

# OPINION



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## SATURDAY FORUM

### Children's Aid Society helps society's most vulnerable

**A**bandonment. Neglect. Sexual abuse. Emotional harm. Exposure to conflict. Physical abuse. Family break-

down. More than 465 children are in the care of York Region's Children's Aid Society. About 186 of these children are younger than six years, 107 are between seven and 12 and 173 children are 13 to 18 years.

Last year, the agency also provided a high risk infant nurse program to 290 prenatal and post-natal infants.

Referrals to this program resulted from infants at risk of neglect/abuse, parental substance misuse potentially impacting ability to care for a baby, along with parental mental health issues that could impact ability to meet the needs of a baby.

York is a community of contrasts — great wealth and abject poverty.

The society is responsible for keeping all children throughout the region safe and helping families thrive.

The work and services provided by the society is remarkable. Last year, 10,000 calls were received concerning the safety and well-being of a child, 9,055 children were served and 4,199 investigations were completed.

Demands placed on the society are unending — 24 hours every day of the week.

The agency co-ordinated 116 foster homes and facilitated 21 adoptions last year.

One member of the agency's board of directors, Sophia Wong, knows that without the society, the most vulnerable children in the region would suffer.

Collaboration is important for the agency's success. The society is one of more than 30 partners that established the York Region Centre for Community Service.

This resulted in critical care programs being located with a shared intake and assessment process by the appropriate agen-



Dennis Hopps

cies involved. York Regional Police's diversity, equity and inclusion bureau also works closely with the society.

As partners, they share information and resources, recognizing they are working toward the same goal. Insp. Ricky Veerappan said.

The society, under a strong leadership model, takes seriously the challenges it faces, the trust it has earned and the work it has yet to complete.

It is a trusted partner in improving the quality of life of children and families in the region.

The society fundraises and welcomes donations for programs and services not funded by the government.

Annually, the agency is overwhelmed by the number of people, families and businesses in the region who generously and thoughtfully donate to its holiday heroes program. Last December, 1,700 children, 130 youth and more than 500 families were served by this program.

The agency is supported by 195 volunteers, who, during the past year, donated 17,962 hours of service and have driven more than one million kilometres helping children to access visits, appointments and activities.

Dennis Hopps is a professor at Seneca College's school of business management and a doctoral candidate researching impact and accountability of non-profits organizations. You can read more of his weekly blog, *Community Charities*, at [www.yorkregion.com](http://www.yorkregion.com). Your comments and suggestions are welcome.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Town needs vision for next round of growth

Re: Expansion plans on agenda, Oct. 10.

In each of the next 17 years, we will be welcoming on average 1,000 newcomers to the community of Stouffville.

It promises to be challenging: we've barely had time to discover and integrate the unique gifts, needs and dreams of the last 17,000 people who arrived since the population boom began here in 2006.

"Growth management" is necessary, but only makes sense once the supporting "vision" has been articulated.

"Country Close to City" was coined 20 years ago to promote employment and residential growth.

In recent years, the motto has proved impotent to address the town's most pressing needs and opportunities, including sprawl and gridlock, affordable housing, social infrastructure, heritage preservation and 600 new local jobs needed annually until 2031.

Town staff note that immediate action "is

### HAVE YOUR SAY, STOUFFVILLE

► What do you think of these issues or any others? E-mail [jmason@yrmg.com](mailto:jmason@yrmg.com)

important to maintaining an uninterrupted supply of land and building lots following the build-out of phase 2 development lands in Stouffville". This is not a vision for community building and its assumptions need testing. This underscores the political urgency for vision.

Here's a start. Plan for a small-town feel with amenities (pool, rinks, library, train, banking etc.) and employment lands accessible by bike or on foot.

Include in the plan from the start a) a bike/trail system with all routes leading downtown; b) a transit plan for everyone.

The current proposal will not get youth to where they need to be or commuters out of cars.

We can't afford more cars and sprawling parking lots — whether for big

box stores, churches or strip malls.

Embrace density at the heart of town. The current plan with apartments on the outskirts is politically safe; but a community killer. A denser vision for Main Street, with housing and apartments on transit and bike routes, will be crucial for a vibrant, safe community and to curb sprawl.

Include a social audit with a plan for a "complete" community. We need a mix of housing, including affordable options for young couples, aging boomers, service industry workers, etc.

Moreover, show us how and why "civic space" will be achieved. Why would the "creative class" and their businesses find the plan attractive (show link to Economic Plan)?

Finally, make us "fall in love" with the vision. What's great or beautiful about it?

Inspire us and we can easily put out the welcome mat and invite another 17,000 people to enter into this place we proudly call home — and "manage" our growth well.

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