

# Levy would cost you \$123 annually

BY TERESA LATCHFORD  
Staff Writer

A 3-per-cent tax levy for York Region hospital capital expansions amounts to about \$123 a year for the average homeowner.

That works out to about \$2,214 over 18 years, according to assessment figures provided by the region.

York Region's hospitals, including a yet-to-be-built facility in Vaughan, say they will need \$2.2 billion in capital funding to keep up with growing health care demands.

To meet that demand and because of a shortfall of provincial funding, a hospital coalition asked the region for a \$486-million commitment — a commitment that will mean a tax hike of 3 per cent, according to a report to the region's finance committee.

Having municipal property owners fund hospital construction began in 2001 after the Mike Harris Tories said, in 1998, municipalities could no longer collect capital funding through its Development Charges Act.

To offset that blow, the region made an eight-year deal to give York's three hospitals \$7.4 million a year — 2 per cent of the region's general tax increase, said Newmarket Mayor Tony Van Bynen, chairperson of the region's finance and administration committee.

That deal ends next year.

Before 1998, municipalities were able to work these fees into new home and commercial construction costs, thereby putting some of the burgeoning health care costs on new homebuyers, a growth-pays-for-growth situation, Mr. Van Bynen said.

But the Harris government put a wrench in those plans, amending the act and taking away power from municipalities that almost immediately felt a huge funding loss, he added.

This new request, which amounts to an uncapped 3 per cent of the region's total tax collection, is simply an extension of the previous funding commitment, said Chris Benedetti, spokesperson for York's hospital coalition.

The reason for the 1 per cent increase is because capital requirements have changed over the past eight years, he added, however, Mr. Van Bynen argues it is a new ball game altogether.

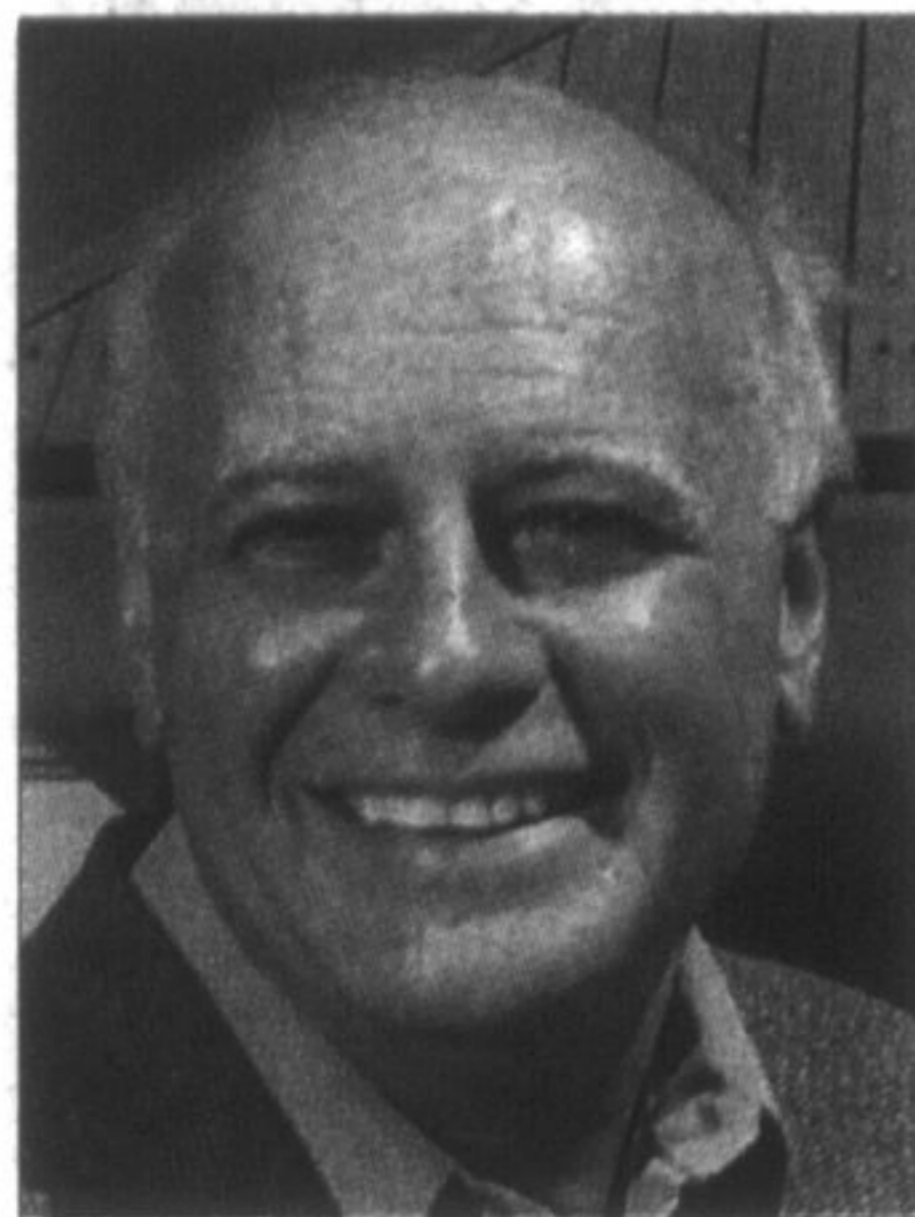
The previous \$7.4-million annual payment was capped or consistent over eight years and will decrease in the final year to \$4 million.

The new proposal, however, would amount to \$21 million annually in the first year and rises as the region's tax collection to nearly \$33 million by 2027.

York Region Media Group newspapers have been inundated with angry letters and calls about the proposed levy, most pointing the finger at the province.

"This idea is outrageous," resident Rob Chip said.

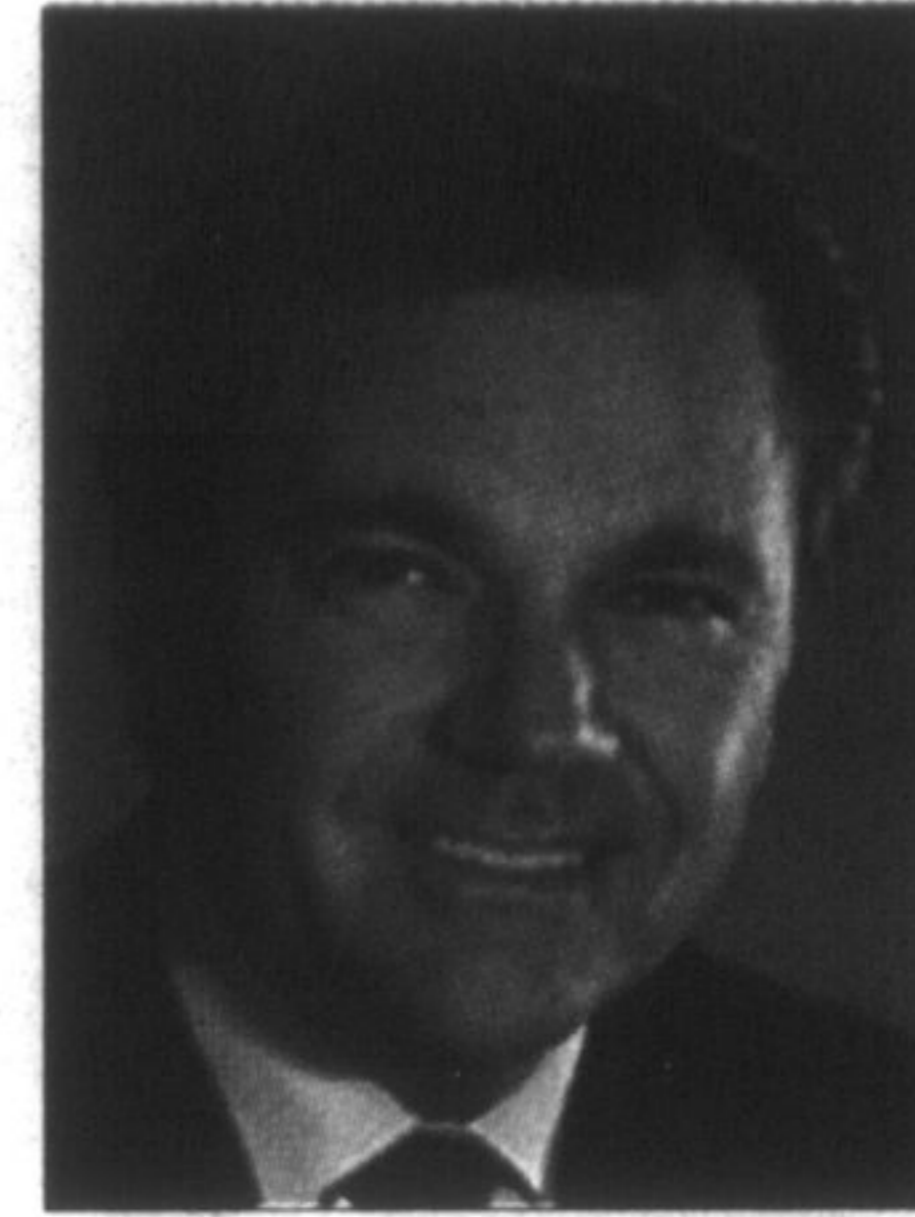
"The provincial government has



**TONY VAN BYNEN:** Newmarket mayor says levy proposal is the first step in process to find cash for York hospitals.



**HELEN JACZEK:** Liberal MPP says communities responsible for 10 per cent of construction costs.



**FRANK KLEES:** Tory MPP says province shortchanging region and failing to recognize growth pressures.

been collecting a health tax for several years now and I have yet to see a significant change in the health care system," Mr. Chip added.

Hospital wait times have become shorter but waiting to be seen by a doctor after being shown to the examination room has increased, he said. Not to mention there's a shortage of doctors.

"Since the provincial government currently does not seem to be using the money they have been collecting to better the system, the hospitals that need more money should be knocking on the door of the provincial government, since they already have it," Mr. Chip said.

Resident Anthony Samotus agrees, pointing out the government just spent \$265 million on GM with the right to recover only \$35 million if the contract was breached. Another \$32 million was given to cultural groups.

"It seems the funds may be available, but Premier Dalton McGuinty and his gang have put cricket pitches and Jewish and Iranian culture before the health of the province," he added.

Kevin Rydzik has a hard time believ-

ing the provincial health tax, which collects hundreds of dollars from Ontarian's incomes a year (an average of about \$600) isn't enough to cover costs.

"The government needs to live within its means," he said. "There is only so much money to go around so they had better use it more effectively."

The region is being shortchanged

because the current government fails to recognize the growth pressures on York Region hospitals, Conservative MPP Frank Klees said.

It is the same government who imposed intensification and development on municipalities through the Places to Grow Act and then turns a blind eye to the infrastructure needed to support the development, he noted.

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