

Suddenly, Last Summer

Newman's
Own



By Newman Wallis

It seems like yesterday that this rustic Christian community was plodding through its second century like a folksy, 20th century Brigadoon, its city fathers perennially hamstrung by the economic imperative of "opportunity cost".

This is a time-honoured concept in municipal economies everywhere. It represents the cost, or sacrifice, incurred by a decision-maker when selecting one option over another. Opportunity cost is the fundamental cause of decisional constipation among politicians with a finite budget, an infinite number of electoral promises and an inclination to be all things to all people.

Then suddenly, last summer, propelled by seeds planted by earlier administrations and resolute developers, ignited by a new regime undaunted by the spectre of opportunity costs and implemented with the renewed vigour and professionalism of a conscientious administrative staff, Whitchurch-Stouffville went into developmental and service lift-off.

It started in September, 2007, with the opening of a grand new secondary school, the arrival of a huge Wal-Mart, the emergence of a plethora of new homes and the receipt of the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville 2007 Developmental Charges Update Study. This authorizes the town to pass by-laws imposing charges on builders and developers against land, updating qualifying projects to the present and foreseeable future, and indexing the projected costs to 2007 dollars, thereby suddenly being empowered to afford promises and capital projects well beyond the taxpayer's dollar. This is how Whitchurch-Stouffville is bursting into tomorrowland, driven by the

little city-hall engine at the corner of Sandiford and Main.

Two additional public elementary schools, designed to accommodate about 540 pupils, are on their way up across from the shiny new SDSS on Hoover Park Drive and a new school behind St Brigid Catholic, enshrining the lifelong contribution of Harry Bowes. The 2007 proposal for a new, expanded Public Works and Parks operations facility, having survived myriad consultations and studies, is about to materialize on the south side of Bethesda Rd. between 48 and McCowan.

For years the existing facility has lacked covered storage for sand and salt. The remote vehicle servicing facility in Vandorf is no longer efficient and the building and Leisure Services facility in Memorial Park have long reflected deficiencies. And, besides, that space is needed for the new Memorial Park Plan.

And how about those parks?

Memorial Park will be rejuvenated, retaining legendary ball diamond No. 1 and losing two diamonds

which will be replicated at Bethesda Park. The town plans to extend Park Drive, retain the outdoor pool, create a Somerville access, close Church and Burkholder streets, introduce skating paths, beach volleyball, three more tennis courts, expand the lawn bowling facilities, add playgrounds, a basketball court and more parking space. All the while preserving the park's history.

Bethesda Park will also be financed through development charges. Phase one will boast a 400 square foot field house, natural grass for softball and soccer fields with lighting, state-of-the-art irrigation, drainage, septic and parking facilities.

Residents of Musselman's Lake will be

consulted on the park in their community. They seem to be leaning toward one large offshore neighbourhood park over a waterfront magnet for "outsiders". The Town has set aside \$500,000 in a trust fund for the park.

The Rupert Park Improvement Project emerges like a modest phoenix from Stouffville's first suburb of 40 years ago. For \$300,000, already in the coffers, the community will enjoy courts for basketball, ball hockey, skating, a seniors' gazebo, walking paths, removal of the worn-out tennis court, extended toboggan slides, increased accessibility and a commitment to regular maintenance.

Council has recently endorsed the new, 336 square-kilometre Rouge River Watershed Plan, to protect and restore our natural heritage and ecological systems, since many of the tributaries that comprise this vast watershed rise in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

They are widening the streets, re-opening a revived Country Market, fashioning a new arts centre where the Princess Theatre once stood, approving an auto mall, mulling over a bio-fuel plant, talking up a curling facility, erecting a new fire and emergency services compound along with new big new additional ice pads in support of what this town does better than anybody.

More stores, more houses, a Vandorf Secondary Plan, an expansion of Novopharm meaning more employment and more services, a stately addition to the town's museum and now the prospect of a formidable power generation facility in our own backyard. And still another Tim Horton's for those who can't get enough of a good thing.

This town is no longer mired in band-aid mode, skimping on services and developments on the "tax-payer-dollar-only-stretches-so-far" rhetoric typical of Metro Toronto; it is

no longer encumbering decisions with the mindset of the dreaded opportunity cost. After years of country-style parsimony, somebody at city hall seems to have noted that, "from the York-Durham Line to the 404, there is a monster population blow comin' up Townado Alley...and we are right in its flight path."

Somebody at last got it clear that all those immigrants who continue to pour into the GTA have now made a few bucks and have discovered the hinterland, and it is us: Stouffvillians, the mysterious cow-tipping Strawberry Festival people north of Markham with the big Santa Claus parade and the great big pumpkins.

And then suddenly, last summer, the evidence of this new view began to burst out of the ground and manifest itself in project after project, development after development, preparation after preparation for a foreseeable future, mindful that seven per cent annual increase in population means that a community doubles every ten years.

When the hockey association asks for fewer seats for the new ice pads and the mayor responds by demanding many more, we know he got the message. When the council stops saying you cannot have it both ways and starts to find new and creative ways to bankroll facilities and services undreamed of in the past, you know they got the message. You know they have matured into sophisticated, 21st century fiscal mode and their eyes are on the distant future, where so many of us plan to live.

Next month's column will review an impressive array of upcoming developments and examine the financial strategies that have brought them into being.

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