



Talk Of The Town

Town Taxes: The Catch 22

By Ben Embiricos

Part 1

Taxes, taxes. We don't like paying them but we all want the services and facilities that they pay for. For municipal taxes, the answer, so the theory goes, is to attract more businesses which can ease the tax burden on residents.

Whitchurch Stouffville Ward 1 councillor Ken Ferdinands recently said that businesses and institutions currently contribute less than ten percent of Whitchurch Stouffville's tax revenue. He said that this figure needs to increase by a half.

The town of Georgina, to our north, has recently considered the same point in their 2009 "Socio-Economic Mission and Strategic Plan" (available at www.georgina.ca). Georgina is concerned that their business tax base is insufficient, meaning either heavy taxes for residents and/or inadequate services and facilities. Georgina residential property tax rates are the highest in York Region according to The Toronto Star.

The Georgina report suggests that their reliance on residents for municipal tax revenues actually increased between 2001 and 2006. This was not because the municipality experienced a major loss of employers but because the population of Georgina has increased rapidly.

What matters is the ratio of employers to residents. If a town's population grows so the demands placed upon municipal services increases. If that population growth outstrips business growth then a larger proportion of the municipal tax burden will fall on residents as opposed to businesses.

The lower house prices in Georgina and the Region and Province mandated growth have attracted home buyers who commute to other parts of the GTA (usually to the South). Does this sound familiar?

The population of Whitchurch Stouffville is expanding at a particularly fast rate, even by the standards of York Region and is set to keep on doing so. The town estimates

that Whitchurch Stouffville's population grew from 26,149 in 2006 to 33,200 in 2009 (27% in just three years). It is expected to grow by around another 9,000 in the next three years and to reach 62,321 by 2026.

It seems that development charges, although welcome, are of little assistance in the long term in balancing the town's books. Robert MacDermid's report "Funding City Politics" (available to download at www.votetoronto.ca) suggests that development charges only cover a relatively small proportion of the additional costs associated with rapid population growth. In 2005 MacDermid states that the Vaughan planning department reported to council that development charges would need to increase by 279% to cover the true cost of new development. The council voted instead to increase the charges by 41%. MacDermid states that York region has realized that "development charges do not pay for the cost of development".

So, what to do? How does Whitchurch Stouffville attract the business growth that it needs to help meet the increased needs of a growing population whilst at the same time keeping taxes paid by home owners as low as possible?

According to the York Region Official Plan, a big part of attracting business growth is making a community a good place to live. This makes sense. The Georgina report elaborates "lifestyle is a major attractor for [business] owners...firms employing highly skilled and well-paid employees are always concerned that they may be attracted away by other similar firms that are located in more ideal surroundings or who can offer a very desirable life-style. By locating in such a pleasant environment, with the amenities and culture desired, such employee retention becomes a reality. It is necessary to create an ambience where people come to live because of the beauty, vibrancy, and amenities of the community".

This is the municipal taxes "catch 22".

It would seem that to attract new businesses to relocate in the town, a municipality has to invest in facilities as well as maintain and improve a high quality of life for its residents. But how does a town do this without raising taxes for

residents, at least in the short term? There is no short answer to this conundrum.

A growing town needs to be very careful in its spending and organization not only so that the current and future residents are best served but also so that employers are attracted to locate there. Employers need to see a town as a good place to live where skilled employees will be happy to relocate. Has the town succeeded in this? Next issue I will discuss the record of the council and Mayor Wayne Emmerson on this point.



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Student Wins Place At Science Centre School

Only 28 students selected from across Ontario

Stouffville District Secondary School student Aleena DiPede has been chosen to attend the fall semester at the Ontario Science Centre's Science School.

"The guidance councillor, Ms. Chartrand, told me about the program in January," said Aleena, who is in Grade 11 at SDSS. "I applied sometime in March but didn't find out until May that I'd got in. I was so excited." Applicants must have a strong academic background, demonstrate initiative and independent study skills, and be able to work effectively as part of a team.

Other requirements are a passion for learning and communicating science. Students are selected based on a written application and essay, academic record and recommendations from two teachers, one of whom must be a science or mathematics teacher.

"Twenty-eight students in all of Ontario get chosen for each semester, and we do one math and two sciences," Aleena explained. They will also explore new science and technology and participate in Science Centre and community activities, completing a minimum of 15 practicum hours in addition to their coursework.

"I don't think anybody else in this school applied and nobody has ever applied before," said Aleena. "I'll be there for one semester, from September until the end of January."



MISSING



OREO

Long Haired Cat
(spayed male)

- missing since Dec. 2009
- has been seen around town

Please call even if you've
adopted Oreo so I'll
know he's safe.

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TOWN OF
WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE

- **Tuesdays:** Pick up Baseball at Rupert Park ~ 1-4pm
- **Thursdays:** Games in the Park ~ Picnic Shelter in Memorial Park Featuring Wii Sports ~ 6-9pm
- **Saturday:** Public Swim, Stouffville Outdoor Pool ~ 6-7:30pm

IT'S ALL ABOUT YOUTH ~ BUT OPEN TO ALL!

FREE Youth drop in programming geared for youth ages 11-17.
Youth staff on hand to organize the events!

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\$10 Registration Fee

For details visit www.townofws.com or call 905-642-PLAY