

International drug trail led police to York Region

BY MARTIN DERBYSHIRE
Staff Writer

Agents from the United States' Drug Enforcement Agency, with the help of the RCMP, busted two massive ecstasy distribution rings this week they allege ran from the back alleys of the Far East to the streets of York Region, Toronto and several U.S. cities.

Authorities allege the huge drug distribution and money laundering operations were responsible for pushing more than 1.5 million ecstasy tablets a month across the continent.

"This is not just the tip of the iceberg, this is a big chunk of the iceberg," DEA special agent Steve Robertson said. "We've taken down a major trafficking network here."

MDMA powder, the chemical used in ecstasy production, was allegedly smuggled into Canada, where pill press warehouses were set up to make the drug and

then smuggle bulk quantities into the United States, a DEA statement says.

Following a 24-month investigation dubbed Operation Sweet Tooth, 291 people, including nine in Toronto and York, were arrested this week.

The DEA is now working to extradite those arrested in Canada to face charges in the U.S.

There were ecstasy "distribution cells" found in York Region and Toronto, DEA spokesperson Bill Grant said.

Arrest warrants have also been issued for four additional Canadian suspects, according to the RCMP.

Approximately 931,300 MDMA tablets, 1,777 pounds of marijuana and \$ 7.75 million in U.S. assets were seized.

York Regional Police made the largest ecstasy bust in Canadian history in December 2004 seizing uncut ecstasy with a street value of over \$500 million and RCMP officials fear these lat-

est busts area part of a disturbing pattern.

"In Canada, we are seeing an increasing trend in the use of clandestine produced chemical drugs," said RCMP superintendent Ron Allen, the officer in charge of the GTA drug section which assisted in Operation Sweet Tooth. "Ecstasy has become a drug of choice at work, schools, nightclubs and house parties."

The RCMP, Canadian Border Services and York Regional Police assisted with the investigation and the execution of search warrants on this side of the border.

"With Canada, the U.S. shares more than a border, we share the determination to reclaim our neighborhoods from the grip of drugs," DEA Administrator Karen P. Tandy said. "This operation shows we will discover, dismantle, and together, decimate ecstasy trafficking organizations from the kingpin to the street dealer."

Rural towns see big increases

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will likely produce a spike at tax time, he added.

With an average increase of 16.55 per cent, Georgina was the highest in the region. A Georgina home valued at \$250,000 in 2003 would suddenly be worth \$291,375.

At 8.56 per cent, Markham was lowest. The provincial average was 12.68 per cent.

The highest increases in property values were in York's more rural municipalities — Whitchurch-Stouffville, East Gwillimbury, Georgina and King Township — where assessments increased 15 to 16 per cent.

With home prices appreciating 80 per cent over the past decade in York

Region, real estate remains a solid investment, said Jason Mercer, a senior analyst at the Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation's GTA branch.

"That's well above inflation," he said.

A robust housing market shows no signs of turning in 2006 either.

"That's underlaid by solid market factors and a good local economy," Mr. Mercer said.

For a senior citizen or anyone on a fixed income, a dramatically higher assessment can be added stress.

But assessments simply reflect the marketplace, said Gregory Baxter, account manager at MPAC.

"We believe the values are accurate, but if people feel they're not, we'll review it," Mr. Baxter said.

The Regional Municipality of York

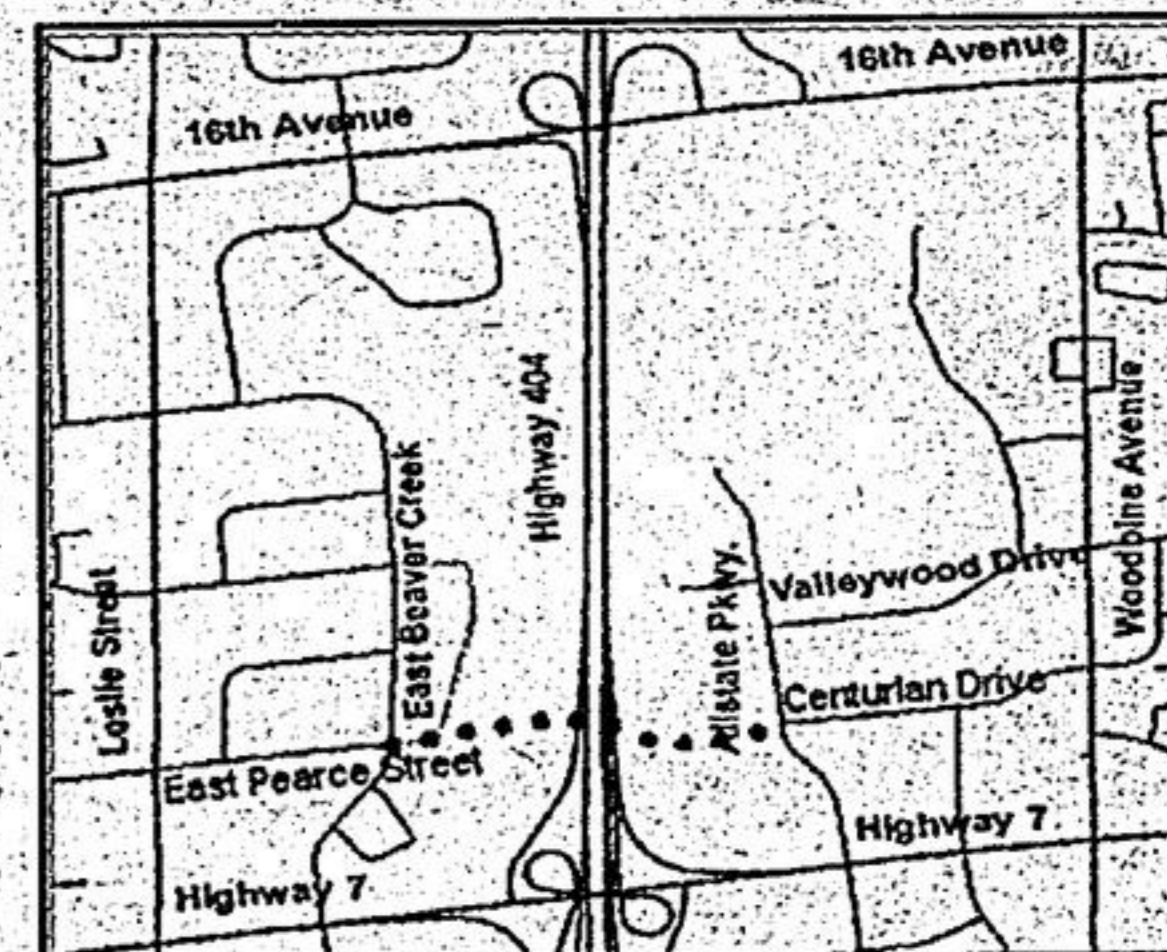
HIGHWAY 404 CROSSING BETWEEN HIGHWAY 7 AND 16TH AVENUE
CLASS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SCHEDULE C)

NOTICE OF COMPLETION

The Regional Municipality of York jointly with the Town of Richmond Hill and the Town of Markham have completed a Class Environmental Assessment Study (Class EA) to address the need for additional transportation capacity across the Highway 404 corridor between Highway 7 and 16th Avenue. The Proponents have planned this project under Schedule "C" of the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (June 2000) process.

The preferred design includes a proposed four-lane road over Highway 404 that connects East Pearce Street in Richmond Hill to Centurian Drive in Markham.

The Environmental Study Report (ESR) documents the planning and decision making process followed for this project. By this notice, the ESR is being placed on the public record for a 30-day review in accordance with the requirements of the Municipal Class EA.



Subject to comments received as a result of this Notice and the necessary approvals, the proponents intend to proceed with the detailed design and construction of the project as documented in the ESR.

The ESR will be available for public review from November 18, 2005 to December 19, 2005 at the following locations during regular business hours:

The Town of Markham	The Town of Richmond Hill	Regional Municipality of York
Office of the Clerk	Office of the Regional Clerk	Office of the Regional Clerk
Ground Floor	Ground Floor	4th Floor
101 Town Centre Blvd.	225 East Beaver Creek Road	17250 Yonge Street
Markham, Ontario	Richmond Hill, Ontario	Newmarket, Ontario
L3R 9W3	L4B 3P4	L3Y 6Z1
905-475-4744	905-771-8800	1-877-464-9675 ext. 1320

Should you have concerns with this project that cannot be addressed through consultation with the Proponents, you may request that the Minister of the Environment make an order for the project to comply with Part II of the Environmental Assessment Act. This would require the project to undergo an individual environmental assessment. The Part II Order request must be received by the Minister of the Environment by the end of the 30-day public review period, at the address listed below. If no Part II Order request is received by December 19, 2005, the Proponents will proceed with design and construction of the project.

Send Part II Order request to:
The Honourable Laurel Broten
Minister of the Environment
135 St. Clair Avenue West, 12th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M4V 1P5

Contact the Proponents at:
Steve Mota, P.Eng.
The Regional Municipality of York
Planning and Development Department
Infrastructure Planning Branch
17250 Yonge Street
Newmarket, Ontario L3Y 6Z1
Phone: 1-877-464-9675 ext. 5056
Fax: 905-895-0191
Email: steve.mota@york.ca

This notice is issued November 17, 2005.

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