

Queen's Park plan means \$50M for York

BY CHRIS TRABER AND DAVID FLEISCHER
Staff Writers

Sooner would be better, but Ontario's 10-year plan to support more municipal welfare programs is still welcome, York Region politicians and social services' professionals said.

The province announced yesterday it will take over welfare costs downloaded on municipalities by the former Mike Harris Tories in the 1990s.

Services downloaded after 1998 by Ontario to municipalities included welfare, social housing, ambulance services, public health, GO Transit, drug benefit program for seniors and low-income Ontarians, Ontario disability support program, court services and property tax assessment.

The 10-year phase-in plan is encouraging, York Regional chairperson and CEO Bill Fisch said.

"It doesn't have a major impact on us in the first two or three years, but it'll be a \$50-million impact over the 10-year period," he said, despite the fact there is no guarantee the Liberals will still be in office in 2018.

"Most important is that the cost of social services won't be charged to property taxes."

Under the new plan, York's taxes won't be funnelled out of the region.

"It's a good news story for York Region," Mr. Fisch said. "It's just not fast enough. But, it's happening and we're on the right track."

Newmarket Mayor and regional finance chairperson Tony Van Bynen is pleased.

"My first reaction is that we're happy to see we're turning the page

on downloading," he said. "Most people probably aren't happy with the phasing, but I think it's a responsible, cautious approach, especially when the jury's still out on the economy."

The government's plan ensures more appropriate funding, Mr. Van Bynen said.

With downloading, economic redistribution was premised on property, not income tax. The pressures on York Region translated into millions of dollars annually.

"Those are very real dollars we'll see relief on," he said.

United Way of York Region CEO Daniele Zanotti is buoyed by the plan.

"It's a great step, long awaited," he said.

"It appears the province has thought through some of the complexities. It's a break for York Region. Now, we can spend more of our tax dollars on core municipal services."

Mr. Zanotti empathizes with the 120-month rollout rationale.

"It's easy to understand looking at the uncertainty of the economy," he said.

"Sooner would have been better. I really think this represents what the Liberal government promised to do."

The province's support will go far to support United Way initiatives, he said.

The review began after the Association of Municipalities of Ontario drew attention to the fiscal gap of municipal funds being siphoned off for provincial redistribution programs, president Peter Hume said.

Over the past two years, the association sat at the table with representatives from the province and Toronto, hammering out the deal.



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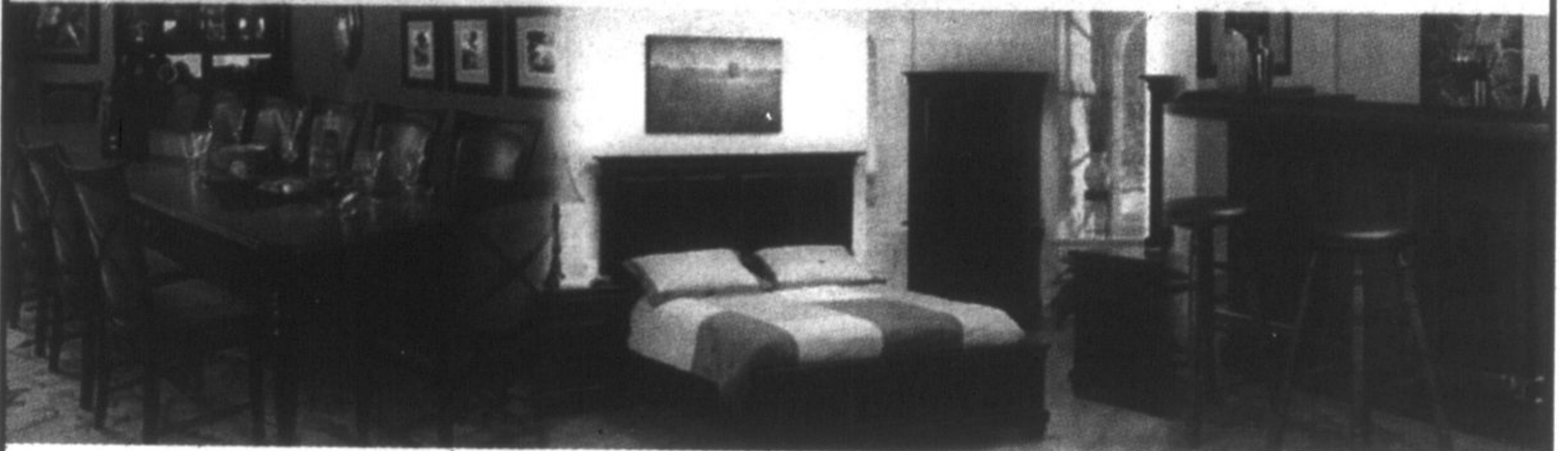
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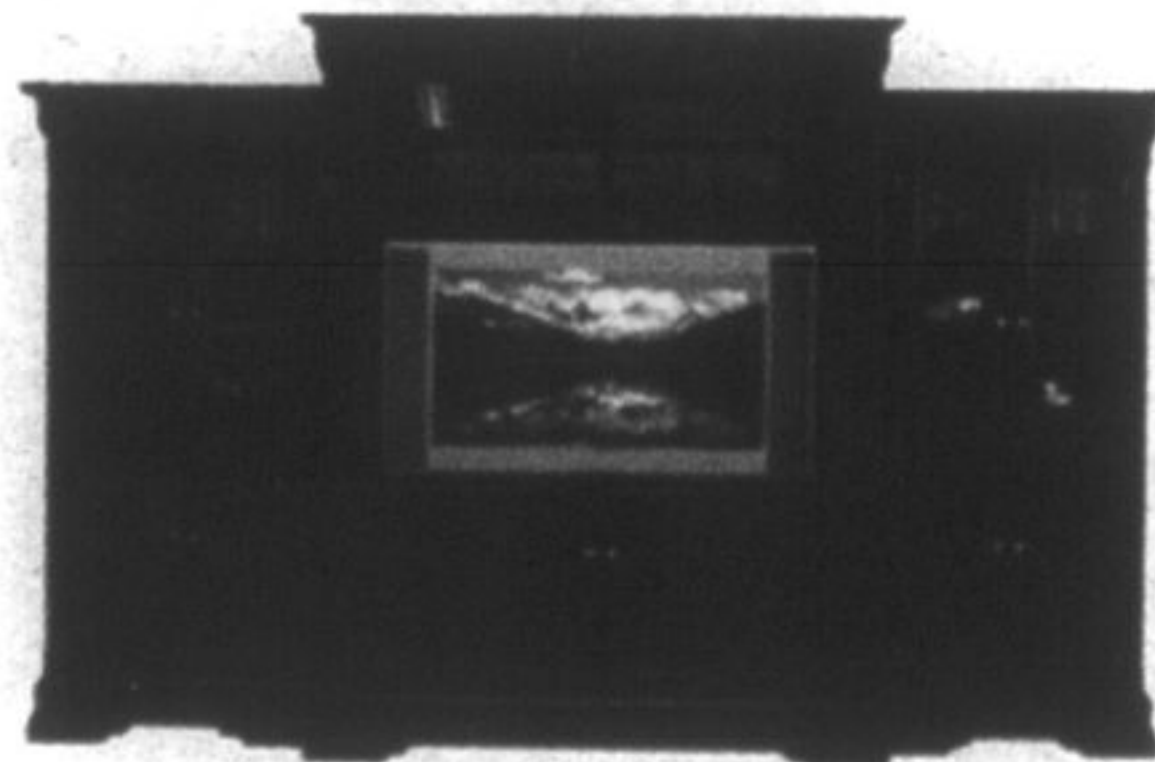
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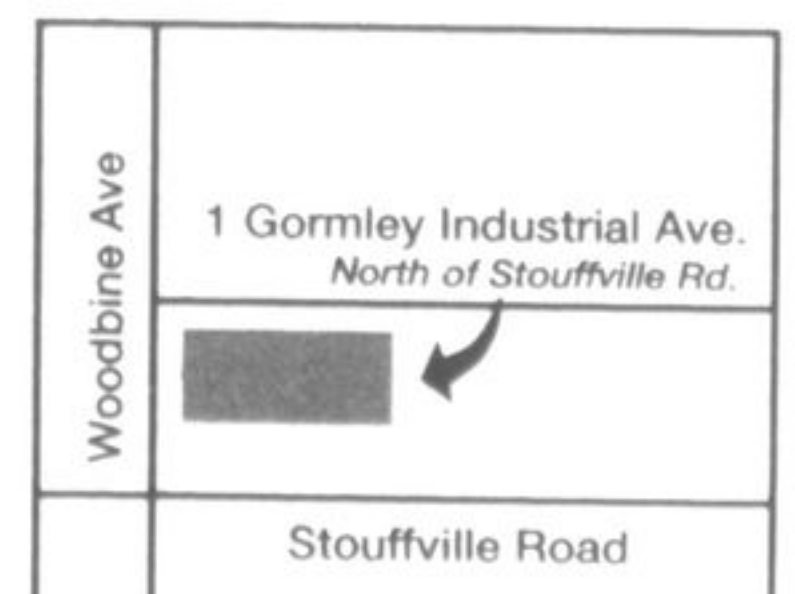
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Company has constructed 20 arenas, 10 fire halls

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in the process, it would be 20 to 25 people," Mr. Ginzel said.

Although Norlon is a general contractor and has built everything from the Galaxy theatre in Milton to a Shoppers Drug Mart in Peterborough, arenas have become the company's specialty, having built about 20 arenas and 10 fire halls, primarily in southwestern Ontario.

While building arenas is old hat to Norlon, this is perhaps the most excited Mr. Ginzel has been about a

project in a long time.

"When we get this one done, we're going to be very proud," he said. "It's like going from a three-star to a five-star complex."

Both buildings are scheduled to open in late 2009 or early 2010.

Requesting a developer to utilize as many local labourers, contractors and suppliers as possible is nothing new for municipal projects, including Whitchurch-Stouffville, which requested local companies and suppliers be considered when the Lebovic Leisure Centre was constructed in 2001.

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