

Poverty group offers input on budget

The Peel Poverty Action Group (PPAG), based in Brampton, offered input last Tuesday (Jan. 14) on the upcoming Provincial budget.

PPAG Chair Edna Toth made the presentation to a pre-budget consultation of Ontario's Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs in Oakville

She told the committee PPAG is an organization which lobbies on poverty issues to all levels of government. The Province was being approached to assist cash-poor people in Peel, and Toth said a good starting point would be a \$100 a month increase in Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) that was recommended by the Lankin-Sheikh Social Assistance Review.

Toth also said Peel needs more affordable housing, as she pointed out 12,853 people were on the waiting list for subsidized housing in 2011, closer to 14,000 now. Peel's population is growing by about 30,000 a year, which pushes property prices higher. As well, she pointed out that many cash-poor people rent single rooms in private homes at \$450 a month, when their total income may be a little more than \$600 a month. They can't live on what's left.

PPAG commended the government on requiring municipalities to permit secondary units. Toth pointed out Mississauga has already held consultations and passed the necessary bylaws, and Brampton is on its way.

She also said PPAG has lobbied all municipal councils in Peel to forbid acceptance of election donations from corporations and labour unions.

“We believe that councillors can play hardball with corporations which includes developers, when planning permissions are considered, and that municipalities can demand more social housing in new developments,” she said. “You probably know that the provinces of Manitoba and Quebec, and the City of Toronto have made such rules. Would the province of Ontario consider them?”

Toth said there are many homeless people in Peel. Some live in the woods, while others live in cars, underground parking lots, empty buildings and 14,000 people used emergency shelters in 2011. She added that number is not dropping.

Another point she made is that health care is at risk among cash-poor people. She commented the Region helps seniors in need of dental care with money from property taxes. But it can't help all of them, or provide all services.

“Property tax is not the treasure chest that dental care should come from,” she said. “Please add dental care to OHIP. Seniors need it, but so do cash-poor people of all ages.”