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FRANK SCARPITTI: Markham mayor says shortage is start of legal meltdown.

Region calls for more JPs to handle cases

BY JOE FANTAUZZI
Staff Writer

A shortage of justices of the peace is costing York Region cases, Mayor Frank Scarpitti said.

Markham council is calling on Attorney General Michael Bryant to appoint 14 new JPs to service the Central East Region, which includes York Region and some surrounding areas.

In Markham alone, more than 140 cases were withdrawn or the summons had to be re-issued last year, Mr. Scarpitti said in a statement.

Courts were closed 60 days in 2006 due to justices' holidays, courses and sick time.

"What you're starting to see is a meltdown of the justice system," Mr. Scarpitti said, adding York Region had no JP appointments in 2006.

On Feb. 11, Mr. Bryant announced the appointment of 22 full-time JPs.

Nine of those were new appointments to the bench, 13 were re-appointments.

They will serve in Toronto, Peel Region, Oshawa and Ottawa.

Two years ago, York Region politicians passed a resolution calling for more JPs. York Region has lost approximately \$700,000 in revenue from fines due to charges being set aside over the past two years, Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees said.

"This government has mismanaged the court system to the point where we don't have a justice system, we have a court system," Mr. Klees said, calling for a minimum of 15 new JPs in the Central East Region and five more in York Region alone.

Mr. Bryant has previously promised more appointments, Brendan Crawley, a spokesperson for the attorney general, said. The province has appointed 67 full-time JPs since October 2003, eight of which are in the Central East Region.

The province has also taken steps to alleviate the shortage, he said.

One of those moves is a plan to create "blitz courts", which would focus court resources on crimes such as traffic or criminal offences, Mr. Crawley said.

That could happen as early as this spring. The Access to Justice Act, passed in October 2006, also permits JPs to come out of retirement and serve again.

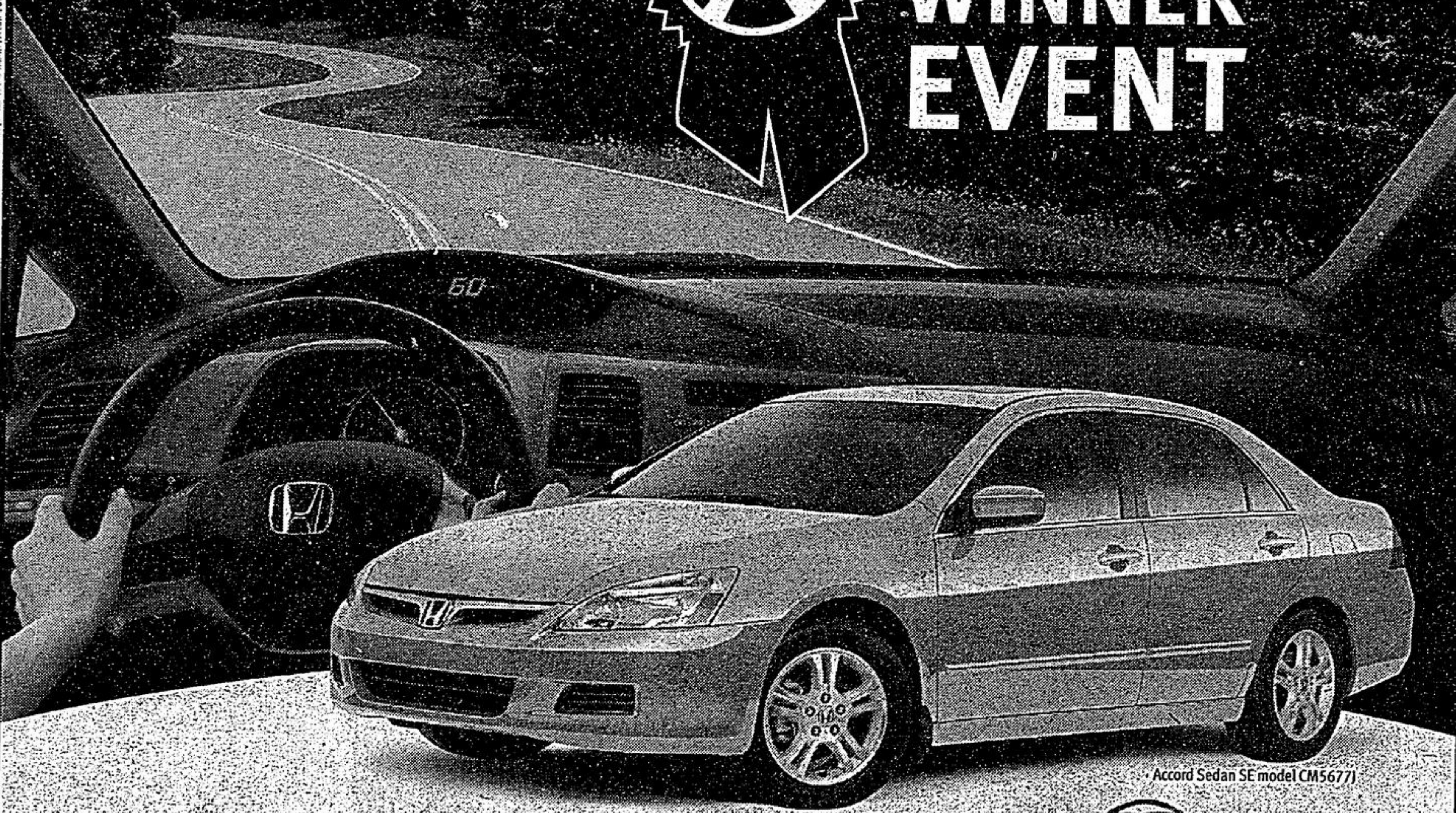
"We are now working with the judiciary to decide the appropriate complement for the justice of the peace system," Mr. Crawley said.

"Currently, there is no agreed upon compliment for the number of justices of the peace required for Ontario."

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