

# OPINION



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York Region Media  
Group community  
newspapers

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published every  
Thursday and Saturday, is a  
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Media Group Ltd., a wholly  
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## SATURDAY FORUM

# Our dependence on growth has us in awkward spot

I read with interest your recent editorial arguing against MPP Frank Klees' proposal for municipalities to have the final say in area development and arguing for the Ontario Municipal Board to maintain that role.

Regardless of who triumphs in this debate, I am more concerned with your conflation of growth and progress, an assumption that is fundamental to the editorial's line of reasoning but one that is debatable, to say the least.

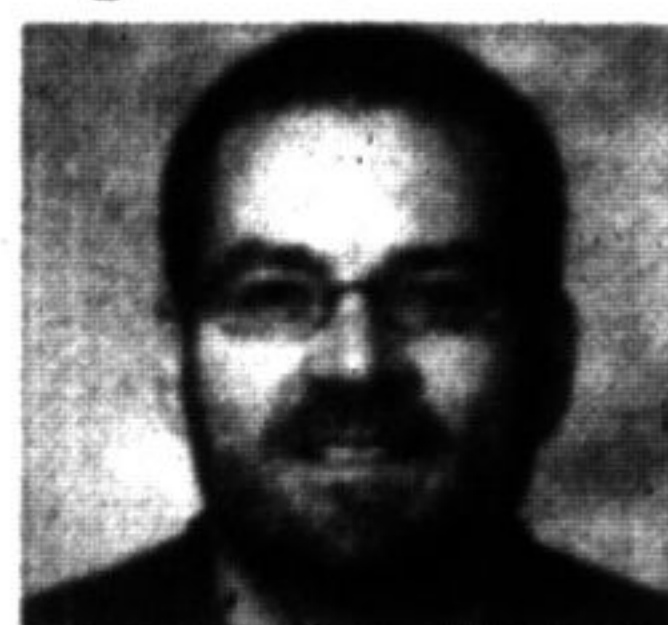
First, growth can be defined as an increase in size/value, or an abnormal formation, such as a tumour. Progress, on the other hand, can be seen as movement toward betterment, or completion.

The editorial's assumption is that an increase in size (of a given municipality) results in movement towards betterment. I would counter that belief and argue that, in fact, the growth you support is more like a tumour that is moving humanity toward completion of an exponential-growth culture.

*As the planet makes its way toward eight billion inhabitants, we are running desperately short of cheap energy, fertile agricultural land, and clean water.*

As Donella Meadows, co-author of the seminal work *Limits to Growth*, argues in her book, *Thinking in Systems*, growth is a clear leverage point in the dynamic, complex system of life on Earth.

However, she points out "Growth has costs as well as benefits and we typically don't count the costs—among which are poverty and hunger, environmental destruction and so on—the whole list of problems we are trying to solve with



Steve Bull

growth! What is needed is much slower growth, very different kinds of growth and, in some cases, no growth or negative growth."

Ms Meadows goes on to show how leverage points are often used backwards, creating more problems than are solved.

After spending two years researching these topics for a novel I penned (*Olduvaï*), I am quite convinced our dependency upon growth—population, industrial and economic—has put us in a precarious predicament.

The planet and our human-made systems can no longer sustain what we have come to rely upon to maintain our standard of living. As the planet makes its way towards eight billion inhabitants, we are running desperately short of cheap energy, fertile agricultural land and clean water.

These are not opinions of mine, but of thousands of scientists (corporate-funded "research" aside).

I am convinced the growth argued for in your editorial only moves us closer to an endpoint we will not enjoy.

The parable about boiling a frog is a good analogy: if you try placing a frog in a pot of boiling water, it will jump out immediately, however, place that same frog in a pot of room temperature water and slowly increase the heat, and that frog will remain in the water until it is boiled alive. Small, incremental changes can add up to a result that is very unpleasant indeed.

Stouffville's Steve Bull is a vice-principal at a Markham elementary school and an author.

Is there an issue about which you are passionate?  
You could be a Saturday Forum contributor and get the chance to have your piece published along with your name and headshot. E-mail your 450-word submission to [jmason@yrmg.com](mailto:jmason@yrmg.com)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Maybe expectations are too high today

*Re: How will middle-class families keep up?, letter to the editor by Brian O'Sullivan, May 4.*

Every day one reads how affordable housing is out of many's reach, with the list-average price of a resale home in York Region at \$643,000. Even those with six-figure incomes struggle. True.

But let's not look at financial numbers for a moment and ask the question what is today's perception of affordable housing?

My first abode was a row-house, under 900 square feet, one bathroom, three bedrooms and laundry room in the unfinished basement.

You had to bring the lawn mower through the living room/dining room to mow both lawns.

It was perfect even though we had a 15-per-cent-plus mortgage with no powder room, no ensuite, no hardwood floors, eight-foot ceilings and non-stainless steel appliances.

Location was in the boondocks, known as Ajax, a sacrifice we made to give our son a back yard. That was affordable housing—with the exception of that mortgage rate of course.

Why aren't builders building these homes? Maybe it is because people want what it took their parents decades to acquire.

I'm risking the wrath of readers for posing this but maybe expectations today are the real issue.

My first car was old. My wedding cost less than \$20,000. I worked two jobs to get through school and took years to pay off. My first child was born while renting an apartment.

I was raised old-school and have passed this along to my children but even I

succumb to the realization they need reminding that one must start at the bottom and work their way up.

It's this journey that makes one appreciate the years of putting your head down, laying one foot in front of the other and working as a family to endure the tough times and relish the good.

Maybe even more important, it builds coping skills and sets an example for your kids for their journey through life.

Rule No. 1 of Bill Gates' 11 Rules of Life states: "Life is not fair—get used to it!"

And while I am not sure I want my kids to get used to it, I do want them to have coping skills to get through those tough times that will make them people I am proud to know and ensure their expectations match reality.

If they want the same as I now have, they, too, have to start at the bottom.

SHAEN ARMSTRONG  
STOUFFVILLE

## HAVE YOUR SAY, STOUFFVILLE

► What do you think of these issues or any others?  
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