

OPINION

Stouffville Sun-Tribune

6290 Main St.
Stouffville, ON, L4A 1G7
www.yorkregion.com

PUBLISHER Ian Proudfoot

EDITOR IN CHIEF
Debora Kelly

BUSINESS MANAGER
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Editorial

Another year of change in Stouffville

So, you think you've seen a lot of change in recent months, Stouffville?

- Homes have gone up in all quadrants of the community during the past two years.

- The town got its first look at big-box shopping with the opening of five stores in the Hoover Park power centre off Hwy. 48.

- The new Stouffville District Secondary School opened to rave reviews.

It's only a start, as the once sleepy little town grows and gets a facelift.

Here's what to expect:

- For starters, more homes. The economy here isn't taking the beating it is in the United States. Demand for homes remains and Stouffville is still viewed as prime pickings for buyers.

- The renovation of the old town hall into the 19 on the Park arts and culture centre has been anticipated by many for several years. Work should start in March, but look for that July opening to be pushed back by several months. Anticipated cost is \$3.3 million with more than \$300,000 raised at an event in November. Look for more fundraisers to pay the cheque.

- Construction of a double-pad arena should start later this year and it should be open in September 2009. A fire hall and ambulance station will be built on the same parcel of land, off Weldon Road between Stouffville District Secondary School and Sobey's.

- Main Street widening and improvements will continue, commuters. The intersection of Hwy. 48 and Main Street will be started in 2008, rather than next year, because Main is to be widened to four lanes. It means the old general store now housing Da Classic Scoop has to be moved or demolished.

- More stores are planned for Hoover Park complex, including a dollar store and sub shop. Look for more news from the developer.

- Two new public, elementary schools holding 527 students each will open this fall, including Harry Bowes, behind St. Brigid Catholic School, and an unnamed replacement for Orchard Park on Hoover Park Drive. The fate of the old Stouffville Secondary is up in the air.

- The Stouffville Country Market will close from the beginning of February to mid-March for renovations to turn it into an outlet operation.

- A multi-dealer auto mall will open on Hwy. 48. Town officials have no timetable for its construction.



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

Lenten tradition of food, fellowship back on church menu

Many Christians give up stuff for Lent. Like coffee and chocolate, or video games and movies.

At Christ Church Anglican in Stouffville, they also take things on during the 40-day season.

Like a whole community. As in 348 people for dinner.

The Lenten dinners at the Sunset Boulevard church enter their 13th year next month.

They started small as an outreach from the congregation and grew into a local tradition of the pre-Easter season just like Ash Wednesday and Shrove (pancake) Tuesday.

"It's a great way to meet people and it's comfortable because you're having a meal in a friendly atmosphere," Gail Wood of Christ Church said. "All through the evening, we see people greeting old neighbours or friends, people they may not see again till the nice weather returns. It's a good way to catch up on news or hear what's happening around Stouffville."

It started in 1996 with 25 people a night in a small room, grew to 80 and mushroomed to more than 250 per sitting last year. That means change.

"As you can imagine, that's a lot of work and a lot of food," Gail Wood of Christ Church said. "In the past we had tables laden with salads and desserts, in addition to the hot main course."

This year, there will be a main course, two salads and a dessert. The simpler meals should translate into less work and shorter waiting times.

The dates are Feb. 13, 20 and 27, and March 5 and 12 from 5 to 7 p.m. and everyone is welcome.

Drop in. You don't have to be Anglican, or Christian for that matter. Meet some new neighbours. Network in the purest sense of the word. Discover your home town. There's a basket for donations, but no obligation to pay.

Christ Church is at 254 Sunset Blvd., next to Orchard Park Public School. Call 905-640-1461.

Jim Mason is editor of *The Sun-Tribune*.

Road tolls fair — if they lead to tax cuts

It is a simple — no, simplistic — but unpopular solution to the dilemma du jour: if we won't get out of our cars, make us pay.

Our environment is in jeopardy, our roads are clogged and crumbling and our public transit system is hardly an alternative for most of us living in suburban bliss. The hope is that by putting a price tag on every trip we take, we'll consider other options such as driving during cheaper non-peak hours, carpooling, taking transit, riding a bike (heaven forbid!) or even moving closer to work.

A study released this week calls for a tax on use of the 400-series highways in the GTA and Hamilton areas, as well as the Gardiner Expressway, Don Valley Parkway and Queen Elizabeth Parkway.

The new study, commissioned by the Residential and Civil Construction and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, estimates a road toll of seven cents per kilometre travelled would generate \$700 million annually for municipalities.

The study also suggests hiking the price at the pumps — by six cents a litre, bringing in as much as \$420 million a year — and in parking lots. Sigh. Where do I start?

If I'm to trust the sticker on the pumps at my local gas station, taxes make up the majority of the very high cost of gas.

The money is meant to be pumped back into our transportation infrastructure; clearly it's not. Where is the money actually going?



Debora Kelly

Why should we fork over even more money and trust that it will be invested in the right place this time? Our property taxes, too, are supposed to go toward maintaining and building our transportation infrastructure.

Sure, there's merit in the thought of raising revenue from those who derive the benefits, rather than relying on general property taxes to fund roads and public transit.

It is fairer, more transparent and leads to greater accountability.

The fair thing, then, would be to reduce our taxes. Like that would happen. So, what comes first? The chicken or the bus?

Is it fair to penalize drivers with road tolls for not getting on the buses when there aren't buses to catch because there isn't enough cash kicking around to expand public transit?

London introduced a plan in 2003 that charged drivers entering the centre of the city from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and traffic did, indeed, drop significantly.

However, not only was there an

accessible transit system already in place, at the same time London introduced its congestion charge, it added 300 more buses to the central area. Ridership on the London subway dropped because people could now travel faster by bus through formerly congested streets.

The reality is without a viable alternative to driving, even tolls can't get us out of our cars.

Many of us would simply flock to untolled roadways, shifting congestion woes.

Grain of salt time: the study's author, the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance, is a lobby group for the construction industry that may well build and run these tolls. In Ontario, 76 per cent of us travel to work, according to Statistics Canada. The alliance knows we will stay on the roads and all the money generated will go to them.

But it appears Ontario's Liberal government feels taxpayers are doing their part to finance highway and public transit projects.

It has its own simple solution: MPP Minister Greg Sorbara says Ottawa needs to step up.

Local MPP Frank Klees, PC Transportation and Public Infrastructure Renewal critic, also nixed the idea of further "taxes".

But he points a finger not only at the feds to pitch in, but at the Liberals for not putting 100 per cent of gas and fuel taxes into municipal coffers for transportation and transit costs. Now that's a bell that tolls for me.

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Letters to the Editor,
The Sun-Tribune
6290 Main St.
Stouffville, ON
L4A 1G7
jmason@yrmg.com

EDITORIAL
Editor
Jim Mason
jmason@yrmg.com

INTERACTIVE MEDIA
Marketing & Advertising
Manager
Dawn Andrews
dandrews@yrmg.com

ADVERTISING
Retail Manager
Stacey Allen
sallen@yrmg.com

Classified Manager
Ann Campbell
acampbell@yrmg.com

Assistant Classified
Manager
Bonnie Rondeau
brondeau@yrmg.com
PRODUCTION
Team Leader
Sherry Day
sday@yrmg.com



EDITORIAL
905-640-2612
Fax: 905-640-8778

ADVERTISING
905-640-2612
Classified: 1-800-743-3353
Fax: 905-640-8778

DISTRIBUTION
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