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Public transit should get council's eye

A call for public transportation from the chair of Innisfil's accessibility advisory committee should make council rethink their future budget strategies.

IAAC chair Margaretta Papp-Belayneh has suggested that town residents greatly need a cheap and reliable method of public transportation, for a variety of purposes. Although the request comes at a bad time, with council set to pass a 9.5 per cent town tax levy increase, she does raise a few very prominent points that need further discussion and investigation.

Innisfil is the largest geographical municipality within Simcoe County. It stretches across several small communities like Cookstown, Gilford, Lefroy, Belle Ewart, Alcona and Stroud. With the number of residents approaching 40,000 within the next few years, it also has one of the largest populations in the county.

Many of these residents are either elderly, physically impaired or students, who cannot drive and are without adequate methods of transportation.

And for many, seemingly simple tasks like grocery shopping, medical appointments and working are difficult. Taxi cabs are reliable, but expensive. And many of the people that would use a public transportation network would likely be on fixed or low incomes, making taxi transportation difficult to afford. According to



Comment

by Chris Simon

Papp-Belayneh, getting to Royal Victoria Hospital for a doctor's appointment costs over \$55 for a one way fare.

The lack of public transportation in Innisfil has other side effects. The elderly are left in isolation, and students have difficulty getting to jobs.

Innisfil is not the only municipality within the county without public transportation. Currently, only Barrie, Orillia and Collingwood have developed networks. County government will be looking into the issue during the development of their Transportation Master Plan.

But perhaps Innisfil needs to investigate the feasibility of bringing a transportation system to the town, along with any county decision.

Obviously, any transportation system would be expensive to start-up and maintain. Innisfil mayor Brian Jackson estimates it would cost between \$500,000 and \$600,000 per year to maintain, in addition to the initial start-up funding that would be required. And other privately-run transportation systems have failed within the town, due mostly to a lack of ridership.

Although the GO bus runs through the town

several times per day, getting to a stop can be difficult without another form of transportation.

So perhaps that's why a feasibility study would be wise now. The town could survey residents, to find estimated ridership levels, and consult with other county and Greater Toronto Area municipalities to discuss fare rates and develop a cost/benefit analysis. The town could also use some of the information gathered to start planning future road projects.

True, there are concerns over the distance buses would need to travel across the municipality. But a transportation system would not need to be as intricate as those in Barrie or Orillia. Each community within Innisfil could have its own route linking residential areas to the major urban cores. A few times per day, a bus could run from those communities into a main station or access point. That access point could anchor a route into Barrie a few times per day as well.

A reliable system running along a few routes every couple of hours could be beneficial to the town, providing easy and affordable access to jobs, retail businesses and the New Town Hall and recreation complex. It would also appeal to new businesses looking to set up offices and industry within the municipality. If successful, it could also reduce traffic volumes on roads, eventually saving money for the town. Anything that could potentially save the town and its taxpayers money is at least worth a look.

Town, media have it wrong on Innisfil Heights

Letters From Our Readers

There seems to be a lot of misinformation being circulated about the proposed Innisfil Heights development. Your recent comment column, Investing in Innisfil Heights (Feb. 6) is a prime example.

You wrote, "For all the millions of dollars spent on studies ... the three levels of government have failed to link this significant project to its plans".

This is for the simple reason that the Innisfil

Heights proposal does not conform at all with the Smart Growth planning principles established by the province.

Calling some fields a "settlement" does not make it one. With gasoline at \$1 per litre we should not be contemplating creating a whole new car-dependent town of 27,000 adjacent to a major highway. Nor should we be destroying what little agricultural land we have left and reinforcing our dependence on imported food supplies. Likewise, we should not be extending Barrie's unbroken urban sprawl even further south.

And let's not get too carried away about some starry notions of an 'industrial park' solving our problems.

I suggest reading the recently published article 'Our idea of cities needs a rethink' by Glen Murray.

"Now ... the majority of new jobs are not manufacturing but creative jobs in science, technology, design, culture, and financial and professional services," he said.

You ask, "how was this development missed by every level of government except the town?"

In fact, it wasn't missed by anyone. Innisfil was

criticized by the province for its attempts to undermine the Smart Growth planning process. Both Barrie and Innisfil councils just don't get it when it comes to planning for Smart Growth. Council members and planning staff in Barrie and Innisfil should be required by the province to attend Smart Growth training sessions before any further planning takes place.

We urgently need a Citizen's Smart Growth Committee to audit the actions of council and developers. Innisfil residents need to be much better informed about the issues

surrounding Smart Growth. So far the press, council members, and planners have failed them. We should applaud the town when it get things right but we also need to loudly and vigorously advocate for better alternatives to prevent a repetition of the kind of terrible mistakes that have been made in Barrie. For anyone interested in learning more about Smart Growth, I suggest visiting the Ontario government website and I also recommend the Smart Growth Toolkit. It is free at www.smartgrowthtoolkit.net.

Mike Richard,
Alcona

During cold days, move pets indoors

Letters From Our Readers

Just a reminder that most pets cannot tolerate the frigid temperatures we are experiencing currently. The

sound of dogs barking, crying, yelping and howling during temperature drops of -20 C or below is disturbing, not to the ear, but to the hearts of those who cherish pets. While some may quite innocently believe that it is safe to leave pets outside

thinking the dogs, especially, love the winter and cold, there are limits, even for these furry creatures.

So please be humane and show you care by offering shelter for pets during particularly frigid days,

especially when there is a windchill factor. They will repay you a thousand-fold in returning your affection. Sometimes, putting up with a little extra pet hair in the home is a necessary, life-saving sacrifice. Or at least provide an insulated dog

house, to shelter your pet from the wind. A friendly reminder to pet owners who live busy lives and can't always remember each daily concern. We know you love them. Thanks!

Judy Paulsen,
Gilford

No room for ethnic learning in public schools

Letters From Our Readers

I thought that you may be interested to know how some school taxes are

dispersed to the exclusion of others, based solely upon ethnic learning. Hopefully this is not one of the reasons our taxes are going up again. One thing about Innisfil, you know that every year your taxes increase by 10 per cent. The lack of interest by

our Simcoe County District School Board trustee (Donna Armstrong) and the superior attitude of school officials are worrisome. Both of whom seem to be promoting ethnic differences by either their actions or inaction by doing the

bureaucratic shuffle (board policy, French department idea, just no reply, etc.). Buses, teachers, paraphernalia all paid out of everyone's taxes, but just for a very few students because of an ethnic difference in their curricula.

Why is there not say a Scottish Highland fling for just those students of that ethnic background, or a Sikh festival? Public schools were not created to celebrate ethnic differences.

John Stevens,
Innisfil