

**ENVIRONMENT:** Waste centre not paying off as expected

# 'Green' program's future questioned

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If you don't start making use of one of the region's leading waste diversion projects, it could place future centres in jeopardy.

The award-winning McCleary Court community environmental centre in Vaughan was supposed to be the first of seven centres making it easier for residents to recycle, but whether or not Newmarket and Aurora will eventually get one won't be determined for several months.

The environmental services committee heard yesterday that the Vaughan centre took in 2,500 tonnes of waste, or about half what was expected in its first year. Site visits need to increase by 21,000 — or 75 per cent — for the region to meet its cost targets.

Plans are nearing completion at similar centres in Richmond Hill and Georgina.

A fourth centre, earmarked for Markham, is in the region's 10-year capital plan, but if the program continues to flounder and it is the final centre to be built in the region, Newmarket should be considered, Newmarket Regional Councillor John Taylor said.

It remains a long hike for Newmarket residents to get to the other three locations, he said.

For now, the focus will be to ensure centres in Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Georgina are successful.

The region may not have followed best practices in a couple of areas; namely in choosing the site of the Vaughan centre and in deciding what materials could be accepted there, regional manager of waste programs Dave Gordon said.

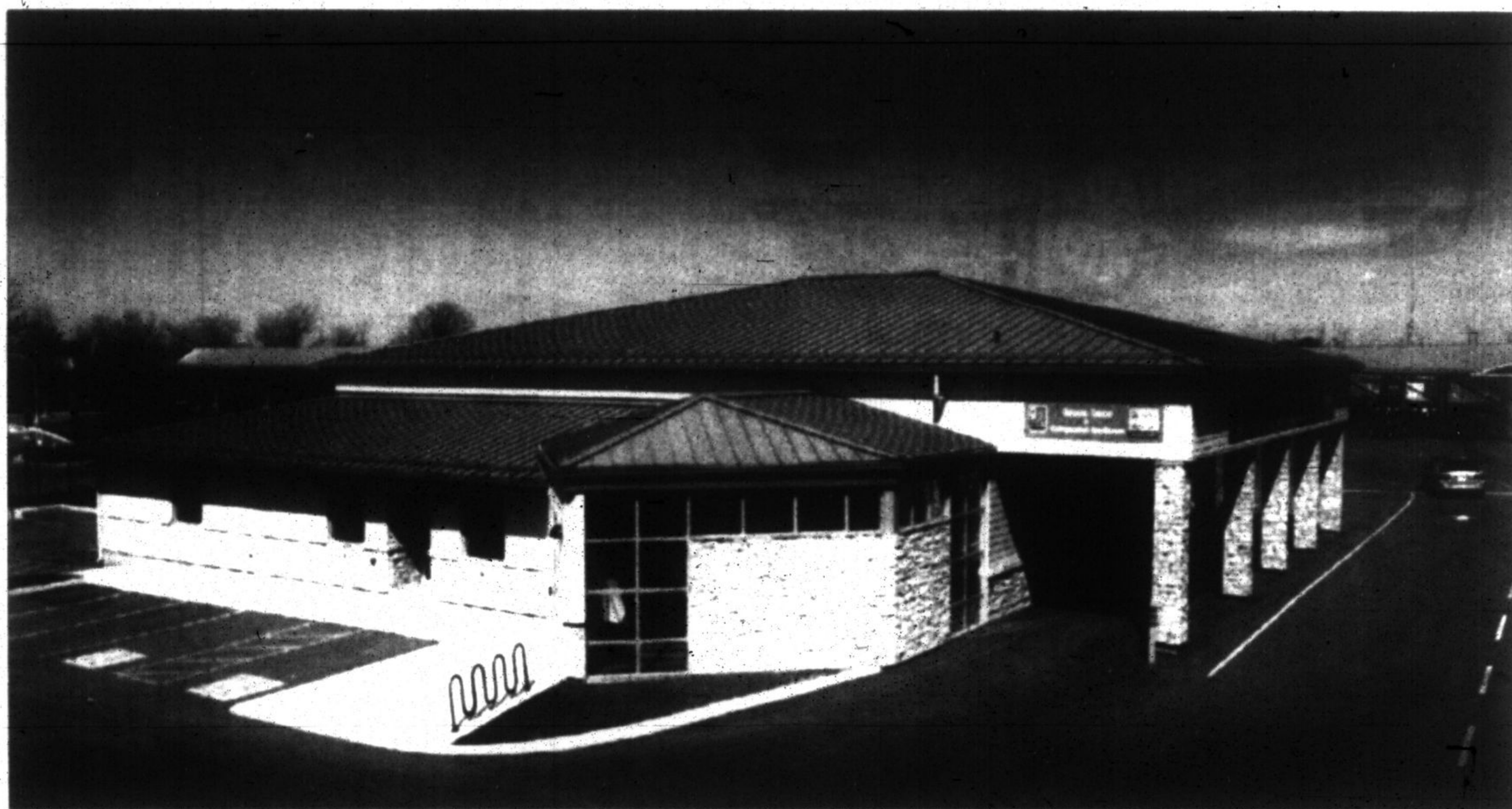
The environmental centre, near Lane Street and Hwy. 7, opened in July 2009 and is designed to feel more like a community centre than a transfer station.

"We have to be realistic. It's not a site people are used to going to," Mr. Gordon said. "It's a bit of a new twist."

The centre was supposed to be near Dufferin Street and Hwy. 407, however, residents raised traffic and odour concerns.

Richmond Hill's Elgin Mills Road location is more prominent and it shouldn't present many challenges, Mr. Gordon said.

Materials that cannot be put out for curbside collection, including drywall, batteries



SUPPLIED PHOTO

Fixed operating costs and about half the amount of recyclable or re-usable materials than expected has led to inefficiencies at the region's new Community Environmental Centre in Vaughan. Residents have been invited to drop off items since the facility opened in July 2009.

and electronics, are acceptable at the centres.

You can also dispose of excess garbage at a cost of \$7 per car and Mr. Gordon said usage now is split fairly evenly between those paying that fee and those disposing of recyclable materials.

Goodwill and Habitat for Humanity accept reusable items and both charities indicated they are happy with the response so far at the Vaughan centre.

The good news is that a "slowly and steady" increase in usage is being seen, according to environment commissioner Erin Mahoney, noting a September survey indicated 98 per cent satisfaction from users.

But having those staff on site and keeping it clean costs money and with less trash than

expected coming through the doors, average tonnage costs at the centre were about twice what was anticipated.

Raising the flat disposal fee to \$10, from \$7, will help close that gap, the region said.

However, the price increase could deter potential users, Vaughan Regional Councillor Deb Schulte said.

Markham Regional Councillor Jack Heath went further, suggesting the fee increases represent "a policy change (and) a shift" for the environmental centres.

On his suggestion, the committee deferred a decision on whether or not hazardous waste should be accepted at the centres, something that would have made them more of a one-stop shop.

You still have to drive either to Georgina or Vaughan facilities to dispose of paint, motor oil, fluorescent light bulbs and other items.

Before accepting hazardous materials at a CEC, new facilities will have to be built and it will take three to six months for provincial approval, the region said.

It will cost nearly \$200,000 a year to expand hours in Georgina and allow hazardous waste collection in Richmond Hill, the region estimates.

The region is developing an integrated waste master plan that will include a review of the centres and evaluate their future, in a report later this year.

Council votes on the committee's decision at its meeting next week.

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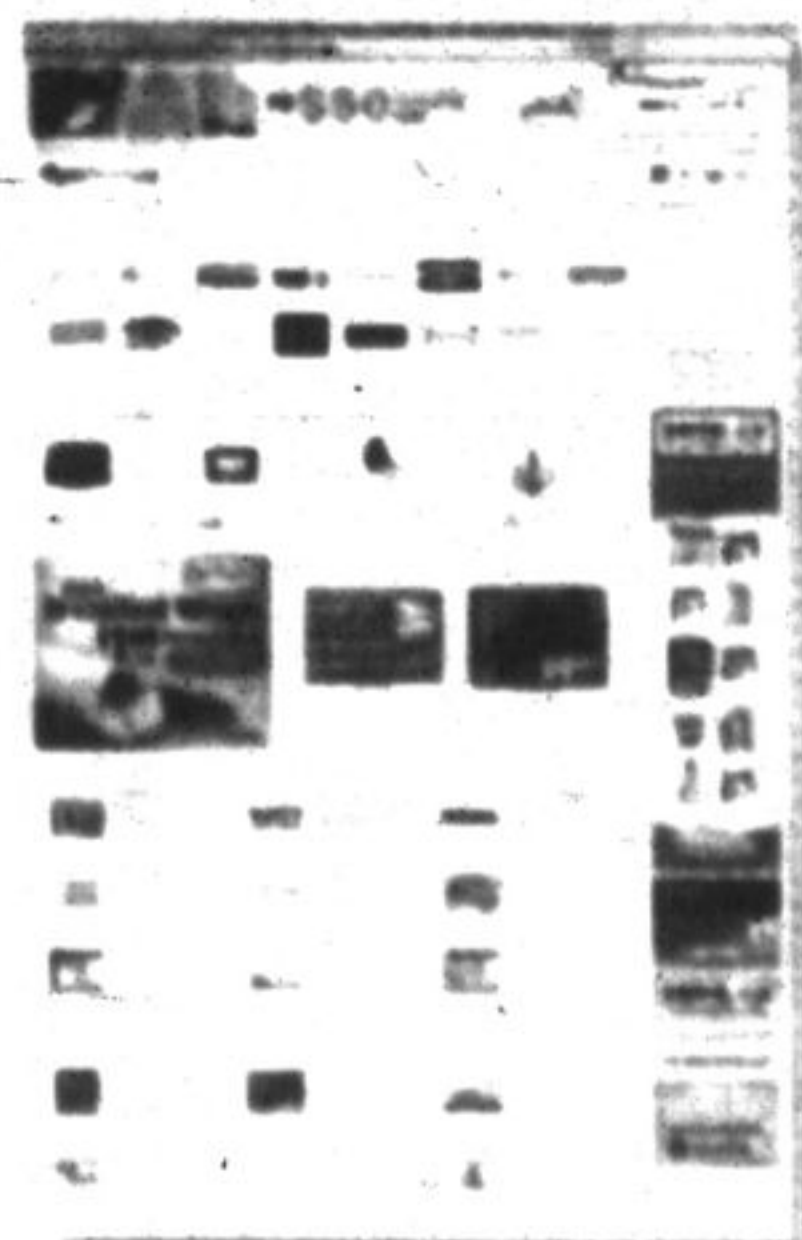
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