

# OPINION

**Stouffville Sun-Tribune**  
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## Editorial

### How can anyone oppose openness?

Who would argue against open government?

The type of government that doesn't sneak behind closed doors every time something sensitive or politically embarrassing surfaces.

Certainly, there are issues that need to be discussed outside of the glare of public scrutiny for the good of taxpayers. They include buying or selling property, legal affairs and personnel matters, such as disciplining a town employee.

Under the Municipal Act, those are the only issues councillors should discuss in private.

But the definition of what falls within those categories can become murky. In some cases, municipal councillors have discussed their own salaries in the comfort of a private session, arguing it's a personnel matter. In other cases, less weighty but possibly embarrassing topics have been debated in secret.

There's little private citizens or reporters can do to pry open the closed door when they think councillors are overstepping their rights under the Municipal Act. And there are no penalties when municipalities keep taxpayers in the dark.

But a champion for open government may be on the way in the form of a private member's bill called the Transparency Act. Introduced by Sarnia-area MPP Caroline Di Cocco, the bill is expected to go to its final reading soon.

Perhaps the most important part of Ms Di Cocco's bill is a provision to apply consequences for going into private session illegally.

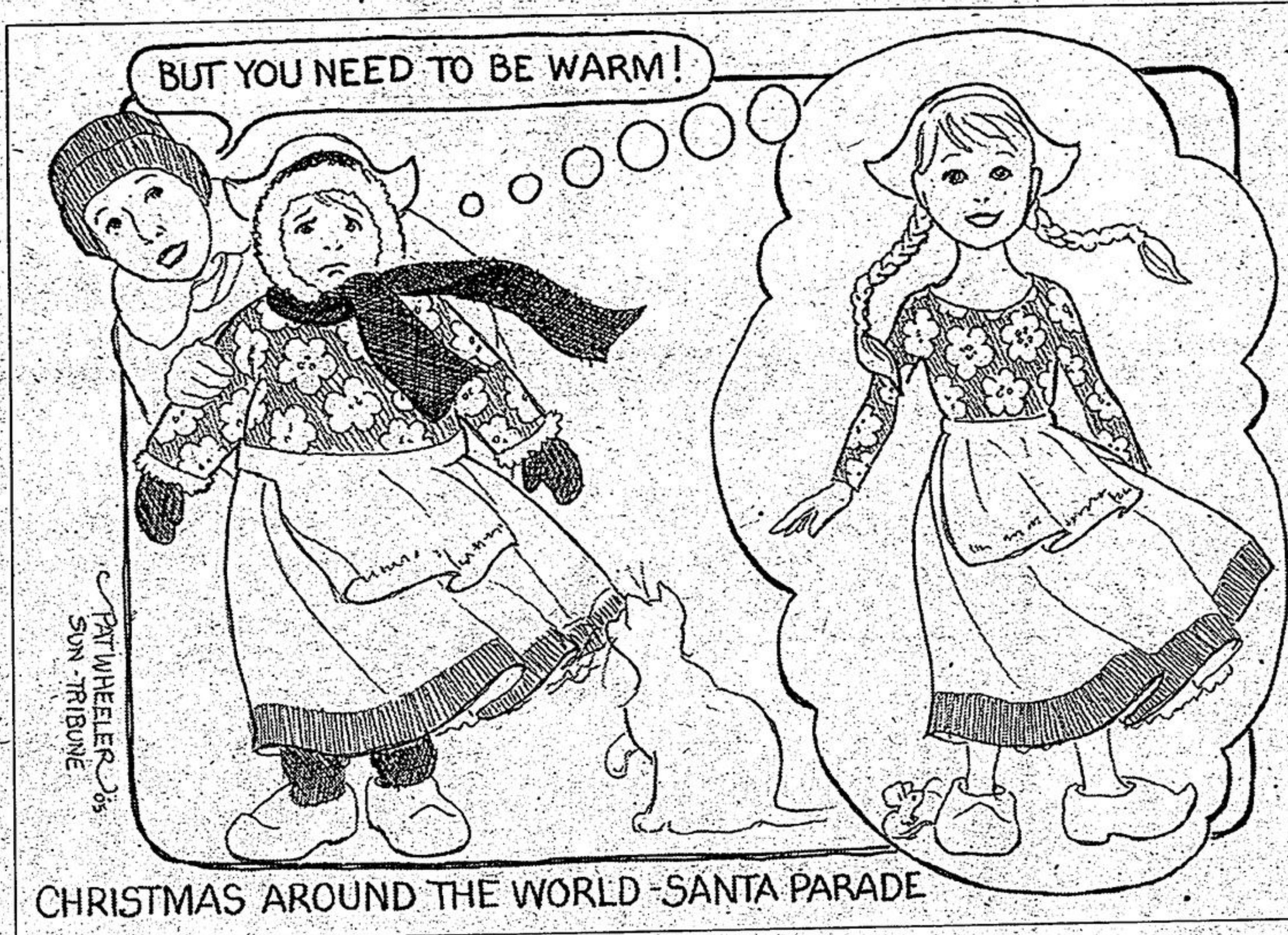
Currently a citizen who believes councillors are breaking the rules must sue the municipality, a prospect that can cost thousands of dollars and hours of personal time. Pitting David against Goliath is no way to empower citizens.

Under the Transparency Act, residents would complain to the province's privacy commission, which could impose penalties if private meetings were found to have been held improperly.

It would, at least, help keep local politicians honest. But some York Region politicians, including Aurora Mayor Tim Jones, bristle at the suggestion private meetings aren't always on the up and up.

"We get elected, supposedly, with the trust of residents to make things happen. This act assumes guilt before innocence," Mr. Jones contends.

And perhaps Aurora council has never abused the situation. But it's this kind of reaction that makes citizens wonder why their elected officials would oppose being monitored and penalized if rules are broken.



CHRISTMAS AROUND THE WORLD - SANTA PARADE



## Off The Top

with Jim Mason

### Forecast calls for smiles on Santa's parade route

Santa was dodging puddles and watching the snow melt on Stouffville's main drag Tuesday.

"Could be a messy one, Jimmy," the man said, during a scouting mission in advance of Saturday afternoon's Stouffville Kinsmen parade in his name.

"But it will be a good one, rain, snow or whatever. Always is. The children make it that way."

Maybe it was the upcoming federal election or the oncoming busyness of the holiday season, but Santa sensed tension in the good citizenry of Whitchurch-Stouffville.

"Maybe the parade will get them in the Christmas spirit," he said.

He remembers a parade here in the late 1930s. A real reindeer (unconfirmed reports say it was Rudolph) pulled Santa from Ringwood to the fire hall, then located in the heart of downtown. Firefighters handed out candy to the children who followed the sleigh.

There are fast-food restaurants with drive-throughs, sports bars, bank machines and traffic lights on the route now.

Not that Santa stops for red lights. But some things don't change.

"Even with all the new people moving into Stouffville, it's the same people I see doing all the community work," he said.

"And over the last few years, some of those fine people have passed away. I wonder if they'll be replaced."

Santa may wear red but that's not an endorsement of the Martin Liberals. He's a man of the world, a friend to all and he will not get into election predictions.

So he won't say if any MPs will be replaced, but he says there's a message behind the madness of campaigning during the holidays.

"Santa's really happy about the election," he said, a glint visible in his eyes.

"It means lovely gifts to the children and adults."

No, not political patronage or sudden funding for federal projects in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

"But if the children watch how the candidates treat each other over the next two months, they'll know how not to act."

Try putting that one under the tree, Mr. Claus.

See you Saturday. Forecast calls for smiles.

Jim Mason is editor of The Sun-Tribune.

## Letters to the Editor

### Legion should be given space in new Memorial Park

I noticed activity taking place in the parking lot north of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 459 in Stouffville earlier this fall.

Upon closer examination, I determined the cenotaph and memorial garden surrounding it are undergoing some renovation. As they were looking a little derelict and neglected lately, I was glad to see they were receiving some much needed attention.

And although I was heartened to find these efforts are being spearheaded by a group of volunteers, I was more than a little disappointed to learn from them their actions were necessitated by the fact that the town lends little or no support to the creation or maintenance of this most deserving of monuments.

And when the corner of Main Street and Ninth Line gets "fixed" by York Region and the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, the legion itself may find itself in a mighty precarious position, to say nothing of all the other homes and businesses affected by those "improvements" to re-align the intersection.

Some homes and business are already close enough to the street to give a new meaning to the phrase "drive-through".

Seeing as the legion is already bursting at the seams and has no surrounding space for the kind of activities it would like to hold, perhaps this is the right time for the town to offer up some space in the "new" Memorial Park to allow the legion to expand its facilities.

At the very least, it should free up space to allow for a proper cenotaph to be built that might properly reflect the contribution made by veterans.

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](mailto:jmason@yrng.com) or fax 905-513-7525

In light of the importance of the sacrifices made by these men and women, it is only fitting their monument be in a place where citizens can remember and appreciate their contribution to our freedom every day of the year, not just Nov. 11.

Considering everything the veterans and legion have done for Stouffville, including being one of those organizations everyone turns to when some worthy cause needs to be funded, it is high time we return the favour.

As the town considers community input for the future of Memorial Park, I hope that due consideration will be given to holding true to its name, Memorial Park.

And as for those who decry war memorials as glorification, do well to heed these words of King George V upon viewing the massed graves and memorials in Flanders, Belgium: "...I have many times asked myself whether there can be more potent advocates of peace upon Earth through the years to come, than this massed multitude of silent witnesses to the desolation of war."

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