

Darcy McKeough says Regional government will bring town, country together

Darcy McKeough, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, says he is not rushing the establishment of regional government in Peel and Halton Counties.

Speaking to the annual dinner meeting of the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce at the North Halton Golf and Country Club last Wednesday, the minister said that contrary to press reports he did not set November 1 this year as a deadline date for the Peel-Halton proposals.

"What I did say was that if they wished to get underway in 1971 we would have to present a final proposal by the end of this year," he told the audience of Georgetown businessmen and a sprinkling of municipal officials from other Halton municipalities, including Acton and Milton.

"If this is not possible, they must be willing to wait until 1972 or 1973," the minister stated.

"What is important is the participation and understanding of where we are going on the part of the people," Mr. McKeough emphasized.

Departing only slightly from the prepared script, the minister added little to the plans already well known to municipalities throughout the county.

He said his government is

Discuss Arctic

The geography department of Acton district high school is holding three meetings, open to the general public, to discuss the Arctic regions of Canada.

Department head Paul Martindale has invited Mr. Anderson to talk on the Dew Line and the Arctic at the first meeting on Wednesday, May 21. Mr. Anderson spent some time in the Arctic and has an interesting story to tell.

The second seminar on May 28 will feature vice principal Joe Bray. He will talk and show pictures of the Mackenzie Delta where he spent summers on research work.

Third and final event has not been fully worked out but Mr. Martindale expects it will be on Siberia and the contrast it presents to the Canadian Arctic. It will be on June 4.

Dredge again

Dredging operations in Fairy Lake began again last week. The dredgers stopped for the winter in January.

prepared to accept the responsibility of ensuring that the comprehensive regional plans fit into a rational plan for the orderly development of the entire province. The regional government program is very much oriented towards local participation and consultation, Mr. McKeough said, but he made it clear that no township of 3,000 people which seemed to be a direct reference to Nassagaweya, was going to tell the much larger parts of the Peel-Halton region how they should be governed.

The minister said plans for regional government were based on representation by population. Burlington wanted to leave Halton County three months ago, he claimed, because there was no adequate 'rep by pop' at the county level. Mr. McKeough said the county system was in drastic need of overhaul since

the province had changed in the last 120 years when the system was set up.

"We must have changes across the province," he stated "to bring town and country together again."

"We have abandoned the old idea of the country and the city as two entirely separate units," the minister continued. "The needs and wants of the modern family are best served by having a region that has an urban centre and that includes both urban and rural areas."

He said the Peel-Halton region was a dynamic, growing area and desperately needed a broader plan of development, one that was recognizable and usable by residents. He said the province was not going to impose its ideas on the residents of this area.

"I want community participation and acceptability to be the keystones of the

regional government program," he declared. "I am relying strongly on the ideas, efforts and dedicated involvement of organizations such as councils, Chambers of Commerce, service clubs and churches... in achieving our goal."

The minister set out the government's reform objectives which included:

1. Reform of the provincial tax system.
2. Reform of provincial aid to local government, hinting at what Premier Robarts announced the next day about cutting down on grants to municipalities and granting them more power in the tax field.
3. Reform of local taxation so the property owner is not saddled with a burden that is grossly unfair.
4. Reform of local government structure in order to reduce the total number of municipalities and establish larger, more viable units.

He traced the history of attempts to establish a working committee and some sort of rapport between representatives of Halton and Peel. He said one of the main concerns which held up a wedding of the two counties was finances but didn't think there was anything that couldn't be solved. He congratulated the Milton paper for attempting to assemble the figures involved in such a merger

but comment his department felt some of the figures were not as related as they might have been.

In a question and answer period which followed Mr. McKeough fielded some knotty puzzles from Acton's mayor and reeve and the Georgetown mayor and other members of the audience.

Replying to host mayor Weldon Emmerson, he said that his statement that no municipality would have the right to veto regional government provided it stuck to the plan in Design for Development, was sometimes misunderstood. The minister emphasized that he meant that a minority in a small community was not going to "hold the whole shooting match up" when the majority of the population wanted change, despite the fact that sometimes the small municipality might be operating efficiently on its own.

He stressed that regional government was not trying to destroy the sense of community but create a bigger community than it used to be. Mr. McKeough used the words of Marshall McLuhan, "global village", to describe his feelings on that score to J. C. president Dave Kentner.

Reeve Frank Oakes of Acton, who mentioned his political experience encompassed just six

years less than the minister's age, said it had been his experience that any form of government takeover inevitably cost the taxpayers more. He wondered how much more regional government was going to cost.

The minister said he was not going to guarantee the cost would be less. "I wouldn't be surprised if the total cost goes up," he continued, "because I don't see taxes getting any lower." He cited the many things people want government to do now compared to 36 years ago. "We can't have all these things and not expect taxes to go up."

"The reason they are going up is not because of regional government but because the municipalities are doing more and more things the people want them to do," he claimed.

A three point question from Acton mayor Les Duby was answered point by point. The minister said that the community of Acton would go on regardless of whether it was merged with Georgetown in one municipality where the preponderance of the vote would be the larger centre. He said the boundaries of region four were drawn hastily, however, and the Department was by no means sure the line was in the proper place yet.

Replying to Mr. Duby, he asserted part of the reason it was

difficult to get local people to run for political office was because the positions were downgraded. The minister thought this was partly because so many of the decisions were made at Queen's Park. "We want to get some of the decisions out of Queen's Park and into local municipalities so we can attract the quality of people in politics."

Answering the Georgetown mayor, Mr. McKeough said the government was trying to eliminate the unconditional per capita grant because the money never got to the property owner, who needed tax relief.

He said many of the grants from the government were of the carrot type to encourage municipalities to do things but often the decisions came in the wrong priority for the good of the community.

The initial mayor of the Peel-Halton region, the minister said would probably be appointed so he could have the full weight of the government behind him. But eventually the position would be an elected one. Mr. McKeough said this method had worked successfully in three instances to date.

He said the chief need was for an administration officer to get the job done, not necessarily a mayor of the people.

Acton mayor Les Duby asked if the region became a reality and Acton, Georgetown and Etobicoke were hooked up, if there was any way this would encumber Acton's growth?

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JOHN ARMSTRONG, centre, an old friend of Darcy McKeough's, helps fellow Georgetown resident Ken McMillan renew acquaintance with the Minister at last Wednesday's Georgetown C. of C. annual meeting. The pair met before when Mr. McKeough accompanied Chatham Maroons on a hockey junket to Russia. Mr. McMillan, president of the Ontario Hockey Association at the time, also made the tour which helped lower the iron curtain at a time when relations between the Soviets and other countries were strained.—(Staff Photo)



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