

Whitby

THIS WEEK

Thursday, April 10, 2014 / A publication of [metrolandmedia/durhamregion.com](#) / @newsdurham

Durham Catholic school supporters asked to check tax bills

School board wants supporters to help preserve Catholic education

Kristen Calis
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DURHAM -- The Durham Catholic District School Board is asking ratepayers who want a strong Catholic education system in Ontario to show their support with a simple check mark.

The board has launched a campaign asking Catholic residents to check off 'English-language Catholic Separate Board' on the portion of their tax bill that indicates which school system they wish to support. Many people don't know that support automatically goes to the public school board unless otherwise indicated, said the board's director of education Anne O'Brien.

"Primarily, it's just reaching out and raising awareness," she said.

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WHITBY -- Durham Mental Health Services program coordinator Mark Bouwmeester, left, and executive director Rob Adams, right, said they're disappointed the Town of Whitby has decided to purchase a building at 400 Centre St. S. The agency had expressed interest in buying the building from the Province to turn it into a community hub for providing mental health services to local residents.

Kaitlin Abeele / Metroland

Plan for Whitby mental health community hub dashed

Town will buy historic building that Durham Mental Health Services wanted

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WHITBY -- A local agency's hopes of purchasing a vacant building in downtown Whitby for the purpose of enhancing the community's access to mental health services have been dashed following a recent council decision.

Durham Mental Health Services (DMHS) had expressed interest in acquiring a building at 400 Centre St. S., currently owned by the Prov-

ince of Ontario, in order to turn it into a community hub for providing services to people with mental health issues.

But on March 31, Whitby council voted 5-3 in favour of purchasing the building for municipal purposes that have not yet been determined.

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TW POLICE

Durham cops in video facing charges

Jeff Mitchell
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DURHAM -- Disciplinary action has begun against two Durham police officers over their involvement in a homemade video that poked fun at their court services duties.

Durham police said Wednesday that Police Services Act charges of discreditable conduct have been laid against two sworn members who appeared in the video. A third participant, a special constable who is a civilian, is not subject to PSA charges but "his discipline is being managed by internal policy," the service said.

Read the full story on page 10

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Council disappoints mental health advocates

From page 1

"We're extremely disappointed," said DMHS executive director Rob Adams, following the decision.

"Buildings like that in Whitby are very scarce and difficult to find. It was zoned properly and it sort of met all our requirements, so we're disappointed."

The historical property was built in the early 1870s and previously operated as a provincial registry office. It was also once used as a mental health centre but has sat vacant for several years, according to Mr. Adams, prompting the agency to inquire about its purchase in 2011.

Infrastructure Ontario must follow a policy prior to the sale of any property owned by the Province, which includes determining if the property is needed by any provincial ministry or other levels of government. Failing that, not-for-profit agencies, such as DMHS, are given priority before the property can be sold on the open market.

Town of Whitby staff brought forward a report last month recommending that the Town advise the Province of its decision not to purchase the property, clearing the way for DMHS. The recommendation also included a direction that was supported by DMHS to designate the significant external features of the property under the Ontario Heritage Act, preserving the site's heritage value.

"The reality is that there's no substantial difference between the Town of Whitby purchasing the building or Durham Mental Health purchasing the building with the exception that it's going to cost our taxpayers \$2 million," said Mayor Pat Perkins, who agreed with staff's recommendation, along with Councillors Michael Emm and Ken Montague.

The property costs \$810,000 to purchase and Town staff anticipate about \$1 million would have to be spent to make necessary repairs and bring the facility up to municipal standards. Annual costs to operate and maintain the facility are expected to exceed

\$25,000 per year, according to staff's report. But Deputy Mayor Don Mitchell and Councillors Lorne Coe, Joe Drumm, Derrick Gleed and Elizabeth Roy touted the economic benefits of the Town purchasing the building.

"What I see when I look at this is there's a convergence of opportunities here and principally economic opportunities," said Deputy Mayor Mitchell, adding the property could serve as additional office space for municipal staff or provide an opportunity to bridge a gap between the Town's economic development department and the Whitby Chamber of Commerce, located in downtown Whitby.

FAST FACTS

Estimated costs for the Town of Whitby to acquire and renovate the building at 400 Centre St. S.:

- Property purchase price - \$810,000
- Cost to repair and address issues raised by staff - \$175,000
- Cost to bring the building up to municipal standards - \$900,000 to \$1 million
- Total - Approximately \$2 million

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"The big advantage here is how we can promote the downtown and how we can derive so many positives out of this one opportunity."

Money to purchase the building will come from the Town's uncommitted reserve funds, which is made up of year-end surplus taxpayer dollars. Next, staff will undertake a process to come up with potential uses for the site.

"We're going to purchase the building first, and then we'll figure out how we're going to come up with a process to figure out what goes in there," said Bob Petrie, chief administrative officer with the Town of Whitby.



WHITBY -- Executive director Rob Adams, left, and program co-ordinator Mark Bouwmeester, right, of Durham Mental Health Services. **Kaiflin Abeele / Metroland**

"In recognition of National Victims of Crime Awareness Week, April 6th to 12th, 2014 we would like to thank our Volunteer Crisis Responders for their dedication and support in ensuring that we are here to help when victims need us most."



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