

OPINION



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It's more than time to move on senior initiatives

ISSUE: All levels of government must quickly collaborate to deliver services our aging population will require.

It's not a new conversation, by any means, but the crucial issue of meeting the growing needs of senior citizens has, once again, come to the forefront of political discussion.

We've known for years the senior population in York Region and, indeed, across the country, has swollen to its highest level since the post-war baby boom and it's time to dust off studies, forecasts and visionary strategies and place this looming crisis square in the centre of the table.

It's going to take more than talk from government and more than good intentions and well-meaning partnerships and collaborations with non-profit agencies that deal with this issue. It's time, now, to bring all these costly efforts into a realistic, immediate plan.

In fact, this should have started five or 10 years ago.

Municipalities will have a vital role to play in these collaborations as outlined in a recent Federation of Canadian Municipalities report.

That's because our aging population will have a profound impact on not just our challenged health care system, but our housing stock, transit service and even the availability of jobs.

The FCM report showed seniors make up the fastest growing age group in the country and number about five million (10 million in 25 years). Here, in York Region, it's even more profound as the senior population has nearly doubled to 126,000 or 82 per cent in 2011, rapidly changing the landscape of our communities. By 2031, seniors will make up one-quarter of York's burgeoning population.

So, while, municipalities focus on providing soft services, such as recreation, lifestyle, health and support networks for seniors, property owners, alone, can't sustain the increasing costs of necessary services.

There needs to be a financial push/partnership with higher levels of government on how best to maintain and improve the types of community resources offered to retired citizens such as preventative ways to keep them healthy and active.

This can no longer mean lofty visions and forecasted strategies from groups and agencies fighting for funding to keep or create jobs for themselves. It has to be part of top-down collaborations, constructive ideas and financially sound concepts.

The Region of York, for its part, has undertaken numerous studies on ways to develop and deliver health care services for those 55 and older but it needs committed financial support from all levels of government and those agencies funded by public money.

The United Way of York Region, as a start, just announced an investment of \$5.5 million beginning this year to help social service agencies provide services, part of which is geared to help seniors who need services close to home.

Affordable, senior-friendly housing and other vital service delivery needs to morph into a workable and co-operative approach and, municipalities, considered frontline service providers, must apply for any funds up for grabs or risk losing to more innovative communities.

The region, the province and Ottawa are astutely aware of how crucial it is to get moving on senior-focused initiatives but this awareness needs to flourish — quickly — and turn ideas, strategies and visions into reality.

As Regional Councillor Brenda Hogg, a member of the community and health services committee overseeing this movement, says, "We're sounding the alarm bells."

Citizens need to let the policy makers know what we need and make it an election issue.

LETTER OF THE WEEK

Paying teachers to run clubs, coach teams not the solution

Re: Would new model work in our school system?, editorial, June 27.

I have been teaching for 16 years, both in Toronto and York Region, and am passionate about extracurriculars.

I have seen the growth in self confidence, leadership and maturity for students who get involved in teams and clubs.

I have worked with student councils for 15 years and really enjoy working with some very motivated young adults.

However, I think making extracurriculars mandatory for teachers or paying them to do it is not the way to go.

Some teachers will coach just to get the extra money; that is a disservice to the kids.

Where will the boards get this extra money? They are already having trouble funding existing programs; if they pay for extracurriculars, there will be cuts elsewhere in the system.

Where will the boards get this extra money? They are already having trouble funding existing programs...

I don't have a solution to the problem, but paying teachers to do extracurriculars, is, in my opinion, the wrong solution.

JOHN MACDONALD
STOUFFVILLE

Bus drivers fighting climate change

As we celebrated Canada Day, it is fitting to express our thanks to the army of public servants who toil on our behalf to make this country the envy of the world.

We all have our favourites and mine are bus drivers.

I stand in awe at their professionalism, courtesy and efficiency as they navigate through both dreadful road and weather conditions and irate passengers.

All my plans and appointments are geared around ever-dependable schedules.

And, as I wait on cold, dark nights in the middle of nowhere, I cannot describe the feeling of comfort and security I get from knowing a bus will soon be there.

As we continue on our reckless fossil fuel binge, the bus represents not just another means of transportation but an alternative mode of thinking that could save the planet.

In this, the bus drivers are foot-soldiers in the greatest battle we face as a species — climate change — and I salute them.

MICHAEL DIAS
MARKHAM

HAVE YOUR SAY, STOUFFVILLE

► What do you think of these issues or any others?
E-mail jmason@yrmg.com

Young drivers are dual exhausting

Our drivers. What a joy! I am so proud of the successes of our young people. They whiz by me on the road in beautiful shiny cars with personalized plates and hubcaps.

They have dual exhaust and fancy stereos.

Their parents must be so proud of their young people's accomplishments, they give or help them buy these vehicles.

These machines are so superior they don't have to signal turns or lane changes. We plebs should recognize that they don't have to follow the rules.

No, just watch out and let them do as they please, please.

Racing and cutting off people seems a God-given right.

How about a touch of reality? Have your wheels and the dual exhaust, just

pay more taxes, (luxury tax) for disturbing our rights to quiet peace and enjoyment in our homes and town.

MARY HOPPERTON
MARKHAM

My children love their school

Re: Last minute 'sick' days an appalling act of fraud, June 20.

Debra Kelly writes, "Thank goodness my daughter only has one more year to go before leaving Ontario's public education system."

It's been a while since I've read anything so melodramatic in my local newspaper.

I'd like to respond by writing thank goodness for the teachers and staff at Parkview Public School. (Go, Panthers!)

Both my children had a great year at Parkview, filled with learning, fun and top-notch arts programming.

Sure there was a little bit of "noise" this year, but when I look at the big picture, my kids love their school and can't wait for the exciting things planned for them next year.

LARRY CUOZZO
UNIONVILLE

BOTTOM LINE: Municipalities need to determine needs and put plans into action.