ADVERTISING

Classified Manager
Ann Campbell
acampbell@yrng.com

Retail Manager

Stacey Allen
sallen@yrng.com

Managing Director, New

Business & Flyer Sales
Dawna Andrews
dandrews@yrng.com

New Business Manager

Steve Kane
skane@yrng.com

Managing Director,

Real Estate
Mike Rogerson
mrogerson@yrng.com

EDITORIAL

905-640-2612
Fax: 905-640-8778

ADVERTISING

905-640-2612/ Classified:
1-800-743-3353/Fax: 905-853-1765

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