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"Making York Region the Best Place to Raise all Families"

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Entry Deputation to York Regional Council – Deputation – for Dec 16 2009 Council session

RE: Budget / social / service funding

Dear Council,

Two years ago or so, I addressed the council regarding council's use of GTA pooling dollars - funds fought and lobbied for to be returned to the Region for social services from Toronto. After York Region had won that lobby, the council opted to use the bulk of it to pay down its debt, roads, sewers, and other infrastructure costs – but little to maintain and improve services for which it was lobbied for. The following year the council allotted \$1,000,000 to tackle poverty, a start but not nearly enough. I hoped messages from PACC, the YR Alliance to end Homelessness and others representing thousands of service users would have been taken more seriously.

Our services here are still severely lacking, not coming close to what the city offers. I'm told some programs in Y.R. for children, once applied for through the municipalities, even require a welfare worker to process applicants now - resulting in single parents and others missing out when no one gets back to them. These are essential children's services that should not be distributed in this manner.

I hear tell also that organizations like the Y.R. Food Network, which from a PACC standpoint as well as a personal standpoint is seen an integral cog right now in the community collaboration wheel to tackle poverty, is losing some key staff to funding cuts. Their recent success in establishing a much needed food bank to the reservation on Georgina Island and vastly expanding community outreach gets rewarded with job cuts? If not for the Food Network connecting me up with some much needed food to distribute to some of those in the community who are unable to get to food-banks – like blind residents and those in wheelchairs etc – these people will likely go hungry.

This is why we, the people of York Region, enable you the council members to provide these vital community and social services so they can function like all society does and with dignity. It's not my job or PACC's job or the community development team's job or charity's to service them- it is our governments. Providing access to food is a necessity and those on meager incomes such as ODSP or welfare can barely manage. Speaking of which, the Region is benefitting from uploads of ODSP as well now - leaving more than enough to provide the funds needed to keep the programs operating one would think, as well as adding essential services now not being provided.

The same fellow in the wheelchair often cannot get out his door in our brutal winters and must hope to attract charity or a passerby to shovel his driveway. The only group available doing this in the area for free, the Neighbourhood Network, does an admirable job but I'm

also as sure that assistance from them like any volunteer reliant service may be subject to availability. My personal knowledge of volunteerism lends me to know that you are often at the mercy of when someone might be available – and is therefore not a sufficient replacement for an essential service per say, such as if you are supposed to attend a doctor or emergency or cannot get out of your door. Being confined as such can be claustrophobic and lead to depression.

Ditto groceries. *With no delivery service – even at a cost-* available to him in Newmarket where he lives what is he to do? Is this not a lacking service? This guy also spent all night in a hotel lobby because there was no service in York Region that could provide him mobile taxi service to get home past 11 o'clock. It is outrageous, not to mention a breach of human rights that someone with a disability should have to sit an entire night in a hotel lobby because they can't get home. This was his first and last attempt to get out and 'socialize'.

These and many other community services are not frivolous, they are essential to keep our residents not only connected but also fed and housed it seems, and unless this council begins to get serious about tackling poverty by addressing the funding needed, lobbying for and building more affordable housing, and by attracting higher paying jobs; this region we will likely continue on a path towards a community crisis the likes of which we've never seen before - if its not already too late.

At a time when many residents are suffering financial distress and the demand for services in turn is increasing, I implore you to consider the need to address this issue now before the budget is actualized. Should there be one among you strong enough to stand up now and insist the issue be revisited - or have their vote of protest heard on record - now would be the time because "we told you so" in this case may cost lives.

Do the right thing now or we all will pay the consequences tomorrow.

Tom Pearson

Chairman poverty Action for Change Coalition
Vice- Chair – Operation Sparrow