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EDITORIAL  
Editor

Jim Mason  
jmason@yrmg.com

ADVERTISING  
Advertising Manager

Dave Williams  
dwilliams@yrmg.com

ADMINISTRATION  
Regional

Office Manager  
Melanie Attridge  
mattridge@yrmg.com

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## LETTERS POLICY

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.

Letters to the Editor,  
The Sun-Tribune  
6290 Main St.  
Stouffville, ON  
L4A 1G7  
jmason@yrmg.com

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# OPINION

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Bob loved town, hockey

Re: Bob McNeil remembered as cancer fighter, Jan. 26.

Sad news last week with the passing of Bob McNeil.

I've only been in town for 23 years and I only knew him from the rink.

He always had a grin, followed by that big smile. He loved the game of hockey and this community.

I skated with him a few times in pick-up games when he was well into his 70s. Pretty awesome when I remember it, Bob out there with his big smile, just happy to be included. I guess that is all that mattered.

He was one of those players who was tough in his day. You could tell by his manner, size did not matter. It was heart and determination. I wish we could harness that product in today's hockey players — and our kids, for that matter.

Seeing him light up watching his grandkids play was a joy. From my side of the fence, I

saw a straight shooter in life.

I am sure he was a good businessman, friend, father and son.

I can also guarantee you he was tough on his kids, just like in the good old days. That is how it was if you wanted to make it in his day.

I enjoyed our conversations, which were far too few. Now, as I look back, I realize he had lots to share.

Did you know he roller-bladed the Terry Fox Run route in Stouffville 10 times one year to raise money for cancer research? That was just 17 months ago.

Bob McNeil had a huge passion for life. His kind is becoming extinct.

Thanks for your time, Bob.

MIKE HUMPHREYS  
STOUFFVILLE

You can read letters, columns and stories from The Sun-Tribune on [yorkregion.com](http://yorkregion.com)

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**Sun-Tribune**

6290 Main St.  
Stouffville, ON, L4A 1G7  
[www.yorkregion.com](http://www.yorkregion.com)

PUBLISHER Ian Proudfoot

GENERAL MANAGER  
John Willems

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## Articulate residents could teach media lesson or two

Money, politics, sports, entertainment, big-name stars.

As news stories go, the saga of Markham's quest to build an NHL size arena has it all, which is why news trucks from every media outlet lined the curb outside the Markham civic centre Tuesday night and into the wee hours of yesterday morning to report on a crucial vote on the fate of this controversial project.

Some of these reporters learned the hard way these meetings don't always run according to their air time.

Proceedings didn't wrap up until 3 a.m.-ish, shortly after councillors voted 7-6 to proceed with the project in much the same form it was first proposed back in April, with the audience at that point down to a couple of dozen people, while earlier the chamber was packed to overflowing.

Unfortunately, I also think some members of the media failed to understand the concerns of local residents about this project, as if residents were somehow anti-hockey, anti-Canadian partypoopers who didn't know a good thing when it dropped in their lap, didn't appreciate the show-biz aspect



Bernie O'Neill

of it all.

When your city is featured on the holy grail of Canadian TV, Hockey Night in Canada, with "sports journalists" incredulous at your opposition to what should be a "no-brainer", you know you are fighting an uphill battle trying to get non-Markhamites to understand what the debate is about.

There are a lot of very smart people in Markham and what the media saw Tuesday night were a lot of articulate residents who have taught themselves quite a bit about a project for which the information hasn't exactly been forthcoming.

I will say the mayor did a good job of

chairing the meeting on a very difficult night. Out in the gallery, sometimes people talked while others were talking and one fellow was bent on booing every person who spoke against the arena funding formula, but generally people were civil.

If, as the mayor suggested, some of the statements deputants made were not factually accurate, you would have to also note the general public has still not been apprised of all the details about this plan, which has been subject to confidentiality agreements and meetings that are closed to the public.

You would have also heard some very passionate speakers supporting the project, supporting the mayor and excited that a facility like this, and an accompanying NHL hockey team, could put Markham on the map, anchor the city's new downtown, increase property values across the city, be a boon to business, boost civic pride and so on — all of which is likely true, if everything goes according to plan.

It's the big "if" of getting the hockey team or of the facility coming in on budget, being busy and profitable and so on that worries residents who, without more assurances, are being asked to take a leap of faith.

I can't say I'm really surprised by the

outcome of the vote.

I think we can all confidently say we've learned in the past eight months that this project got its genesis at Markham city hall and would never have been proposed if those who had the grand dream didn't think they could muster the votes to stickhandle this thing through.

I can only imagine the lobbying and arm-twisting that has gone on behind the scenes the past few months, since this plan seemed about to melt away.

It's good that the pretence that this is about building a cultural centre or venue for public skating is long gone and residents know at its core this is a bid to get an NHL team in Markham.

I also think that, after yesterday's crucial vote, it may be time for detractors to turn their energies and suggestions toward making the project the best that it can be in terms of what it will bring to a new downtown, how the transit and parking and all the other aspects of something this size will work, what amenities the GTA Centre can offer to Markham amateur athletes and teams.

My guess is their financial participation in the arena is now essentially set.

Stouffville resident Bernie O'Neill is a York Region Media Group editor.