

Schomberg meet brings out residents' concerns

By Mark Pavilons

The latest installment of King's annual Meet the Mayor and Councillor evening in Schomberg brought out residents with some concerns of their own.

Both Mayor Steve Pellegrini and Councillor Bill Cober note they enjoy these informal community consultations because it's a great way to 'keep our ears to the ground.'

Helping homeowners, particularly newcomers to King understand taxes, is an ongoing challenge, but one the politicians are well versed in.

King is the largest municipality geographically in York Region and yet has the smallest population and therefore smallest tax base. The mayor explained that the bulk of taxes we pay include income tax and others at the federal and provincial levels.

Locally, King is responsible for collecting property taxes, but only gets to keep a small portion. Of the average assessment of roughly \$6,000, 45% goes to York Region, another 22% to the school boards and 33% to King Township. So of that \$6,000 tax bill, King gets only \$2,000 to pay for fire service, libraries, municipal roads, arenas, snow removal, etc.

Cober pointed out that many regional services are 'invisible' to most residents and include social services, regional roads, health, etc. 'There are many layers to local government,' he observed.

The mayor noted municipalities are also legislated to carry out certain work, all of which comes with a cost. Currently, King has had to come up with roughly \$2 million each for three bridges that require overhauls, due to work on the Dufferin Marsh canal system.

That money could go a long way to addressing other issues in King.

The biggest shock, and source of calls to the Township, tends to come from new residents, who moved from urban areas with more services. They wonder why their taxes are so high, for less in return.

Cober noted that people spend more time and effort researching a new cell phone or HD-TV than they do researching a new community. People visit houses and buy them without looking into the local tax situation.

A Pottageville resident was upset about a lack of bylaw enforcement in her neighbourhood. She has problems with noise and property standards not being adhered to. Unlicensed vehicles litter some properties and other homes in the area under renovation remain unfinished, she charged. She has an issue with dogs producing an 'eerie howl' constantly and she believes they're being neglected.

Local bylaws, she stressed, are 'out of date, have no teeth' and need better enforcement.

'We're getting lip services, not getting action,' she stressed.

In her opinion, there seems to be a lack of pride in home ownership these days.

The mayor noted bylaw officers do investigate complaints and many do go to court. But the reality is regional prosecutors will drop cases they can't win.

The Township has decided to provide bylaw officers with uniforms and a clearly marked vehicle. The resident questioned this expense, but the mayor noted it not only gives the officers more of a presence, but in the long run it's more economical.

Cober added progress is slow in bylaw compliance, but orders are issued.

'There is success. The challenge is it's a slow process,' he said.

One resident asked for an update on the status of the former arena property near the fairgrounds.

The mayor noted they have sent a Memorandum of Understanding to Caregiver Omnimedia, which is planning a transitioning care facility on the site. They are awaiting a response.

The mayor announced plans are being formalized for new commercial development on the northeast corner of Highway 27 and Proctor, which will be home to a new Petro-Canada gas bar, car wash and a McDonald's McCafe. The matter recently went to the Committee of Adjustment for some fine-tuning.

One woman commented on the programs available at the Trisan Centre and a lack of awareness of available activities. It's a great facility and more people should take advantage of it.

Cober admitted they're 'very proud of it' and agrees there's a need to promote it better.

The mayor promoted two coming events to the residents.

One of his annual favourites is the Volunteer Appreciation Night, slated for May 7. It's a celebration, he said, and he encourages the public to come out and show their support and appreciation of our tireless volunteers. He added volunteering is the best way for recent arrivals to integrate into the community.

'It's a great way to integrate into the community fabric quickly and easily,' he said.

The mayor also promoted the annual cleanup day and a "Cleanup Challenge." He's urging all residents to take five to 10 minutes April 18 between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. to spruce up their streets and neighbourhoods. The Township will provide some supplies and even pick up the garbage. He gets out in his neighbourhood and he's urging everyone to "pitch in."

The next Meet the Mayor & Ward Councillors night will be held Thursday, April 16 at Ansnorveldt Library. It will be hosted by Councillor Avia Eek and it runs 6:30 to 8 p.m.