

Firefighting deal poses safety threat, union claims

Central York spreads to Vandorf, Preston

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

A plan to offer improved fire service to Vandorf and the Preston Lake area poses a public safety threat to Aurora and Newmarket, a local politician claims.

Newmarket Councillor Dennis Ramsarran is expected to side with the local firefighters union when public safety concerns are raised at a council meeting Monday.

The Central York Professional Firefighters Association is against the plan to have its Aurora-Newmarket joint force extend its coverage to include 39 square-kilometres in Whitchurch-Stouffville that takes in the two hamlets.

"While it is commendable to want to help a neighbouring municipality, Central York is not in a position right now to render that assistance, as recommended by the fire chief, without negatively impacting the current level of service that is provided to the citizens of Newmarket and Aurora," Local 251 firefighter association president Rob Leathen said.

Vandorf's and Preston Lake's gain will not be a loss for Newmarket and Aurora

loss, Central York Fire Services Chief John Molyneaux insists.

The fire chief said he's confident public safety is not being compromised by a new two-segment fire-coverage plan designed to include parts of Whitchurch-Stouffville.

But Mr. Ramsarran wants the plan altered to ensure Aurora and Newmarket will not be left short-changed if local firefighters are dealing with a Whitchurch-Stouffville call.

"I'd rather err on the side of more protection versus less protection," Mr. Ramsarran said.

The recommended coverage plan stipulates in the event of a building fire, three trucks from Central York Fire Services will be dispatched to the scene with backup from Whitchurch-Stouffville's fire department. As well, a "call back" option that involves calling off-duty firefighters can be put in place.

In the event of a Whitchurch-Stouffville incident such as, including a remote-alarm call or someone reporting a smell of smoke, two fire trucks will be sent with backup from Whitchurch-Stouffville. But, the option to call off-duty firefighters to service will not be exercised, the fire chief

explained.

Mr. Leathen recently outlined some of the association's concerns at a joint committee meeting of three councillors from Aurora and three councillors from Newmarket.

The final 3-2 vote supported the fire chief. Committee member Aurora Councillor Phyllis Morris was absent.

The firefighters' union is prepared to take its fight to councils in Aurora and Whitchurch-Stouffville, the union president said.

If the plan gets the nod,

the Central York Fire Services' coverage area for the next six years will include the area of Davis Drive to Hwy. 404 south to Bloomington Road and east to half way between Warden Avenue and Kennedy Road.

"We have an Aurora fire station within a mile of Vandorf," Chief Molyneaux said.

"The plan will be monitored and a review will be held in six months. Yet, if we determine there's an issue, it could be reviewed in 10 days."

As chairperson of the joint six-member committee,

Aurora Councillor John West backs the fire chief.

"Whatever the fire chief says is accurate," Mr. West said.

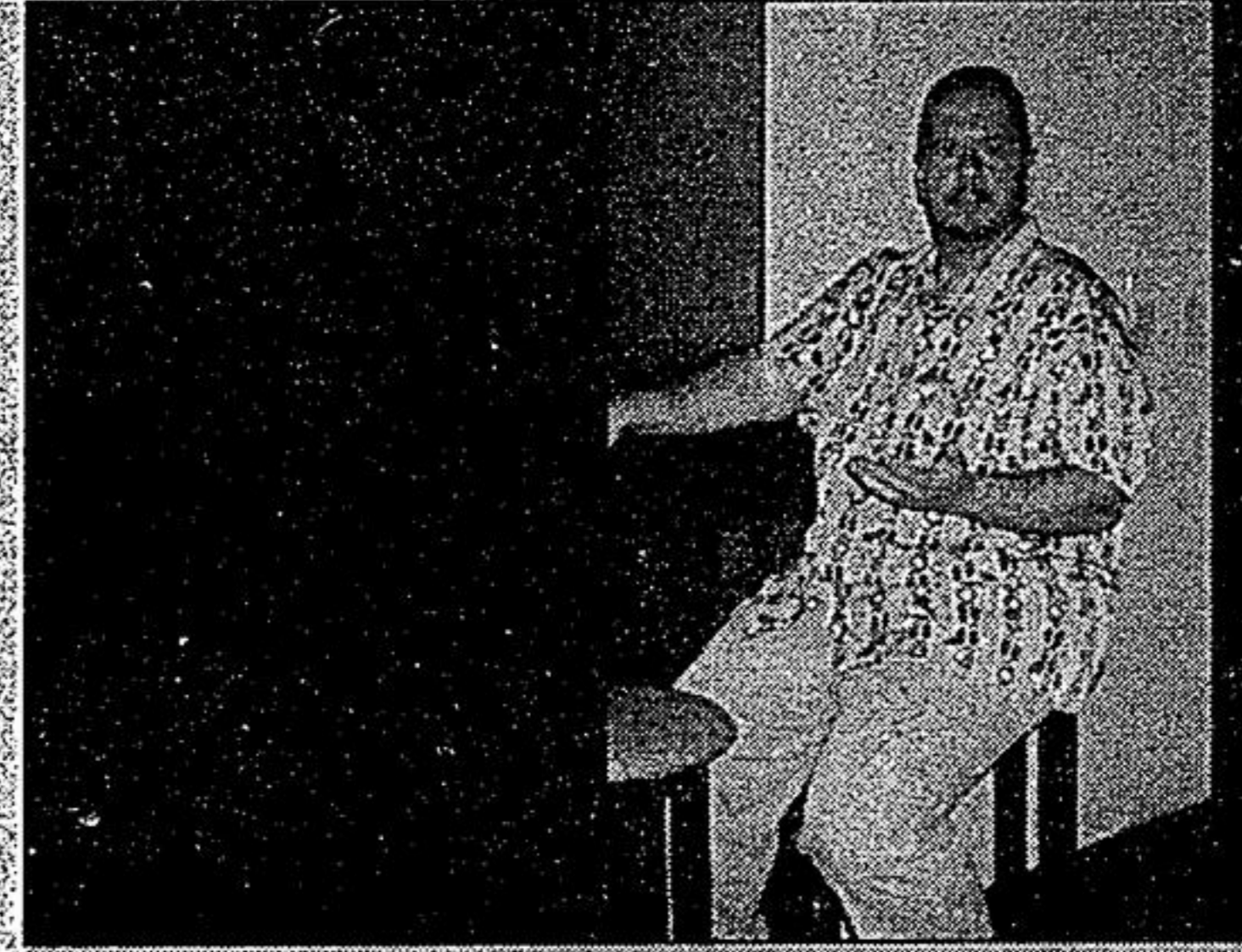
The agreement includes Whitchurch-Stouffville paying a \$100,000 retainer fee in addition to fees charged on a per-call basis.

In past years, the Aurora Fire Department provided protection in the Vandorf and Preston Lake area, but that coverage was discontinued when Whitchurch-Stouffville opened its new station in Ballantrae six years ago.



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