

Fire plan approved over protests

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

Despite a claim public safety will be jeopardized in Aurora and Newmarket, a plan to extend fire service to Vandorf and Preston Lake got the go-ahead Monday.

Firefighters didn't pull any punches in telling Newmarket council a plan to have Central York Fire Services look after a 39-square-kilometre area, taking in Vandorf and Preston Lake, is flawed.

"It is not fair to the taxpayers of Newmarket and Aurora to put the safety of another community ahead of its own," according to Rob Leathen, president of the Central York Professional Firefighters Association.

But Mayor Tom Taylor backs the plan.

"This is a win-win for both municipalities," Mr. Taylor said.

The winners are the residents of Whitchurch-Stouffville, Mr. Leathen argued.

"The losers are the taxpayers of Newmarket and Aurora who are now paying for the full-time fire protection Whitchurch-Stouffville now enjoys."

Fire protection is not being threatened in Newmarket and Aurora by this six-year agreement, Central York Fire Services Chief John Molyneux said.

"We have recently opened a new fire station in Aurora that is

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Rob Leathen
president, Central York Professional Firefighters Association

located within a few kilometres of the new service area. With the agreement in place, we now expect to shorten the fire-response time for Vandorf residents without impacting the service to Newmarket and Aurora," the fire chief said.

In a 5-3 vote, Newmarket council supported the coverage plan, which stipulates in the event of a structural fire such as a burning house, three trucks from Central York Fire Services will be sent with backup from Whitchurch-Stouffville.

As well, a call back option involving calling in off-duty firefighters can be put in place.

In the event of a non-structural fire, including a remote-alarm call, two fire trucks will be sent with backup from Whitchurch-Stouffville. But the option to call off-duty firefighters will not be exercised.

"Under the agreement, our trucks could be 10 to 12 kilometres away in Whitchurch-Stouffville at any given time," Mr. Leathen said. "That means it could take anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes for them to get back into Central York if needed for an emergency here."

But the plan could put firefighters in harm's way, Mr. Leathen said.

"To assume that every remote fire alarm or pre-fire condition is minor and is not a real fire is to be complacent," the union president said. "Complacency is one of the factors that gets firefighters killed and it is a serious threat to the public."

While part of the agreement is to have Whitchurch-Stouffville pay a \$100,000 retainer fee in addition to fees charged on a per-call basis, Mr. Leathen insists Newmarket and Aurora will carry some of the cost.

While a meeting to put the finishing touches on the plan is being arranged with Whitchurch-Stouffville, the firefighters' association is contemplating its next move.

"We have to determine where we go from here," Mr. Leathen said.

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

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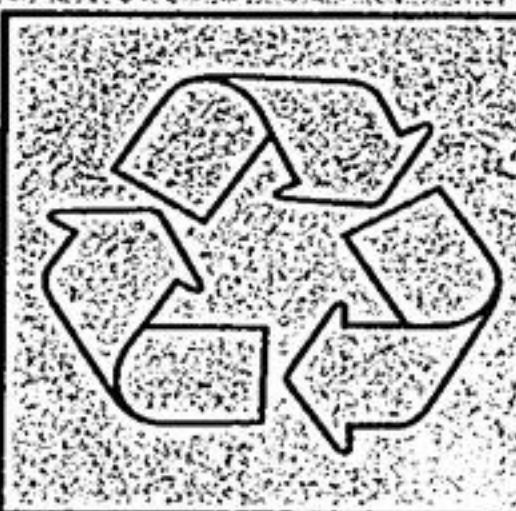
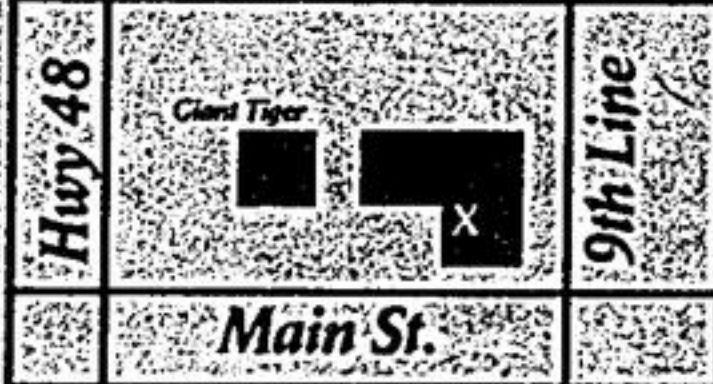
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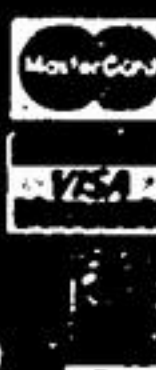
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