

Politicians consider other plans to increase turnout next year

Councillors no fans of online voting

BY SANDRA BOLAN
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Even if 100 more people voted, the \$100,000 price tag to implement online/phone voting for the advance polls in the 2014 municipal election is not worth it, according to Councillor Ken Ferdinands.

Whitchurch-Stouffville council voted 6-1 in favour of having a traditional pencil-and-paper election. The only addition will be the use of optical scan tabulators to count the ballots during the advanced polls and on election day, Oct. 27, 2014.

The decision on voting methodologies was deferred twice since the issue was first brought to council back in August.

Councillor Clyde Smith was the only one willing to give online/phone voting a shot.

"To me, it's worth something to try at least once to get our voter turnout up," he said during Tuesday afternoon's council meeting.

Disappointing numbers in Markham, which has offered online voting to its residents since 2003 during the advanced polls, was one of the reasons the other councillors cited for not going ahead with the option.

In Markham, online voting has not significantly increased voter turnout and the initial thought that it would appeal to younger residents did not pan out, according to the Oct. 15 council report. In reality, online voters were

between 40 and 60 years old and utilized this method out of convenience.

For Councillor Rob Hargrave, online voting lacks participation.

"How engaged are you if you just sit there in front of a computer and push a button?" Mr. Hargrave asked Tuesday afternoon.

'How engaged are you if you just sit there in front of a computer and push a button?'

"They have to learn and go out and hear what the issues are and be engaged in the process," he added.

Advocating for the use of online voting in the next municipal election was The Sun-Tribune's Community Links' panel.

For its members, it wasn't about increasing voter turnout, but providing options to the disabled, snowbirds, university students and residents who, for whatever reason, cannot vote in-person.

However, councillors remained fixated on increasing voter turnout.

More advanced polls in Ballantrae and Gormley are wanted by Councillor Phil Bannon, while Councillor Susanne Hilton suggested more polling stations and greater

efforts be made to reach residents who do not speak English via translated voter information.

Ms Hilton also proposed utilizing the schools for polling stations, something that has been done in the past.

Safety of the students and the disruption to programming are why polling stations are kept out of schools, according to Michele Kennedy, the town's clerk.

Whether it be elections, town surveys or event attendance, the number of participants is roughly 30 to 35 per cent of the population, according to Mr. Bannon.

"People do not want to be engaged. People do not want to be intimidated or harassed," he said Tuesday afternoon.

In the 2010 election, there were 24,092 eligible voters. Just over 10,000 people, or 43.96 per cent cast a ballot.

As of this past July, there are 30,015 eligible voters, Ms Kennedy told The Sun-Tribune in July.

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8:00-9:30 am

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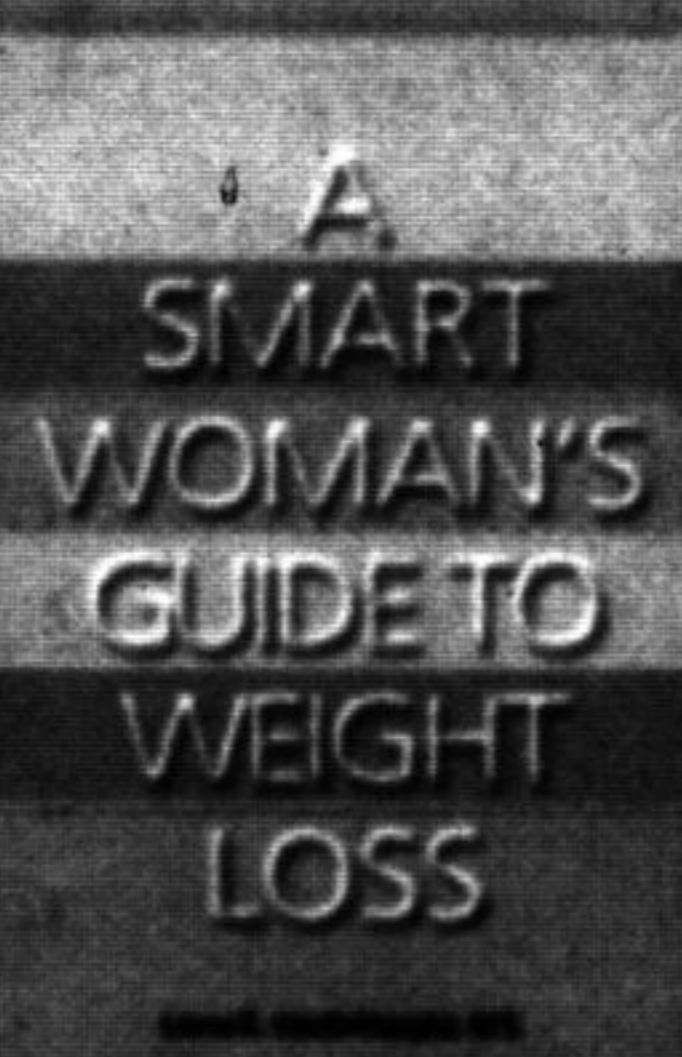
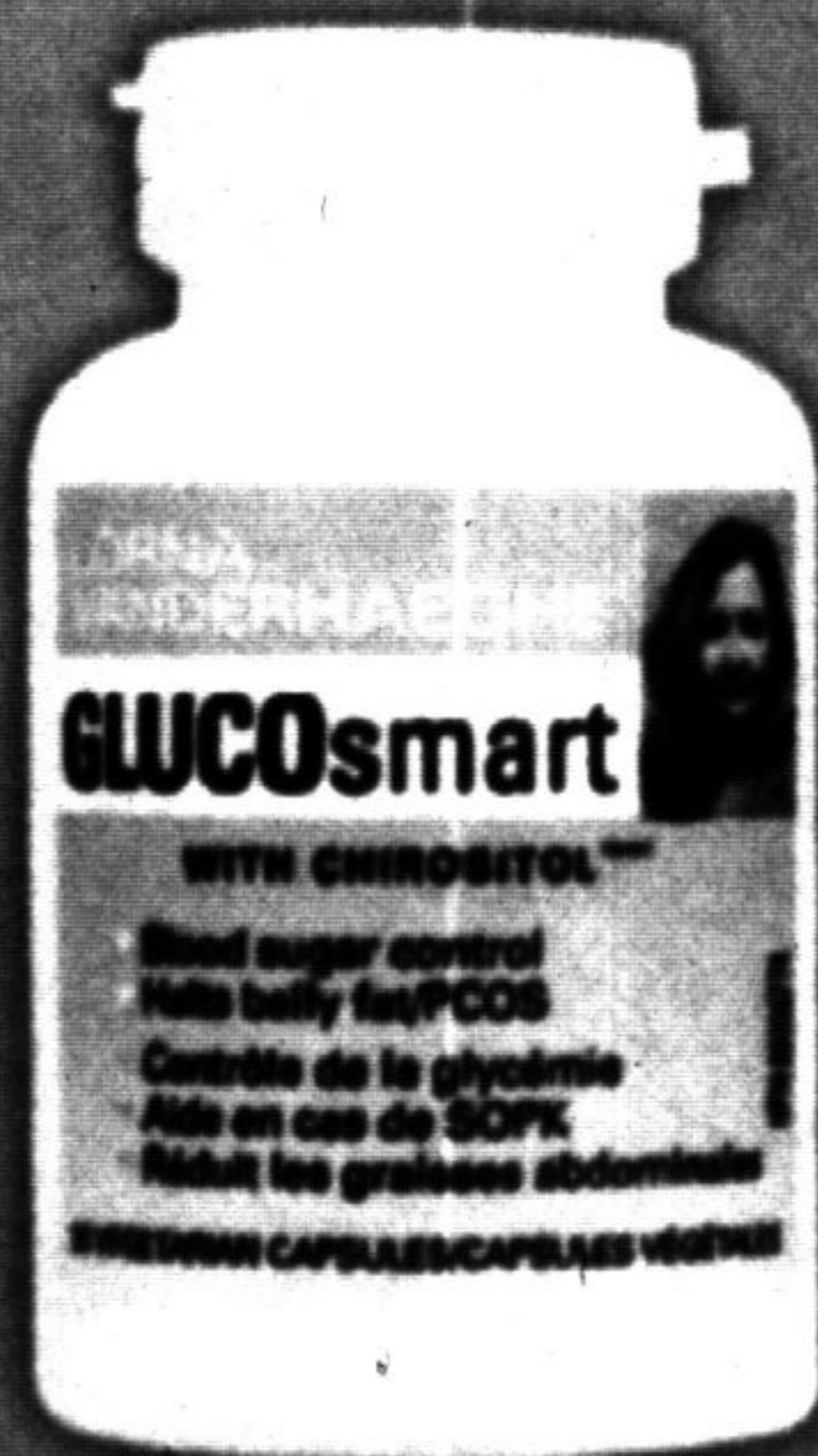
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