Province's plan would cost $8.6 billion

Continued from pg. 1

The Province's Growth Plan will require Halton Region to increase in size by 68 per cent over the next 25 years— most of that growth coming to Halton Hills and Milton (**See sidebar story below**) and the need to spend more than $8.6 billion on infrastructure improvements.

"Two years ago when we first heard about *Places to Grow*, I said this scares the willies out of me, and now, when we see what the cost is...," said Bonnette. "This is a $8.6 billion plan, and we're telling the Province unless you come to the table, we can't do it. ... And if we don't get the money, we're basically going to bankrupt ourselves with this growth."

"I think the numbers certainly shocked a lot of us," Halton Region Chair Gary Carr said, who tabled this resolution at last week's regional council meeting. "It just shows you the magnitude of the situation we face. Taxpayers just can't afford to pay for these services."

Already municipalities cannot keep up with the current infrastructure and services improvements— more than $300 million— necessitated by the current growth— roads are congested, hospital emergency departments cannot keep up with the demand, children are being bused to schools outside their neighbourhoods and often housed in portables and recreational and library facilities are lagging far behind the demand.

The current provincial funding models do not reflect the cost of growth:

• The Development Charges Act restricts what municipalities can charge and for what and as a result existing taxpayers pick up the rest of the tab— $32 million a year

• Ontario (the only province to do so) requires municipal property taxes to pay for social and health programs— about 20 per cent of the tax bill, leaving little left (54 per cent) for road, service and facility improvements

• When the Province does contribute to health spending to municipalities— here in Halton that contribution is $200 less per capita than the provincial average.

• Halton taxpayers must also hand over more than $40 million a year to the City of Toronto to help pay for its social service costs, known as GTA pooling.

• Provincial funding for transit, roads, schools, hospitals and other municipal needs has not kept place with the current growth.

"I think they're (the Province) going to realize we do have a problem, and we're giving them some very, very clear solutions," Carr said.

These solutions are:

• Change the Development Charges Act to allow municipalities to recover the full cost of growth

• Change the GTA pooling, so Halton residents can pay for their own problems, instead of Toronto's

• Set up funding programs targeted at increasing infrastructure to accommodate growth

• Commit provincial funding to address current needs now and then match dollars to growth as it comes

—With files from Melanie Hennessey, special to the IFP

What Region would need to accommodate plan

• 1,100 hospital beds
• 50 new elementary schools and 14 new high schools
• 25 community centres, eight libraries, and 1,650 acres of parkland development
• 22 fire halls, four ambulance stations and six police stations
• 2,000 (lane) kilometres of major roads, plus expansions to highways, bridges and interchanges.
• 11 local transit facilities and 175 buses
• expansion of inter-regional transit including GO Transit
• expansion of electrical power facilities

Growth plan targets Halton Hills

CYNTHIA GAMBLE
Staff Writer

So, you think Halton Hills has grown too big, too fast in the last 25 years?

How about doubling, tripling or even quadrupling that growth in the next 25 years?

That's the scenario that could happen if the Provincial Places to Grow Plan evolves as it's currently laid out.

"Make no mistake, the bull's-eye is on us for growth," said Mayor Rick Bonnette at Monday's council while pushing the Fairness for Halton resolution, asking for provincial money to pay for infrastructure improvements resulting from new population growth.

In the last 25 years, Halton Hills grew by close to 20,000 people— an average 780 people per year. In the next 15 years to 2021, another 15,000 people— about 1,000 people/year— will be added when Halton Hills builds out to its full capacity of 70,000.

But now Province has come along with its Places to Grow Plan— telling Halton it must take another 312,000 people, mainly from immigration, in the next 25 years— and most of those people will be coming to Halton Hills or Milton.

Mayor Rick Bonnette says while it's hard to predict precise numbers now, and "I don't want to panic people," but about 100,000 to 150,000 could be divvied up between the two municipalities.

He explained by 2021 both Oakville and Burlington, at 250,000 and 205,000 respectively, will be almost completely built, Halton Hills will have reached its Official Plan projected capacity of 70,000 and Milton will be at 145,000.

"That gives us 670,000, there's still roughly 150,000 people that will still have to be dispersed," said Bonnette, adding Burlington Mayor Cam Jackson has already expressed concerns that Burlington taxpayers will be paying for infrastructure improvements in Halton Hills.

"So, it's affecting each and every municipality in different ways. Burlington won't get the growth but they will still be paying for a lot of the infrastructure and then you're getting wars among yourselves at budget time," Bonnette said.

Last fall, Halton Region's Manager of Long Range Planning Ho Wong told Halton Hills council that, while Places to Grow designates Oakville, Burlington and Milton town centres as major growth areas targeted for intensification, the majority— six of every 10 new developments by 2015— will be located in expanded urban boundaries within the 30,000 hectares of prime soils in south Halton Hills and Milton.

Many developers have already bought most of those lands— in Halton Hills they are from 10 Sideroad to Steeles Ave. and from Tenth Line to Trafalgar Rd. No urban expansion (for example in Acton) can occur above the Niagara Escarpment due to the restrictive polices in the Province's Greenbelt Plan.

"Basically growth will be Halton Hills (Georgetown) versus Milton," Wong told Halton Hills councillors. The percentage of division depends on what unfolds with the Durable Plan, a planning exercise that will involve the Region, Halton Hills, Milton, Oakville and Burlington, developers, and residents. Depending on the density chosen, he said, one quarter to one-third of those hectares would be needed to accommodate the additional people, depending on the densities chosen.

While the Durable Plan process has already begun, the decision-making year will be 2008. For more information about the Durable Plan go to Halton Region's website, www.halton.ca

(Cynthia Gamble can be reached at cgamble@independentfreepress.com)

A handgun and knife were used by three suspects to force four Swiss Chalet employees into a walk-in refrigerator during a robbery at the Guelph St. Restaurant Saturday night. *Photo by Ted Brown*

Restaurant workers locked in refrigerator during robbery

TED BROWN
Staff Writer

Four employees at the Swiss Chalet restaurant in Georgetown spent a tense 20 minutes locked in a walk-in refrigerator late Saturday night following an armed robbery.

At approximately 11:50 p.m., two employees taking out the garbage at the rear of the restaurant at 320 Guelph Street were confronted by two males.

"One of the suspects was armed with a black handgun; the other with a shiny knife with an 8-inch serrated blade," said Acting Detective David Shortt of Halton Regional Police.

"They were hiding out back of the restaurant and basically ambushed the two employees putting out the garbage, then they were joined by a third suspect as they entered the restaurant."

Shortt said there were another two employees inside, and the restaurant was not open to the public at the time, as the employees were cleaning up after closing.

Once inside, the three suspects ordered all four restaurant employees into a walk-in refrigerator, locking them in, while taking an undisclosed amount of cash from the store safe and the cash drawer.

"The suspects attempted to lock them (the employees) in by ramming a chair up against the door, so they couldn't get out," said Shortt, "The four employees forced the refrigerator door open and called police."

The three suspects were all in excess of six feet. Two were described as being black, while the race of the third suspect was unknown. Two had medium builds, and the third was described as being 'chubby'. One suspect had 'dark eyes' and was wearing a black face mask, and a beige coat. All three suspects used scarves to partially obscure their faces. One male was in his mid-20s.

Halton Regional Police are asking anyone with information about this cime to call Acting Detective David Shortt at 905-878-5511, extension 2110, or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (1-800-222-8477)