

Celebrating 25 Years
Orangeville *"Your Community Newspaper"*
CITIZEN

Vol. 26 No. 23 _____ Wednesday, February 16, 2000

Public supports two tiers and making own decision

By SHEILA DUNCAN

An opinion poll, commissioned by the Mulmur Association of Residents and Ratepayers (MARR) and paid for by residents from several local municipalities, shows the majority of people in Dufferin County support a two-tier system of government. And an overwhelming majority want to decide how they will be governed, through a referendum, rather than leaving it to the politicians or the province to decide.



GEARING UP FOR BOWLING

Photo/MICHAEL SPEERS

Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Dufferin and District is gearing up for another successful Bowl for Millions set for February 19. Linda Simpson from Big Brothers and Big Sisters unveiled their new t-shirts for the event recently which were designed by little brother James. Spots for the event are still available, so if you are interested in participating or in purchasing a t-shirt for only \$10, call the agency at 941-6431.

MARR past president David Hahn says the results show solid support for either the status quo or a reformed two-tier local government in Dufferin. And it indicates a need for further public education surrounding restructuring and related issues due to the number of "unsure" responses to some questions.

He said Mono and Mulmur have supported a merger but the county won't endorse it. Nevertheless he feels the two municipalities will ultimately end up in the same box and they have concerns about the two-tier issue. He said they have been lobbying Queen's Park to not appoint a restructuring commissioner and to send a signal that the government would accept a two-tier solution that met the objectives of less government and fewer politicians.

Last week's letter from Municipal Affairs Minister Tony Clement delivers both messages, Mr. Hahn

said.

And while people in the rural areas have demonstrated support for a two-tier system, Mr. Hahn said no one knew how people in the urban areas felt, where the politicians are supporting single-tier. (Orangeville, Shelburne as well as the rural municipality of East Garafraxa have backed one-tier while the five others in Dufferin have supported a two-tier system.)

Hence, the opinion poll done by SES Research of Toronto in which the number of interviews in each of Dufferin's eight municipalities reflected population. So, phone interviews with Orangeville residents represented 50 percent of the poll, with a total of 301 interviews conducted February 5 and 6.

"We didn't want loaded questions," Mr. Hahn said. "We wanted a poll that would stand up to scrutiny."

The leading option favoured by residents in Dufferin is no change (no change - 30.9 percent, two-tier - 25.5 percent, unsure - 24.2 percent, and one tier - 19.3 percent).

But interestingly, when it's indicated that one and two tier models both yield cost savings, the margin of the two-tier model significantly increases to 40 percentage points and this swing cuts across all regions of the county including Orangeville (two-tier - 64.5 percent, one tier - 25.1 percent, unsure - 10.5 percent).

"People strongly favour two tiers when they realize both structures yield savings," Mr. Hahn said. "We thought people in Orangeville were not interested and would represent a large number of the unsure responses but the numbers were fairly consistent between urban and rural. The urban people feel the same as we do in the boonies. The urban-rural split in terms of what we want is not a severe split.

One weakness in the restructuring effort, Mr. Hahn said, is the flow of true information which is reflected with the number of unsure responses to some questions and the fact that the numbers change so much when people realize there are cost savings in both options.

The poll made it clear that residents prefer to have their governance decided by means of a local referendum to be held during the upcoming municipal election (referendum - 80.7 percent, council decides - 12.3 percent, unsure - 3.7 percent, province decides - 3.3 percent).

Women have a greater tendency (73 percent) to favour a two-tier model compared to men (57 percent), the poll shows.

Even factoring the small sample size, the residents of Mono, Melancthon and Mulmur are most likely to oppose a one-tier model of governance for Dufferin County.

A clear majority of residents (74.1 percent) in Dufferin would support the concept of electing a majority of members to county council. Half of the respondents (48 percent) were unaware that county councillors are appointed.

The maximum margin of error for 301 interviews is 5.7 percentage points, plus or minus, 19 times out of 20.

So why is it that we favour two tiers?

Mr. Hahn believes it is partly due to accessibility of local politicians. "Having a council that is close to you that understands the issues is important."

Plus we want to preserve our rural areas, he said. "We don't want untrammelled growth. We don't believe that you have to have Brampton or Toronto spreading up to Georgian Bay. Some say it's the fat cats from the city who want to pull up the drawbridge and not let anyone else in. I'm sure there is something to that but these attitudes are felt throughout the rural municipalities. These are attitudes in Melancthon and Amaranth too where there is more of an agricultural interest. It's not just a bunch of fat cats from the city."

The chance of getting agreement on restructuring at county council is slim, Mr. Hahn said. "In reality, it will only be resolved through further government intervention which may or may not be likely or at the ballot box this fall."