

OPINION

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EDITORIAL

Growth still biggest issue facing York

York Region — and most suburban communities surrounding Toronto — has grown rapidly over the past 10 years and will continue to face difficult challenges where leadership and vision will be paramount.

York's population will top 1.5 million by 2031 as more and more people, businesses and institutions call our region home.

Growth affects how we live, work and play and crosses all paths — transportation, education, transit, housing, government, health care, the environment, business and public safety.

With the province's mandated Places to Grow scheme where development is geared to curb urban sprawl and allow more people to live and work without long commutes, local politicians must "smart" plan for a sustainable future and bigger citizen demands for services.

For example, while other areas in the Greater Toronto Area are experiencing declines or plateaus in school enrolment, York Region's schools are facing growth.

With the province's deadline for a 20-pupil cap on primary classrooms looming, York's school boards have been forced to do some quick-stepping to comply.

Local governments, too, are facing the challenge of meeting demands for services as populations climb.

As far as transit is concerned, with a

pair of subways on the way, announcements for new funding rolling in and all-day train service on the horizon, it's not going too far to say transit is definitely going to be an area of continued growth.

When it comes to business, residential growth often outstrips commercial by a two-to-one margin.

That means many of York's municipalities will need to tread lightly in the coming years if they are to strike a balance and have enough local jobs to keep commuters off already clogged highways.

As York continues to grow, it must also deal with a lack of energy resources, a problem that spans the province.

One practice is the use of Energy Star standards for new homes. Vaughan and East Gwillimbury have already implemented Energy Star standards for all new residential subdivisions.

Violent crime, along with guns and gangs, have been identified by residents as two of the top public safety priorities in York Region.

Traditionally, traffic and road safety has been the No. 1 concern for residents, according to Police Chief Armand La Barge, but it now sits third.

Let's hope elected officials at all levels have the vision during these crucially important times to look outside the box and beyond their boundaries to plan smarter communities.



Are you smarter than an '07 newsmaker?

Welcome to Are You Smarter Than A York Region Newsmaker?

I'm your host, Jeff Skunkworthy and our contestant is Bucky Jo Remog.

Bucky will answer questions so easy small children, monkeys and some Hollywood celebrities know the answer. But you will have the "help" of some of the key figures in top York Region news stories from 2007 — and they will mess up your mind so badly, you just might make the same kind of stupid, self-defeating choices they did.

So where do you want to start, Bucky?

BJR: I'll take that there kindergarten-level priority settin'.

JS: OK, Bucky, for this question you will have the help of the entire council of Vaughan. Here's the question: What is the most important responsibility of a municipal politician? Is it A) ensuring residents receive quality services at the most equitable tax rate; B) ensuring an equitable distribution of party

invitations; C) thoroughly tracking everyone's e-mail or D) glomming as much personal travel as possible on someone else's dime?

BJR: Well, I reckon the answer's A — all that services and taxes stuff.

JS: Now, are you sure, you want to answer that quickly? You don't seem like the sharpest knife in the drawer and we have lots of cheats for you. You could peek at Vaughan council's work, especially if they e-mail it. You could copy their answers. You can poll the audience. You can ask a friend. You can consult the Magic 8 Ball. You can take what's behind door No. 2. Or you can give up, look straight into that camera and declare "I am too stupid to live" and walk away.

BJR: No, Jeff, I reckon I'm right.

JS: Are you sure, Bucky? I can tell you, none of the members of Vaughan council chose the same answer you did.

BJR: That settles it, I'm lockin' in answer A: providin' services and controllin' taxes.

JS: Well, let's look at Vaughan



Dave Teetzel

council's answers. Most said B, one said D, one said "none of the above", another said "You're a doodyhead" and still another said "I know you are but what am I?"

But they're all wrong, you're right. Bucky, you have won \$5 and can pick your next category.

BJR: I reckon I'll take junior kindergarten criminal law for \$10.

JS: Great — and here to help you is York Region's keenest legal mind, convicted murderer Richard Wills. Here's your question: What is the best defence strategy when you

are facing serious criminal charges? Do you A) Present a tight, coherent case based on solid facts and testimony that will raise reasonable doubt about the Crown's case; B) Brandish a key piece of evidence over your head and use the trial to shamelessly draw attention to yourself; C) Soil yourself; D) Who cares, as long as you can stick the Ontario taxpayer with your legal bill?

BJR: Well, I reckon I know something 'bout this cause I got into a mess o' trouble a while back with my slingblade. I think it's probably A cause it's got big words in it.

JS: Before you lock in your answer, you should know Richard is, by his own admission, the smartest person in the history of the world — and he did everything but answer A.

BJR: I reckon he's the smartest guy in prison. I ain't listening to him.

JS: Well, Bucky, you're on a roll. Choose your category for the \$20 question.

BJR: I'll take obedience school level accountability.

JS: Your helper is East Gwillimbury Mayor James Young. Here's the question: You get caught chopping down all the trees on your neighbour's property, what's your response? A) You did what? B) Apologize, then tell everyone you didn't do it. C) Blame fellow councillors, staff, the media and Black Jacques Shellac. D) Open a Christmas tree farm.

BJR: Well, I reckon them fellers in East Gwillimbury is pretty smart. I'm gonna go ahead and copy the mayor's answer.

JS: OK, let's see the mayor's answer. Uh-oh, the mayor answered the question, but the town wouldn't release his answer. There's just a note here saying the town thinks he was probably wrong.

I'm sorry, Bucky, you don't win any money and you need to look into the camera and say, "I am not smarter than a York Region newsmaker", or maybe just nod your head and drool.

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