

OPINION

Stouffville
Sun-Tribune

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Generator fine in his back yard

Re: Power plant 'too much' for this area, council told, April 19.

A few weeks ago we read in The Sun-Tribune that people don't want some sort of bio-fuels plant near Stouffville. Are these the same people who will welcome \$2-per-litre gasoline?

Now, we read of resistance to the proposed gas-fired electricity plant in York Region. Are these the same people who would be willing to remove air-conditioners and clothes dryers from their homes?

Wind-powered electricity is almost free, after the units are installed and running. But some people think that the big fans on the skyline are ugly.

Quite frankly, I think they're beautiful, having seen them in California and England. I would happily put a small wind-powered generator in our back yard, but what would the neighbours think?

I think I'll turn off my computer after writing this letter.

RON BROWNSBERGER
STOUFFVILLE

Tell province to maintain elevator

Re: Fight on to preserve Stouffville grain elevator, Feb. 6.

By 2030, there will be more than 50,000 residents living in the southeast corner of Whitchurch-Stouffville, the 15 square kilometres of the community of Stouffville.

Do we want it void of all historical reference to how the town was established? The grain elevator may be one of the most important historical points in town.

This little piece of history, if kept and developed with imagination and some willing owners, can become a main stay of all that was "country close to the city".

The town does not need to buy the elevator, nor does it need to spend thousands to fix it up. The town only needs to deem it a historically significant building.

This should prevent the owner from tearing it down. Oh, by the way, the owner is the Province of Ontario through GO Transit.

Why is the town not asking the province to look after its property?

People complain about cats and rats in the building and the possible unsafe state of the site. Call your local MPP, Helena Jaczek, and tell her that this building is important.

GO does not need the parking spaces. It will be opening the Bethesda Station this year with more than four hectares of parking. The few spaces that the grain elevator is using are not important.

Our council is afraid to designate the building because there is the perception they will be on the hook to look after this building. Not so.

Designate it now as an historical landmark and start knocking on the province's door to look after this building the way it deserves.

MARK CARROLL
MUSSELMAN'S LAKE



Frogs are bellwether animal for environment

During high school in Ontario, I spent a lot of time at a swamp near my family's home. Smelling the sweet air in spring, listening to the frogs croak and catching the insects that would become so important to my life and career gave me solace during those lonely years.

As much as insects became my fascination, I have always loved the frogs. These amazing amphibians occupy a crucial place in the natural order. They are both predator and prey, providing food for larger species and keeping insect populations in balance by eating them. If frogs were to disappear, the planet would soon be covered in flies and other insects. I like flies, but not that much.

In fact, frogs are disappearing. Many of us can remember drifting off to sleep to the sound of frogs, but unless we act now, it's unlikely our children and grandchildren will hear the same lullaby.

Scientists estimate one-third to one-half of the world's 6,000 known amphibian species could go extinct in our lifetime — including many in Canada.

This would be the largest mass extinction since the disappearance of dinosaurs. More than 100 species are already believed to have vanished since 1980.

The situation has become so critical conservationists and institutions including universities, zoos and aquariums have named 2008 the Year of the Frog.

The motto, "Frogs matter. Jump in" is one we should all take to heart.

The more we understand about frogs and the reasons for their disappearance and the more we all get involved in trying to save them, the more likely we will be to head off this impending disaster.

It is not just frogs we have to worry about.

Biologists consider frogs and other amphibians as "the canary in



David Suzuki

the coal mine".

Because they live in both the aqueous and atmospheric part of the planet, frogs are often the first species affected by environmental problems and can thus serve as a warning to other species, including ourselves.

One of the main threats to frogs and amphibians around the world is the spread of a fungus called chytrid (kit-rid), but other factors that we can start to address immedi-

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ately are also threatening amphibians. These include global warming, habitat loss, pesticide use, pollution, invasive species, and even overuse as food or pets.

Dealing with the fungus will be a challenge.

Chytrid is thought to have been spread initially by trading in the African clawed frog, which was used for pregnancy tests from 1934 to the 1950s.

The fungus has now infected more than 100 species of frogs, killing them in a way that is still baffling scientists. The spores infect the outer layer of skin, but scientists have yet to figure out its mechanism. Ironically, the fungus is not fatal to the African clawed frog.

In an attempt to ensure the survival of frog species most threatened by the fungus, biologists from

zoos, aquariums and botanical gardens, working with the International Union for Conservation of Nature, set up the Amphibian Ark.

Under the program, conservationists have started gathering threatened frogs to breed and protect in captivity.

There is no guarantee the scheme will work, but it is worth a try. One of the challenges will be to maintain genetic diversity under such a program. Another big challenge, though, will come when it is time to put the frogs back.

Will there even be places left for them to live? And given the crucial role that frogs play in the natural cycle, what will become of those ecosystems while the frogs are away? Global warming is already shifting the areas where species are found, so when it's time to release the frogs, it might not even be realistic to return them to their former homes.

Those are things we can all work to overcome.

LETTERS POLICY

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