



A Weekly Column by Dean Hickey

THE FINAL TAKE

AN UNVARNISHED LOOK AT THE MANY
SOCIAL & POLITICAL ISSUES OF OUR TIME...



COUNCILLORS VOTE TO REDUCE THE 2026 TAX INCREASE BUT WILL IT SURVIVE THE MAYOR’S VETO?

TWO SOCIALISTS AND A HALF-WIT DID ALL THEY COULD to maintain higher taxes, but in the end, council voted to accept a proposal by Ward 5 councillors Brian Nicholson and John Gray that would result in lowering the projected 2026 property tax increase to less than 4%.

Mayor Dan Carter has been seeking a tax hike of 4.68% - which, when added to last year’s increase, would see residents of Oshawa paying a whopping 12% more since the Mayor’s previous 2025 budget was passed. The very idea brought about a mutiny of sorts between the two south Oshawa councillors who sought to overturn what they considered to be unacceptable increases.

Their amendment proposed reducing next year’s contribution to what is known as the Infrastructure Reserve account by a little more than \$1-million, which councillor Nicholson said, “...means we’re taking less money from our taxpayers to simply add more money to our bank account.” He spoke in detail of an elderly constituent in his ward who he said is going without certain necessities as a way to make ends meet. He took pains to remind his colleagues that “thousands of residents are hitting the wall right now” as they struggle with unprecedented cost of living increases.

His colleague John Gray suggested the amount of revenue being sent to reserve accounts should be temporarily decreased due to already high taxes and a tough economic climate, telling his colleagues, “There are times when we simply can’t make the kinds of reserve contributions that we’d like to, and this is one of them.”

Of course, the usual pushback came from certain councillors, some of whom are more inclined toward a tax-and-spend way of thinking. Ward 4 councillor Derek Giberson quickly labelled the amendment as “irresponsible” saying any reduction in topping up the reserve account would be paramount to allowing the city’s infrastructure needs to go unmet. Mere hours after the vote, he took to social media, suggesting “...this is one of the most reckless and shortsighted motions during my 8 budgets I’ve ever seen. And... it passed.” The ward 4 councillor was undoubtedly in a state of mourning after having failed to get his colleagues to actually increase spending on external agencies such as the McLaughlin Art Gallery.

Ward 2 councillor Jim Lee, who also voted against the amendment to reduce the property tax rate, took the unusual step of by-passing the Mayor during the meeting and directly asking councillor Nicholson, “Looking at the amount you brought forward, being one million and fifty thousand dollars, what was your rationale behind this, or did you simply pull that number out of the air?”

Of course, the more erudite among his council colleagues would have seen the proposed reduction in reserve contributions as being equal to the amount required to somehow bring the tax hike to below 4%.

Also voting against the amendment was Ward 1 councillor Rosemary McConkey, who suggested the reduced contribution amount could have been used for roads and other short term capital expenditures right now. She and her Ward 1 colleague John Neal had already joined forces to place a number of amendments of their own onto the agenda, however, five were deemed by the Mayor to be “out of order” and the remaining two were defeated. The details of their amendments are hardly worth sharing here, but you can be certain they were mostly a waste of time. In fact, councillor Neal would end up challenging the Mayor’s ruling on at least two occasions, but to no avail.

An earlier proposal brought forward by councillor Nicholson and Ward 2 councillor Tito-Dante Marimpietri also found the support required to ultimately carry with a majority vote, being a direction to staff to remove overtime wage costs from certain City operations. The idea appeared to be supported by staff and would see a potential reduction of \$200,000 which is significant. Of course, council Giberson was quick to pounce on the idea, suggesting it represented a likely reduction in service standards. At one point he and Dan Carter even seemed to be arguing over that prospect, with the Mayor going as far as to provide specific examples to support the amendment - which was ultimately successful. At the end of the meeting, the Mayor was asked point blank if there was anything brought forward in the budget meeting that he would be likely to veto, an option made available to him by the Strong Mayor Powers he now enjoys, however he said only that he would let council know in a “few days”. Should the Mayor decide to veto (deny) the amendments that were carried by a majority of councillors, they may request yet another meeting to override such a veto by a two-thirds vote. As to that prospect, we’ll simply have to wait and see.

At this stage, I would like to acknowledge a presentation given during a previous budget meeting by Oshawa resident Greg Milosh, who once said, “Taxation is not theft, but it does mean taking people’s money from them by force. “Before they decide to make so much more of our money, at a time when household budgets are already strained, the people who govern us are obliged, at the least, to show there is no better alternative.”

Mr. Milosh told councillors that, when considering an organization’s financial status, one of the questions that are often asked is, does the organization have a spending problem, or a revenue problem? He was correct in telling councillors that Oshawa City Hall has a spending problem by way of staff remuneration. The average cost to taxpayers for every municipal employee five years ago was \$123,000. Fast forward to 2025 and that same employee now costs Oshawa taxpayers an average of \$153,000. Back in 2020, the total compliment of City employees was around 700, a number that has ballooned to around 950 today.

The message Mr. Milosh was sending to councillors and to the taxpaying public is that this kind of expansion in local government is completely unsustainable. He’s right about that. If current trends continue, wages and benefits will take almost the entire tax revenue stream and leave precious little for the actual physical component needed to maintain community infrastructure.

We’ll see in the coming days whether the attempts made to lower taxes during what was the last budget meeting prove successful.



Pickering being Treated like an Island

By Maurice Brenner
Regional Councillor Ward 1 Pickering

There has been a flow of information recently about lack of transparency and failures to communicate with impacted parties. This week I am sharing my views on how the City of Pickering and by extension the community are being treated and being cut off from our borders to the West, with no transparency and no communication.

Lets first explore what happened on Twyn Rivers Drive a key connection between Scarborough and Pickering. Initially a large part was closed in mid-2024 due to structural concerns involving Stott's

bridge. Initially the lines of communication were open and Toronto agreed to work with the City of Pickering on a plan that would ensure a temporary overpass was in place to minimize the glaring commuter impacts it would have on the flow of transportation between the two Cities an ensure there was access to the Rouge Park. Temporary crossings are nothing new, and have been constructed in other locations.

In good faith the City of Pickering offered to work with Toronto and offered to provide some cost sharing, recognizing that our City already has limited access to the West and it takes very little to shut down our road network system putting commuters into total gridlock.

Fast forward, 2025, with no discussion, the City of Pickering learnt through the media, that the City of Toronto has changed its plans and will no-longer be considering a temporary crossing and the bridge/border crossing would remain closed until a new bridge was constructed. The projected commencement of the work would start construction in 2027 and an undefined completion target.

Today a year later, every attempt to influence Toronto to reconsider has failed, and Pickering and Durham Residents remain cut off, left looking for alternate access routes and modes of transportation. Still licking our wounds over the Twyn Rivers/Sheppard closure, residents in South Pickering now find themselves being cut off again, this time losing access to the Pedestrian Bridge that links Pickering to the Rouge Hill Go Station until Spring 2027.

The first residents heard of the closure was waking up in the morning finding their access to the Go Train Station closed. Residents were not party to any discussion leading up to the closure. Was it a decision of Toronto, Metrolink or Parks Canada?

Having no information to share with residents, I reached out to City of Pickering Staff as well as conducted some research via the Internet and found that it was Parks Canada this time who failed to consult and engage the impacted City of Pickering.

According to a post by Parks Canada which took time to locate, the bridge was closed to enable Parks Canada to complete 2 projects in the Rouge Park.

1. Revitalization of the Rouge Beach Day Use Area - This work includes improved infrastructure to address climate change impacts, flooding, erosion, species at risk, invasive species and overall ecological restoration. The project aims to enhance environmental protection and support safe access to the Lake Ontario shoreline and Rouge Marsh.

2. Formalized trail and boardwalk connection - A proposed new trail and raised boardwalk will create a continuous connection from Rouge Beach to the broader Rouge National Urban Park trail network. This route will extend toward the Twyn Rivers. Day Use Area and ultimately toward the future park visitor centre near the Zoo Road Day Use Area. The trail is designed to provide a safe, low-impact experience in this ecologically sensitive area. While the projects could have been a good news story, it is unfortunate that Parks Canada closed the pedestrian bridge over Rouge River abruptly while the City of Pickering staff in good faith waited for a meeting to discuss measures that would keep the pedestrian crossing open. Such a meeting was in the process of being set to discuss Pickering’s concerns and the need to find options that would keep the crossing open between Bella Vista Drive and the bottom end of Dyson Road to enable Pickering residents to continue to have a pedestrian access route to the Rouge Hill GO station.

Who ever made the decision and designed the detour route, did not know the area and why the pedestrian bridge was important.

While not a stakeholder nor the project owner and does not control construction timelines, detours or project-related communication, we are impacted and will continue to reach out to Parks Canada in an hopes of finding a way to open up the access enabling residents to cross the border and access the Rouge Hill GO Station.



The Wonder in Adulthood Why We Lose Childlike Wonder as We Age, and How to Gain It Back

By Camryn Bland
Youth Columnist

As children, our world consists of learning, playing, and experiencing. We spend our days in the park with friends or playing with a new toy, free of all responsibility and stress. Everything seems surprising, new, and exciting. Everything sparks a sense of wonder. Yet, as we grow older, perspectives shift, and that same wonder

dies out. Everything which sparked familiar joy is replaced with the burden of adulthood, a transition which seems impossible to fight. Although the transition to adulthood may feel inevitable, there are specific childhood memories which survive, never to be forgotten. Learning to ride a bike, early birthdays, and the first day of school are moments that feel engraved in our memories. These times feel more colorful, bright, and emotional than the current days. Something just felt special, something which is impossible to describe and unfeasible now.

One of my most prominent, bright memories is from third grade, when my class visited an old schoolhouse museum in North York. I remember dressing up, and walking with my class to the schoolhouse. We did lessons on small chalk slates, after we played with wooden toys during our break. The weather was gorgeous, my friends were happy, and the lessons were interesting; it was the most perfect day. When we had to walk back to our real school after lunch, I was devastated, as the day seemed far too short. To me, this was the best field trip, which I will never forget.

The interesting aspect about this memory is not the enjoyment, but what happened afterwards. I recently found out I threw up immediately upon returning to my elementary school. According to my mother, I got sick during the day, and she had to come pick me up before we got dismissed by the bell. I have absolutely no recollection of this turning point of my favorite trip, no memory of sickness that same day. I can confidently say if this happened to me today, the key memory would be my sickness, the embarrassment of vomiting in school and being forced to leave early. However, as a child, my mistakes were completely irrelevant and forgettable. I cared only about new experiences and enjoyment, and so almost all recollections from my childhood bring warmth and laughter.

I believe this positivity is founded from the wonder which is engraved in every child. Everything is new and exciting, whether that be a schoolhouse, a toy, or a person.

Our stress is insignificant, limited to external attention and learning to share. New foods taste bolder, new songs sound louder, and new places seem brighter than they do currently.

Sometime while growing up, the perfection of childhood transitions to the melancholy of adulthood. This can be mostly attributed to daily burdens. As we grow older, our sense of responsibility increases, replacing childlike wonder with adult anxiety. Things which were once interesting are now insignificant, everyday experiences duller, and routines formed by necessity instead of enjoyment. When everyday is planned due to efficiency and responsibility, it feels impossible to incorporate the creativity and open mindset which was so abundant just a few years prior. Although balancing this wonder with responsibility may be difficult, I believe it is far from impossible. One way to relive this nostalgia is through choosing old favorites. Whether that be listening to an old album, binge watching a classic TV show, or eating a childhood food, these relived moments come with a forgotten sense of peace. To me, this could mean playing Just Dance, eating chocolate pretzels, drawing new characters, or reading a book in the Geronimo Stilton series. Each individual will have different nostalgic choices, which makes it even more special. Achieving the joy of childhood is just one step away, and it doesn’t require the disregard of any aspects of the current routine. Instead, it simply involves the addition of nostalgia in everyday life. The next time you’re feeling stressed, listen to your favorite band from your youth, or eat food you were obsessed with in the past. Engage in new experiences to surprise yourself, and recreate favorite memories. Regardless of your age, these simple actions will bring back the joy and wonder which disappeared after youth. This may not remove all the negative of current responsibilities, however it may bring back an emotion long lost.