

# Newspaper barred from brain-storming sessions

*Last minute decision closes meetings*

BY HANNELORE VOLPE  
Staff Writer

The Stouffville Sun-Tribune was barred from a town initiated brain-storming session Friday and Saturday that was held to find ways to bolster the downtown.

In previous interviews with the mayor and town staff, no mention was made that the meetings would be closed to the media.

On Friday, members voted to have the meeting, which included a walk-about in the downtown area, open to the public, Councillor Harry Bowes said. But that evening, Mayor Sue Sherban phoned resident Fred Robbins, asking him not to attend the next day.

At Saturday's meeting, the mayor announced the session would be private. However, resident Dave Probert and two other citizens who came by Latham Hall near the end of the meeting were never told to leave.

After consulting with members, the mayor decided to bar the media so ideas could flow freely without worry that comments would be recorded.

"It was council's oversight in not clarifying this decision," Mrs. Sherban said.

Everything will eventually be made public and public input will be sought, she added.

Representatives from local

organizations and interest groups met to discuss how the downtown could be improved.

Invited parties included the Whitchurch-Stouffville Chamber of Commerce, the Stouffville Business Improvement Area (BIA), The Whitchurch-Stouffville economic development advisory committee and the town's heritage advisory committee, as well as three members of the public, downtown property owners and two young people.

*'You have to get rid of the four-storey height bylaw and put condos downtown.'*

According to Mr. Bowes, discussion centred on better parking and better traffic flow as well as having a movie theatre and performing arts centre in town.

A good point made by the representative from the Economic Advisory Committee was there should be more housing in the downtown core, Mr. Bowes said.

"You have to get rid of the four-storey height bylaw and put condos downtown," Mr. Bowes said. "That is the only way you will get people down there."

Eric Button, chairperson of the Stouffville Business Improvement Area (BIA), wasn't willing to give specifics of

the meetings, noting it is a work in progress.

"There should not be any discussion outside of it," he said.

The brain-storming sessions were "a wonderful exercise", with participants putting in a lot of time and effort, Mr. Button said.

New ideas, new concepts and a new way of looking at the downtown "that we have not done in the past" came out of the meetings, the mayor added.

"It was a very positive group."

Town treasurer/administrator Nick Kristoffy noted "timing is always important. At some point you stop talking and actually do something".

Once a plan is established, money will be put in the 2006 capital budget for improvements, Mr. Kristoffy said.

Jay Meiliunas, chairperson of the board of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Chamber of Commerce, was impressed to see how well the groups worked together. He, too, was unable to provide details.

One important element coming out of the meetings, however, was changes would benefit Whitchurch-Stouffville residents first, rather than tourists or visitors.

BIA manager Ruth LeBlanc was impressed by the town's assets, which are often taken for granted, such as the 56 acres of parkland in downtown Stouffville.



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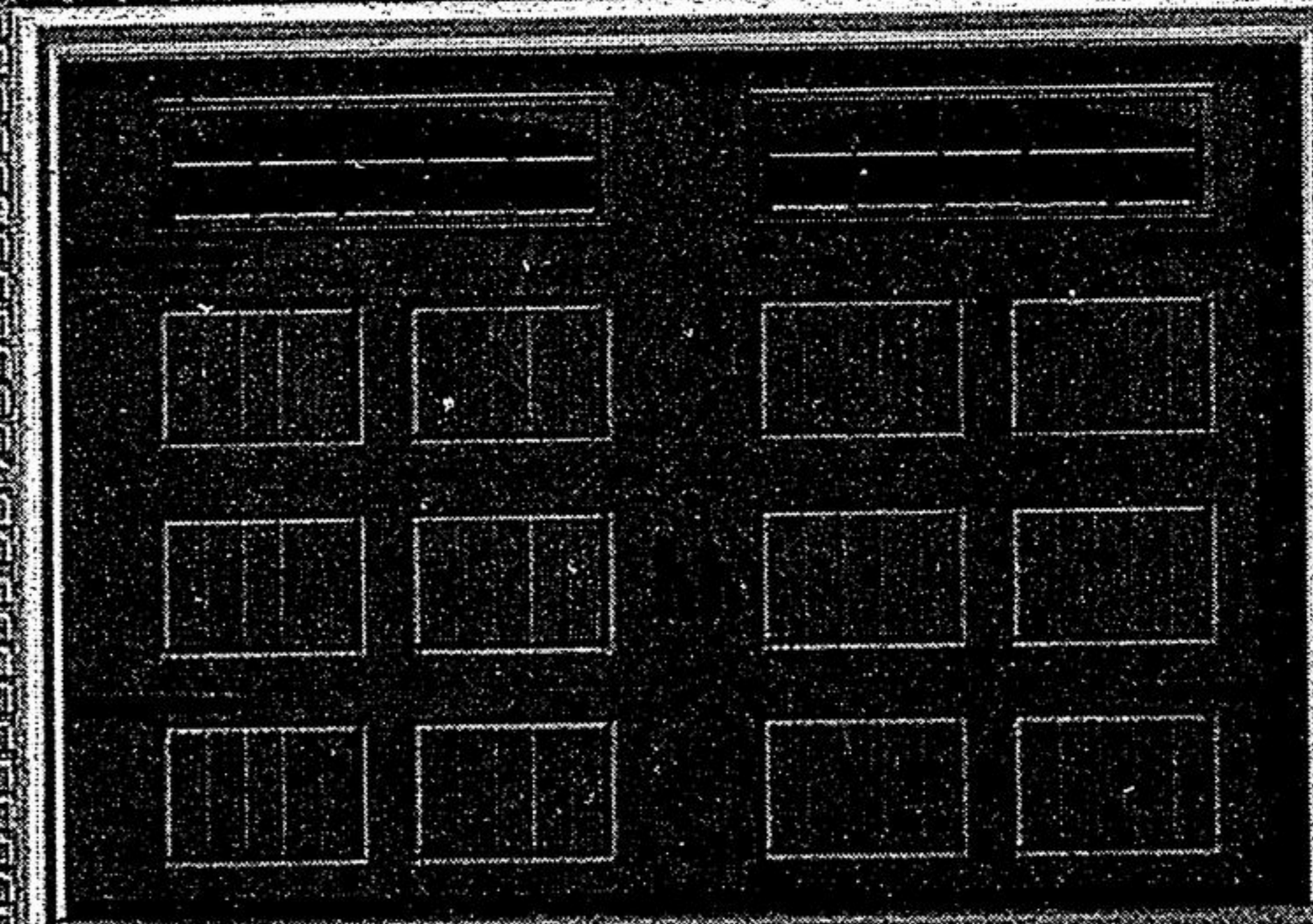
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