



Councillor

Mike Del Grande



WARD 39 • SCARBOROUGH - AGINCOURT

VOLUME 3 • ISSUE 1

Dear Friends and Neighbours,

We are currently in the 3rd year of this Council mandate. The last two years have been rewarding and challenging. On a high note, we had only two reported grow houses in the last 6 months compared to nearly 20 over the same period last year. On a lower note, the City dives deeper and deeper into debt as the majority on Council refuse to acknowledge that the public debt will eventually have to be paid back through higher taxes.

People wonder what's wrong with City Hall? Sadly, many of the comments about politicians are true. But, what is also true is that we get the government we vote for. I have many friends who say: "They're all the same so I don't vote". The issue is: many elected representatives with good intentions are not strong enough to reject the "culture" at City Hall.

My friends, as some of you already know, I ask tough questions because I read my agendas. I put staff on notice that I expect a higher standard than what is "normal". In this newsletter I want you to be aware of the existing culture and share my personal observations with you. I always thank you for the opportunity to tell it like it is and for the privilege to serve you.

My efforts are based on two fronts: locally and City-wide. What happens City-wide, affects us locally. As the demand for more taxes continue, so does the "tax and spend" philosophy here with most of the money going for downtown pet projects. As a City Councillor, my focus is policy impacting Ward 39 since I am here to represent the interests of the residents of Scarborough-Agincourt.

Sean, Rita and Jennifer, my office staff, know my mandate - to continue to keep the neighbourhood clean, well serviced and safe. They are committed to resolving your issues quickly, efficiently and (most importantly) providing you with feedback that you need. I want Agincourt to be a desirable community; a place that people want to move into. I am prepared to do what it takes to make this happen. I am privileged to be your elected representative at City Hall. I will continue to use reason and balance to safeguard your tax dollars. Thank you for your continued trust.

Yours truly,

Mike Del Grande
Councillor, Ward 39,
Scarborough-Agincourt

Please visit my website at www.mikedelgrande.ca

Due to Canada Post's delivery requirements, residents outside of Ward 39 may have received this newsletter.

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Art Gallery of Ontario

Mike Del Grande's Afternoon at the AGO Sunday March 5 - 1 to 4 PM

Admission is Free for Ward 39 Residents

The Art Gallery of Ontario is one of Toronto's cultural treasures. We have arranged a special afternoon for Ward 39 residents and it will include tours in English, Cantonese and Mandarin. It is an interactive family gallery to inspire young minds with hands-on art activities for all ages. Please join me for this special event. Tickets are free for Ward 39 residents, but quantities are limited. Please call my office to book your tickets before February 24, 2006.

The Art Gallery of Ontario is located at 317 Dundas Street West, three blocks west of St. Patrick subway station

Mike Del Grande

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What's On My Mind?

← CITY HALL CULTURE

Too many City employees and senior management live in the 905 area. Some American cities require their senior staff to live within their borders – here, it is considered discriminatory. Why do American municipalities do this? Simple – when you live in the City that you work for, the financial decisions you make affect you as a resident too so caution and prudence are exercised.

Openness to public scrutiny is a constant roadblock. Red tape, mounds of paper to read or the last challenge of 'Freedom of Information' are used effectively to stall and frustrate. Everything at City Hall – all decisions and information – needs to be public.

← SALARY INCREASES

Back in December, you may have read about Councillors secretly giving themselves a pay raise. For many of my colleagues, the excuse was "I didn't know what I was voting for". THAT'S SCARY. I would like to assure you that I knew what I was voting for - and I voted NO. Many Toronto Councillors are upset that they are paid less than other GTA municipal politicians. They are also upset that City staff are getting higher cost of living increases than Council had planned on giving itself. Think about that – we give staff a 2.75% increase, argue that our 1.7% increase isn't enough and then quietly vote to match the higher figure for ourselves? Imagine what that says about how we manage your money? Do seniors and retirees on fixed incomes get annual increases that are higher than inflation? When we negotiated the salary increases for staff, we gave them everything they wanted. Why? Because many Councillors rely on help from the unions at election time. Isn't that a conflict of interest? To be independent is to have integrity.

← SOCCER STADIUM

A couple of months ago, Council voted to spend more than \$20 million dollars (of your money) for a new soccer stadium at Exhibition Place. We also agreed to forego \$2 million each year in property taxes. The time between when the proposal was first submitted and when it was approved was LESS THAN 15 DAYS. No public consultation. No alternatives considered. This decision violated every one of our purchasing rules. To say this was a sweetheart deal for the proponent is an understatement. They get governments to

pay 90% of the cost of a stadium and they have a brand new place for their team to play. When I criticized the deal and suggested that the money would be better spent upgrading and building soccer fields across the City, I was labeled a 'soccer hater'. At City Hall, if you cannot argue with the message ...just shoot the messenger.

← CITY DEBT

Since 1997, our debt has increased from \$800 million to almost \$2 billion. Today, almost 10% of every \$1.00 of your property taxes goes towards interest payments on our debt. By 2010, it will increase to 15%. This is not how you run your household and it isn't how Council should be running the City.

← BOTTLED WATER

Last year, Council approved \$50,000 to bottle and promote our tap water to prove that it is safe. This year, staff wanted \$150,000. I asked: Is this a 'need to do' or a 'nice to do' project wasting tax dollars? The majority of Councillors agreed and I stopped this waste.

← PROPERTY TAXES

In 2003, the Mayor promised that property taxes would increase by no more than the rate of inflation. Since then, inflation has averaged 1.5% per year while your property taxes have gone up by 3% each year.

I've done budgeting in the private sector for a very long time. I've never seen it done the way that Council does it. I've joined my fellow Councillor Norm Kelly and various business leaders to provide recommendations for an alternate budget framework.

This year, there is a new twist. After 2 years of denial, Council just 'realized' that business is overtaxed and Toronto is losing jobs to the 905 area. To address this problem, Council decided that residential property taxpayers will have to pay more so businesses can pay less. This could add as much as 2% on top of our regular increase. I can't support doing this when the City does nothing to control its spending - downtown simply doesn't get it.

← THE BIG PIPE & MARKHAM'S GROWTH

York region has big plans for growth. They have a lot of land and want a lot of new residents. To serve their water/wastewater needs, York Region is building a huge pipe that runs right through sensitive environmental areas. To lay the pipe, they are draining marshes and wetlands which are part of a watershed impacting all of the GTA. With the help of Councillor Glenn De Baermaeker, I convinced the Provincial Environmental Commissioner to agree that, what York Region is doing, is not right and to intervene.

Residents of Ward 39 know that you need not look very far to see how much of what happens in Markham affects Toronto. As Markham

expands, traffic on Steeles Avenue and Kennedy Road will get worse. Pacific Mall and Market Village are proposing huge expansions and Markham Council just approved a plan to allow massive development between Old Kennedy Road and Kennedy Road/Dennison – all without consulting us. Enough is enough! I've convinced City Council to appeal Markham's plans to the OMB.

← THE BELLAMY REPORT AND LET'S BUILD

City Council spent \$20 million to find that a misrepresentation in a Staff Report was the reason that taxpayers paid almost \$40 million too much for computers in 2001. The Mayor's office calls Justice Bellamy's Report a blueprint for cleaning up City Hall, yet I am forced to stand up in Council almost every month to point out that we've already forgotten the lessons that the Bellamy Report taught us. A prime example is a taxpayer-funded housing program called Let's Build. When Council approved more than \$40 million in funding for 8 'affordable' housing projects, I warned my colleagues that the numbers didn't make sense – we simply weren't getting good value for our money. City Council refused to listen and I was quickly labeled as being 'anti-housing'. I finally convinced the City's Auditor General to look into it and – surprise, surprise – he discovered that we spent over \$2 million more than necessary. Why? A material misrepresentation in a Staff Report.

← SOCIAL PROGRAMS

The City spends \$220 million each year to deal with the homeless. Over this term of Council, that's almost three quarters of a BILLION dollars. What do we have to show for it? The same homeless people, sleeping on the same street corners under inhuman conditions. This summer, many of you called my office about a woman sleeping in the bus shelter at Pharmacy and Finch. Nothing happened until I got personally involved. I met her and encouraged her to seek the City's help. She has now moved to a shelter.

In our "World Class" City, Council is told that it is impossible to control squeegee people or beggars (Victoria Park & Finch, Warden & 401, Sheppard & Kennedy). Whenever Councillors point to problems in our communities, staff tell us that they need MORE MONEY. Society does have a responsibility to help our less fortunate neighbours, but we also owe a responsibility towards taxpayers in this City. We must manage within our means, wisely and with some measure of accountability from the people using tax money to deliver this service. I will continue to ensure that we get value for money spent and see results.

← WATER RATES

The same people who brought you bottled water also bring you 9% increase each year for the next 5 years. What they do not tell you is: while this money is supposed to be used to replace our aging water/sewers pipes, they used \$92 Million on a private investment called 'Enwave'. This is a heating and cooling project for downtown. Water rates are collected to improve and fix both water and sewage infrastructure, not for investments in private companies.



2005 Christmas celebration with board members of the North Chinese Community of Canada (NCCC)

What's On My Mind?

SCARBOROUGH SUBWAY

Would you be surprised if I told you that people prefer to drive because public transportation in Scarborough is not reliable? The Scarborough Rapid Transit (RT) line is one of the busiest and most overcrowded networks in the City. The City has committed to building a new subway to service the 60,000 students at York University, but the 550,000 people living in Scarborough should continue to get by with two subway stops and an aging RT system? Next year, Council will get a report on the future of the RT. Your Scarborough Councillors are not sitting by and hoping that it recommends replacing the RT line with a subway AND connecting it to the Sheppard subway line – we're forcing the issue downtown. It's about time that Scarborough started getting its fair share!

AMALGAMATION

At the time of amalgamation, Scarborough's water rates were part of our property taxes, we had \$21 million in the bank and our maintenance work up to date. Today we have separate water and tax bills, our capital projects get pushed aside while 'higher priority projects' (mostly – downtown) go to the top of the list and a mounting debt to repay. It is my contention that the former City of Toronto would have gone bankrupt if it were not for amalgamation. Now all the suburbs are poorer for the union of cities and standards of service have steadily fallen. I will continue to speak up for our community to be treated fairly.

CRIME AND POLICE

When I knocked on doors in 2003, many of you told me that you were prepared to pay a little more if it meant getting better service from the Police. When Chief Fantino was in command, there was no money for more Police and the Mayor said that new officers were not the solution. Now, just 2 years later, we have the money and the willingness to hire 150 new officers? We have an odd system.

With more police officers, I want to see improved response times. I have heard from many of you that response times are slow – even for 9-1-1 calls. I am documenting these complaints and would appreciate more people providing written accounts of their experiences. I will be taking up this issue, once again, with the local command as well as with the Police Services Board.

Since 2003, we've had 3 murders and 6 shootings in Ward 39. 2005 was a record year for gun violence. Criminals commit crimes with confidence while good, honest people are afraid to walk around their neighbourhoods after dark.

This problem won't stop until law-abiding citizens call (416)222-TIPS or my office with information so we can get the criminals out of our community.

GARBAGE

The City has a secret report, but what it says is no secret. We have no backup plans if Michigan shuts their border. As with most difficult issues demanding courage and conviction, City Council has deferred this problem for years and we are now on the brink of a serious problem. We have 2 days worth of storage capacity within the City

limits and then...nothing. The problem is with special interest groups that refuse to consider incineration using modern technology and a Council that caves in to their demands. Yes – incineration is a last resort and should only be used after all alternatives (recycling and reuse) are exhausted, but it is an option that must be considered. Permanent levies on high-rise rental and condo buildings were not the answer. They were nothing more than a tax grab. I worked hard to ensure that, once their diversion rates increased, these buildings would be exempt from the levy.

SPEED HUMPS

Speeding on our residential streets is the most frequent complaint that I receive. I believe that the best response to speeding is radar enforcement. In November, I asked Council to consider doubling the City's dedicated traffic enforcement team. The response so far has not been very positive, but I'm still working on the issue. At the same time, many residents have asked for speed humps to slow down traffic. All requests are measured against a set of Provincial standards taking traffic volume and average speeds into account. If you and your neighbours want speed humps, the place to start is with a petition. Getting them installed is a community-driven process. Contact my office and we'll be happy to provide you with the guidance required to move forward.

PROPERTY TAX ASSESSMENTS AND MPAC

Many of my neighbours were shocked when they received their 2005 Assessment Notice. I don't say this to deflect criticism, but the people who decide what your home is worth don't work for the City – they work for MPAC, a Provincial agency. The Provincial Ombudsman recently announced that he is investigating the way MPAC does business and I – for one – couldn't be happier. MPAC is autocratic, secretive and do not treat property owners with the respect that they deserve. You have the right to question their assessment decisions – call and ask them to justify the value assigned to your property if you disagree with it. Current Value Assessment is a good concept, but there needs to be some humanity in the process. Seniors living in their homes for years shouldn't watch their property taxes go up and up just because the value of the home goes up. I believe that the higher assessment should apply when the house is sold; otherwise, we risk taxing people out of their homes.

MARIJUANA GROW OPERATIONS

Regrettably, this is an issue that I've had to write about in each one of my previous newsletters. Shortly before I took office, our Ward saw a rash of new grow operations. I am proud to say that we've had only two reported grow operations in almost 6 months. Either they are getting better at hiding or our message 'Get out of our Neighbourhood' is getting through loud and clear. Please continue to be vigilant – if we let down our guard, they will return. My thanks go to the community and to the Toronto East Drug Squad Unit for their continued support.

ST. CLAIR STREETCAR LANES

While much of Scarborough copes with poor TTC service, Council was asked to approve \$65 million to rebuild a section of St. Clair Avenue with "streetcar-only" lanes. The original project was \$25 Million to replace the streetcar tracks only. When I realized that opposing the plan wasn't going to work, I brokered a deal where both sides agreed to \$65 million – not a penny more. Wasn't I surprised when the downtown Councillors tried to push the project budget to over \$100 million? Apparently, the local community wasn't entirely happy with the TTC's plans and needed some last-minute 'perks' to withdraw their opposition – extras costing \$35 million! Enough was enough! I rallied support against the increase and I am happy to report that the budget remains at \$65 Million.

NEEDLE EXCHANGE

You'll be surprised to know that your City just became one of the most 'progressive' in the world at treating drug addiction. How did we do it? We give addicts free crack pipes and a safe place to consume their poisons. Who was opposed to the plan? The Police, downtown communities and former drug addicts. As far as I'm concerned, the plan that Council approved will not resolve our problems with drugs, addiction and the related violence.

ON PATROL

I make it my business to tour our entire community at least twice each month. I find that calling staff when I see a problem gets a faster resolution. I am proactive and do not wait for people to call my office to report a concern; however, I can't be everywhere and I can't see everything. If something in our community bothers you, please let us know – that's what we're here for.



Greeting the Armenian Pope.

Ward Issues in Brief

◀ HYDRO IMPROVEMENTS

We've had some problems with reliable delivery of hydro service. According to Toronto Hydro, customers should experience an average of 2 outages per year. For years, Ward 39 residents have experienced far more and I am working with Toronto Hydro to resolve the problems.

Over the past 2 years, Toronto Hydro has invested heavily in new underground cables and switching equipment supplying power to our community. Besides the recent cable replacements along Huntmill Blvd, we've also seen work completed on Bamburgh Circle, Gordon Baker Road and at Copthorne Avenue. Over all, Toronto Hydro is investing several million dollars in Ward 39 to ensure that power disruptions are kept to a minimum.

My office monitors power outages and I use this information to assist Toronto Hydro to decide where best to invest their money. If you experience an outage, please note the start and end times and call my office.

◀ WINTER SNOW CLEARING

With each snowfall, my office receives dozens of calls about the poor snow-clearing service due to cars parked on the street. Our plough drivers will stay well away from parked cars to avoid causing damage that result in insurance claims and I can't argue with this policy.

At best, one parked car will result in a large part of the street not being ploughed. At worst, if our driver doesn't feel that he can safely pass the parked car, he will not plough the street at all.

Everyone benefits when our ploughs are allowed to clear the streets quickly, safely and completely. Please show your neighbours a little consideration and keep your cars off the road, especially during and after snowfalls.

◀ MCNICOLL BUS LOOP

In previous newsletters, I reported that the McNicoll Bus loop (located on the north side of McNicoll Avenue, just west of Kennedy Road) would be upgraded as part of the ongoing watermain project. Since then, the TTC has purchased the large vacant property just east of Kennedy Road and has decided to relocate the bus loop to that property next year.

This is good news. The Cummer 42 bus will now have to continue through Kennedy Road before turning around – automatically giving residents at the Kennedy/McNicoll intersection better service. It also means that the existing bus loop can be turned back over to our Parks department and restored.

◀ BASEMENT FLOODING

In my Fall newsletter, I detailed my efforts to get help for residents who experienced basement flooding on August 19. After the storm, I spent almost 2 weeks knocking on doors daily and speaking to residents who suffered damage. I quickly learned that, if the City couldn't do more to stop backups in our sewer system, what residents really needed was help protecting themselves. When I returned to City Hall, I made quick work of pressuring Council to approve the Basement Flooding Protection Subsidy Program – a subsidy to help people install equipment designed to prevent future flooding. I understand that over 100 Ward 39 residents are participating. If you suffered damage and would like more information, please call my office.

During our December meeting, City Council approved another program – a 'no fault' grant of up to \$ 3,000 for each homeowner. People interested in participating should collect receipts for damaged property, clean up costs and renovation work because staff will likely require proof of damages. The details of the program haven't been finalized yet, but my office will compile a list of interested residents – please call my office for further details.



Recipients of the 2005 Clean and Beautiful City Awards.

PROPERTY TAX HELP FOR SENIORS

No senior citizen should be forced out of their home because they can't afford to pay their ever-increasing property taxes. Unfortunately, many seniors on fixed income face skyrocketing property assessments and the associated rising property tax bills from the City.

Depending upon your age, income and the value of your home, you could qualify to have your property taxes frozen at 2005 levels, regardless of how much your home's value appreciates. As



long as you apply every year and continue to qualify, the annual increases in your tax bill may be deferred or cancelled outright. All low income seniors are eligible to apply, regardless of whether you live in a single family home, townhouse or condominium.

The deadline to apply for the 2006 taxation year is August 31, 2006. Call my office and my staff will be pleased to send you the details about both programs as well as the application form.

Keep in touch!

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