

York cracks down on ticket scofflaws

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Do you have a ticket for speeding, not wearing your seat belt, being drunk in a public place or selling alcohol or cigarettes to a minor that you figured you could just blow off?

Think again.

With \$46 million in unpaid fines on the books, York Region is about to crack down on people who don't pay their provincial offences penalties.

Regional council is expected on Thursday to approve what it is calling "aggressive steps" to make deadbeats pay their tickets.

"Unpaid fines are lost revenue to the hard-working taxpayers of York Region," Richmond Hill Mayor Dave Barrow, chair of the region's finance committee, said.

Allowing people to not pay their fines "makes a mockery of the whole justice system," Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti, chair of the region's police services board, said.

"We have to do whatever it takes to get this money into our coffers. It's about increasing the revenues, but it's about increasing the revenues because we've spent a lot of money to make sure our bylaws and the Provincial Offences Act are adhered to. It's also about the integrity of the justice system and we might as well not have it if, at the end of the day, there's no ability to (force) the people that have committed the offence to pay up."

Regional chair Wayne Emmerson agreed.

"It is important all steps are taken to ensure offenders live up to their responsibilities and pay court-ordered fines," he said.

But while some legal experts defending York Region clients sympathize with the region's goal of retrieving unpaid fines, they doubt the steps will make much of a difference.

CHARGES LAID

York Region administers the second largest provincial offences court system in the province, based on the number of charges filed, with courts in Richmond Hill and Newmarket.

People can be charged with provincial offences (or non-criminal charges) for a number of infractions, including speeding, careless driving, not wearing a seatbelt, using a cellphone while driving, driving with no insurance, selling booze or tobacco to a minor, smoking in a prohibited place, trespassing, failing to obtain a construction permit, noise complaints, transit fare violations or provincial occupational health and safety violations.

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