

OPINION



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LETTERS POLICY

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Region belongs at gaming table

ISSUE

ISSUE: Regional council declined to hear citizens on casino in Vaughan.

Democracy suffered a blow last Thursday when York regional council refused to allow the 11 citizens who made the trek to Newmarket to speak about their views on bringing a casino to their community.

Residents in favour of and opposed to the issue had prepared short statements no more than five minutes in length that they hoped would either persuade the region to quash Vaughan's willingness to host a gaming facility or do nothing and let the cards play out.

No one got the chance to contribute much of anything on this important local matter as our elected officials, ultimately, decided it was none of the region's business, at this point in the process.

As the top tier of our two-tier system of local government, the region collects a significant portion of your property taxes each year to provide core services such as policing and paramedics, public health, regional transit, housing, children's services and social assistance, to name but a few.

All nine of York's mayors, as well as regional councillor representatives from each municipality, plus a chairperson, make up the council.

We think you'd agree that in addition to collecting taxes and providing services for our communities, our regional government also has an obligation to, at the very least, show citizens some respect and courtesy by hearing them out.

The latter was lacking at the last meeting of this council and, sadly, demonstrates a degree of insensitivity for the democratic process.

Even setting aside that the casino development has hit a snag in Vaughan and, come

Oct. 15, at that city's own public meeting the proposal could be derailed, it is disappointing the region didn't show more interest.

It already has jurisdiction over a municipality's official plan, the document that guides where and how growth will occur.

Does our regional council really believe an Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation (OLG) casino in any of its municipalities will not have any effect on its bottom line? Particularly when study after study shows costs increase for social services in communities where casinos are located, for example?

On the flip side, how about the projected increase in local tax revenue, billions in spin-off investment and thousands of jobs the proponents of a gaming complex point to as significant?

Is that not something in which the region might want a hand?

Just earlier this spring, the regional council in Waterloo overturned the decision of a lower-tier municipality to be a willing host for casino development.

That move prompted Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne to ask the OLG to review its process of casino allocation, which it is reportedly undertaking.

There's no doubt that in municipalities where there is overlapping jurisdiction, such as York Region, clarification is most definitely needed around who makes the final decision on such things as a gaming facility.

We urge the OLG to fully explore how it handles casino allocation in instances where there are two tiers of local government.

And we strongly encourage York regional council to take an active interest in this issue and, at the end of the day, a position on the matter.

Any subject that has as much potential impact on communities as a casino deserves no less.

BOTTOM LINE: Clarification needed on who decides issues such as a casino.

LETTER OF THE WEEK

Five-storey condominium building sets new precedent for Main St.

Re: Condo building good for economy: Hargrave and Neighbours unhappy with council, Sept. 26, and Council didn't listen to residents, merchants, letter to the editor by Shawna Kelterborn, Sept. 28.

More than a year ago, PACE/Geranium submitted a proposal for a new condominium development in downtown Stouffville. A lot has been said about it, and those Stouffville residents who live or own businesses in close proximity have raised many real and relevant concerns.

The first residents to be affected, however, are the individuals, myself included, who live in the PACE Credit Union properties, people who have made these premises their home for years.

Isn't it ironic we won the Benjamin Moore Main Streets Matter contest and are slated to enhance the historical aspect of our Main Street with a facelift? This is not a good start.

We think it's important for people to know we residents face imminent eviction from affordable homes into a massively inflated rental market — a year later, we are still looking.

As a resident, I understand why PACE wants to re-purpose its land, but what it does with it is the real issue.

While I have to wonder how council justifies ignoring the concerns of long-standing Stouffville residents, PACE itself could do so much more for the people of Stouffville, many of whom are members of PACE.

Isn't it true our small community branch will continue to thrive because of the community? Wouldn't it be prudent, then, for PACE to rethink the impact on that community?

I'm no architect but I can think of ways that could possibly address those concerns, such as, why is it necessary to take up the whole property with the building itself? How about a nice garden at the back for the

neighbours to look at instead of brick walls? Garbage could be collected from the underground parking area, accessible from Lloyd Street instead of the rear.

Mayor Wayne Emmerson said there is precedence for the height of the PACE condos at the Stouffville Creek building. But Stouffville Creek is on the bottom of a significant rise in the topography, while the corner of Lloyd and Main is at the top of that rise, visually overstating the actual height of any building there.

Also, Stouffville Creek is not on Main Street. Allowing a structure of that size to be built at this location sets a different precedent for downtown Main Street that allows for further development of five-storey buildings in the heart of historic Stouffville.

Isn't it ironic we won the Benjamin Moore Main Streets Matter contest this year and are slated to enhance the historical aspect of our Main Street with a facelift? This is not a good start.

BENNY VAN VELSEN
STOUFFVILLE

Bravo for strict driving tests

Re: Questions about drive test office unanswered, column by Marney Beck, Sept. 19.

Sorry, but no sympathy from me regarding the licensing office for failing your son. Why? Perhaps this office cares about the driving skills of its customers.

You were not with your son when he took his test. How do you know how many rules of the road he may have broken? Honestly, how many bad drivers do you see every day?

It seems to me there are a lot of people out there who should have not only failed their test, but perhaps should have never been given their licence at all.

The lack of signalling lane changes, speeding in a school zone, failure to come to a full stop at intersections are the most frequent rules of the road that are ignored by many, many people and they are lucky they don't get caught.

Good for Aurora Drive Test examiners for being more strict.

Remember, driving is a privilege, not a right and you need to earn that privilege.

CHUCK THERRIEN
RICHMOND HILL

WEIGH IN ON THE DISCUSSION ... e-mail your comments to jmason@yrmg.com

This is debatable