

Sun-Tribune

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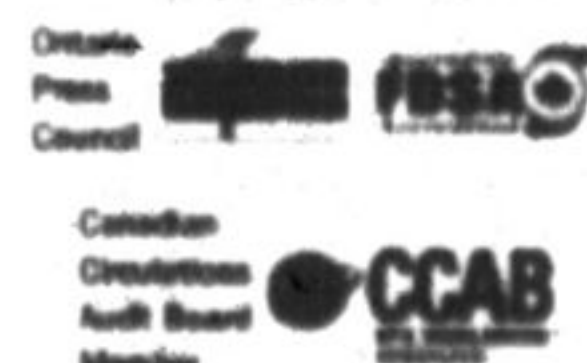
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The Sun-Tribune welcomes your letters. All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The Sun-Tribune reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space.

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OPINION

Stouffville Sun-Tribune

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Relax sign laws, town

Re: Let's manage an explosion not dictate a decline, Stouffville, letter to the editor by Jean-Luc Petit, Jan 6.

Signage is as important to a store as its exterior and interior. It should represent the store's character and be allowed to convey an immediate message of "what the store is all about."

Whether the sign is back lit, neon, wood, or electronically moving is totally irrelevant, as long as the sign is architecturally compatible and is allowed to convey the stores message.

To quote a successful Main Street business owner, Lloyd Britton, "A business without a sign, is a sign of no business."

Downtown Stouffville has about 10 store vacancies and this dismal situation will not likely improve unless some of the current punitive sign restrictions are made more realistic.

Architecture is evolutionary and so must be our sign bylaws. Wooden signs alone are just not in keeping with the demands of modern-day consumers.

If modern-day business did not have access to e-mail, scanners, iPads, mobile phones etc., imagine where it would be now. Signage is the same. It must be current, tasteful and convey its message to be compatible with the store it represents.

The test of reasonableness must be applied to tastefully designed sign applications. If the sign application makes sense, it must be viewed as a positive attempt to improve that business and subsequently those that surround it.

Let's be supportive of reasonable sign applications rather than restrictive. To not be supportive will continue to retard the growth of our downtown and make it increasingly difficult to attract new business and to grow existing business.

Our town is growing and changing and newcomers need to know who we are and what we sell. A proper sign is our first introduction to what is behind the doors of our businesses.

GRAYDON & AINSLEY CARD
CARD'S TV & APPLIANCES

CANADIANS NOT GETTING ENOUGH EXERCISE - StatsCan



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Parking fees fund life-saving services inside hospitals

We're literally paying millions to park at our hospitals.

And when it comes to pet peeves — out of all the things we could complain about in our stretched-to-the-limit health care system — having to open our wallets to park while getting treatment or visiting family and friends ranks at the top.

Hospital visitors, who are often already stressed, worried or unwell, find paying for parking an inconvenience, an added burden, if not petty and even insulting.

It drives some people bananas, as they see it simply as yet another user fee to access care, for which they have already dug deep.

While others profess not to mind helping to cover the cost of maintaining parking lots, it's the feeling they're being "gouged" that gets them angry.

York Region's three hospitals charge about the same for parking: a hefty \$3 to \$3.50 for each half-hour; \$15 daily; \$35 weekly; and \$110 monthly.

After Markham Stouffville Hospital hiked parking fees in 2009, one Stouffville letter writer told us, "One has to wonder what is next. A turnstile at the front door and \$2 admission? You would like a seat in the waiting room? Fifty cents per half-hour."



Debora Kelly

"No one likes to pay for it," acknowledges Lisa Joyce, Markham Stouffville Hospital's public relations director.

Complaints about parking rank No. 1, she adds, and despite explanations about how it bolsters patient services, "Some people are disappointed we charge for parking. For them, our answer is never good enough."

New calls for the elimination of parking fees at Southlake Regional Health Centre are occurring after the sad death of a woman crushed between her open van door and a barrier while trying to exit a parking lot Christmas Eve.

"Fees for parking should be abolished," one Newmarket letter writer said. "A woman has lost her life and that is a terrible tragedy... I've never believed it

is good practice to charge people to visit their families in the hospital and staff should not be charged."

Gary Ryan, interim COO, expresses regret over the tragic accident, but says Southlake can't stop charging for parking.

In fact, just about every one of Ontario's 168 hospitals charge for parking, with fees varying from a \$2 flat fee to \$5 per half hour and \$30 daily downtown.

With health care costs skyrocketing and dollars limited, the province wants funding going to patients, not parking lots. Hospitals have to find other ways to fund care — not only raising revenue from parking, but from fees for private rooms, food services and gift shops, too.

Markham Stouffville raises about \$4 million annually from parking, more than covering the \$1-million cost to operate and maintain the lots.

That money goes directly into patient services and equipment, Ms Joyce confirms.

Parking at Southlake brings in about \$2.5 million annually — staff paying about \$800,000 and visitors \$1.7 million — that goes to buy hospital equipment, Mr. Ryan says.

Bottom line, parking fees provide better health care to the community. Do we really want our hospitals divert-

ing money from patient services so we can park for free? I don't.

Mr. Ryan sees it as a clear choice: we can eliminate parking fees and either have less equipment in our hospitals or pay higher taxes.

I'll swallow the pill — and it's a lot less bitter than the one I swallow when paying \$5 for a blanket on a flight that cost \$700, I'll tell you.

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Though, it means my tolerance for waste of health care taxes is at zero — I won't forget the reckless spending and excess at eHealth.

We need to stop thinking of parking as a right. And it likely won't be too long before it's an outright luxury as our governments become more serious about getting us out of cars.

Debora Kelly is editor in chief of the York Region Media Group.