

Assessment, Planning Changes Mooted for County Government

By Gwyn Kinsey
(First of Four Articles)

The biggest legislative story of 1965 in Ontario is expected to be the provincial government's effort to put some logic into an antiquated, chronically sick municipal system.

The job of municipal reform is at least 30 years overdue. Most municipal officials admit this, but enough of them are jealous of their little paper empires to impose caution on

the Queen's Park reformers. The Roberts government is not expected to rip apart the present structure and drag its admirers kicking and screaming into the 20th century. Such action would not be in character for Mr. Roberts and most of his ministers. Besides, government can only operate with the consent of the governed.

RETAIN SKELETON
What the government is like-

ly to do, after it has received the reports of two committees - the Legislature's select committees on the Municipal Act and related acts and the Ontario Committee on Taxation - is to retain the skeleton of the present municipal structure but make some fundamental changes in its diet and living habits to enable it to build the vigorous mind and muscle it now lacks.

The key to the rebuilding

program is recognized to be the county, for so long the old man of government.

All but a few municipal troglodytes now agree that larger administrative units are necessary. The province has outlasted a century old municipal patchwork. The southern municipalities in particular are in an economic and planning mess and must look beyond their boundaries for relief.

These facts have been recognized by most of the members of the select committee on the Municipal Act, and by the people who have appeared before the committee, including officials of the Association of Ontario Counties.

HOW BIG, HOW FAST
The big questions have not been whether or not some form of regional government is necessary, but "how big, how far, how fast?"

Most of the committee members - all of whom have served on municipal councils - seem reluctant to go beyond the county, at least in the initial stages of regional organization. But they suggest that additional powers could be given to the Minister of Municipal Affairs to promote and encourage revisions of county boundaries or the grouping of counties into logical economic and geographic units.

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"You always have to start from where you are," Hollis Beckett, chairman of the committee, has said. "The merger of smaller counties and enlargement of county government responsibilities should both be encouraged, and but one or two of his colleagues have agreed."

But they are also agreed that any new legislation must be flexible, because of the disparity between areas in size and economic development. This was also stressed by Mrs. Beckett.

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