

Views differ on first year in region



Regional Councillor Pat McKenzie

(Continued from Page One)

even two years. The Regional School Board was formed in 1968 and I'm sure, if you asked them, that they still have improvements to make.

As Regional Governments develop their programs, the formation of Regional Police, the development of Regional Planning policies, and the control of water, sewers and waste disposal on a regional level will, eventually, be recognized as progressive steps in local government.

There are others but time and space will not permit developing the topic now. From the Area Council the greatest benefit to ward I would be in the area of financing. Granted we had four tax rates and some expenses were on a charge back basis but we still produced a rate for ward 1 that was modest compared to the mill rate we would have faced under our former system.

Regional Government is not a "Magic Wand" that someone waves and all our local problems come up roses. It will take time. As local citizens are we prepared to give it the time that it requires?

2. What has Acton gained?

Duby: Acton has gained nothing of value. It is my considered opinion we are in the process of losing the independence we knew as a self-sufficient, fully serviced, thriving, locally governed municipality. We are now just a community of people, who will be governed by a majority, who cannot possibly relate to us with any degree of the personal concern we once knew.

Acton representatives, I am certain will always convey the concerns and needs of this community; but the decision making process under the new system will be most uncertain.

Hurst: This question is premature. It is too early to assess what, if anything, Acton has gained.

McKenzie: It is too soon to answer this question. The Regional School Board was formed in 1968 and it wasn't until I read their announcement last week in your paper that they plan to update school facilities in Acton in 1977 and give our students equality in school facilities with other areas in Halton. I must be fair and recognize that the School Board did reduce Acton's levy for educational purposes every year until 1974 when it increased 3.36 mills.

This year Council did not attack the problem so one ward would gain and another one lose. Our responsibility was to establish a new town, try to equalize services and eliminate duplication. Eventually everyone will gain if we succeed.

3. Has Acton lost its identity?

Duby: This is a matter of such concern to so many people, that it cannot be answered casually.

I believe the people of Acton are more concerned with retaining their identity now than ever before. They resent—and rightly so—any attempt by outsiders—however well-meaning—to take over the operation of our Centennial Library, our park and swimming area, or our Community Centre. They resent having to contact the Region to make any repairs to broken water mains or report lack of service, etc. - etc. - etc.

I would like to cover this specific question in more detail at a later date.

Hurst: The fact must be

faceted that Acton, as a municipality, has lost its identity. However, I, as a native of this community, sincerely hope our citizens, as a whole, will continue to possess and cherish many things in common over a long period of time. The community of Acton will retain its identity as long as this spirit prevails.

McKenzie: No! The only time I hear this concern expressed is when I read the editorials or news comments in the Acton Free Press. Many towns and villages have been joined together for municipal government without losing their identity. Have Weston and Bronte lost their identity? Will Norval, Glen Williams or Acton lose their identity in the new Town of Halton Hills. Personally I don't think that they will.

I might ask is the Acton Free Press in danger of losing its identity to the Milton Champion or the Georgetown Independent? I hope not but then I notice that most of the reporters covering council meetings at the Regional or Area level do not come from Acton or vicinity.

Let us all recognize that we are part of a new town. Surely we can respect individual differences, learn to work together and develop the best in the life styles of each community.

4. What has been the most outstanding or unexpected development?

Duby: The most outstanding development, in my view, would be:

(a) the progress which has been made in the field of planning in the best interests of the new municipality as a whole. We were able to work on the basis of common goals which would be acceptable to all communities of the area municipality. Strong recommendations will be put forward in the interest of the northern portion of the region to be included in the overall official plan for the region.

(b) the tremendous work load in amalgamating the work force and ensuring that formerly proposed work projects were continued and completed in spite of the inflationary trends that faced the new council.

(c) setting up of a new system of administration, placing staff, hiring staff, locating departments, and determining the required equipment to support such staff to enable them to efficiently care for the larger, more complex municipality.

The most unexpected development in my view, has to be the power the Region will have over area municipalities. By this I mean the administrative powers the province has placed at the regional level. This is part of the objective of Regional Government—to slow down the process temporarily until municipal business can be placed on a Regional level over which the Province will have more direct control.

This supports their intention to return more powers to municipalities, but at the Regional level. It will take several years to fully accomplish this as they await the completion of studies and reports from the Niagara Escarpment Commission, Ministry of the Environment, proposed adjustments to the Toronto Centred Region Plan, Parkway Belt, or Service Corridor proposals, etc.

Hurst: Is this not a repetition of Question 1?

McKenzie: The progress that staff and council have made to co-ordinate two former towns and a township into a new town and the way the members of council approach the problems and concerns placed before them. Granted we have some that are "role" playing and politicking for the future but by far the majority are there to develop this new town and serve the people that elected them to office.

5. After a year's operation, do you foresee any speeding up of the decision-making process at the area, regional or provincial levels?

Duby: As stated in answer to question No. 4, after one year of operation in Regional Government as an Area



Councillor Joe Hurst

Municipality, I can only say that it will take several years to smooth out the wrinkles of amalgamation to produce an efficient administration.

Hurst: As we enter our second year of operation, I foresee many decisions to be made at all levels of government. I maintain that there should be a speeding-up of decision making in certain matters and a definite slowing-down in others.

For example, we should proceed cautiously, if at all, in residential growth until our present industrial needs are serviced, our final population density is determined and our official plan is approved.

McKenzie: It is one thing to enact a bill to create Regional Government in Halton County with four area councils and another matter entirely to develop efficient and responsible operating units. Anyone would expect the past year to be unusual and difficult when you consider our need for facilities, staff, operating procedures, as well as developing a responsible budget, organize the committee structure and master, if that is possible, the art of working together.

Considerable progress has been made in all these areas and they will be refined in the next year. Steps have already been taken to have our interim tax bill in February and our final budget in April so the departments can carry out their projects in a more efficient manner. The same committee structure will continue, the staff have established routines and council is a more coherent unit and more cognizant of the needs of the people. For these reasons I believe that the decision-making process will be vastly improved in the new year.

6. Can a government which deprives a town of things it had before be a success? We are thinking of the personal contribution of many more citizens on a nine-person council, our former committees, the Christmas bus, twice-a-week garbage collection, the convenience of seeing our town superintendent on the street or dropping into the town office with a problem.

Duby: A loaded question to be sure—but here is a straightforward answer. It will be a success from a Provincial point of view, because the elimination of Ad Hoc bodies (local committees, commissions, etc.) is what Regional Government is all about. On a share the wealth basis, we are now formed into a larger municipality to provide services on a broader scale, but equal to all. We lose some—we gain some.

However, I am well aware we are losing the personal touch your question refers to, and this will always be a concern to citizens of communities that were former municipalities on their own.

Hurst: I agree that one of

the principal concepts of Regional Government is the participation of fewer persons with councillors carrying a greater load. Whether this is good or bad remains to be seen.

(a) Garbage collection is covered in my answer to Question 2.

(b) Many persons with problems are still being accommodated at the service office on Mill St.

(c) We have not been deprived of the Christmas bus. This service has been provided in 1974 for the first time under the proper system.

McKenzie: It is only natural that, when a new form of government is being developed, you have strong feelings about the things which were lost locally. I had the same feeling in 1968 when our local school boards were abolished and the county board was established with one member for Acton and Nassagaweya.

I can still see the Acton Schools losing a Vice-Principal, a Music Supervisor, a Remedial teacher, an acceptable pupil-teacher ratio in the Primary grades and supplies for staff, especially our caretakers. There was no "Billy Middleton" to call.

We marked time while the School Board built auditoriums and Resource Centres and equipped them with books and visual aids in other areas of the county. It wasn't until I read in your paper last week that, five years later, they plan to build an acceptable facility for our high school students and establish a Middle School in Acton that I believe we are receiving equality in Educational Facilities.

If the people concerned will give Halton Hills five years I'm confident that there are many benefits just as there are to our County School Board which I wholeheartedly support.

We have a democratic council that has been very diligent and will continue to be prudent in all matters that concern them. I see more men and equipment on the street and seldom go down town that I do not stop and talk to our employees. Try it—they appreciate it.

If there is to be a bus for Ward 1 at Christmas it must be a concern of the merchants. It was a letter from me that brought it to the attention of Public Works and I could have supported their recommendation, "ON A COST SHARING BASIS" as the council did in Acton in 1972 but to ask the taxpayers to pay for it 100 per cent was unrealistic.

7. We understand Georgetown and Esquesing residents are also complaining about the system. Is this right?

Duby: Of course! The people of Georgetown and Esquesing are no different than we are. It is difficult for every concerned taxpayer to adjust.

Basically, we have all lost the old relationship to our council, staff, and town employees.

Acton, however, is unique, in that not being centrally located in the new area of Halton Hills, it has seen its work staff relocated and Town Office reduced in staff to a sub-office to provide basic information and service. I would say our degree of adjustment is, and will be greater than Georgetown or Esquesing because administration and services in those



Councillor Les Duby

areas have not changed greatly from what they had prior to Regional Government.

Hurst: Yes. Some of the answers I have given may be applied to all areas of Halton Hills.

McKenzie: As long as I can remember, and my father was in municipal politics too, people have complained about municipal government so it would not surprise me to find people in Words II, III, and IV that are dissatisfied too.

May I suggest that, if you feel your question to be a valid one and wish to explore it further, you ask the elected representatives from the wards in question.

8. Do you think your voice is adequately heard at committee meetings and full council meetings? Do Acton matters get a fair share of time and consideration? Do councillors work well together?

Duby: I may not appear to

have as much to say as others, but do not hesitate if I can make a constructive contribution to a discussion. I feel it is equally important to listen to the remarks of other councillors and then speak in approval or disapproval.

Acton business is now part of Halton Hills business and must get equal concern and consideration.

In this new council, it has not been easy for any councillor. However, since we are ordinary citizens and taxpayers like those we represent, we are working together as well as can be expected, facing the task that is our responsibility—namely, to make the new system work—(because we ran for council knowing this WAS Regional Government)—and still being concerned about the effect on our own Ward—Acton.

Hurst: (a) Yes. If I thought differently, I would be speaking more often and more loudly. I may have a conflict of interest on this point.

(b) I think there are some matters of Council business that are not given sufficient time and consideration. Certain of these affect each and every area of the municipality. Mistakes have been made and will continue to be made. Our consolation is that nothing is done in perpetuity.

(c) In our Works Committee, although there are certainly differences in opinion, there is an excellent rapport at Council level, while differences of opinion may be harder to reconcile, I cannot say that councillors,

as a whole, do not work well together.

McKenzie: This year I was chairman of Finance and Personnel. If my voice has not been adequately heard at committee level it is because I subscribe to the rule that a good chairman guides his committee and does very little talking. We have an excellent committee and have made good progress at every meeting.

In Council I feel that I have had good support from other councillors when I bring motions forward for their consideration. Many times you are more successful if you work quietly rather than being vocal at council or put on a show in front of the press.

Although I am representing Ward 1 at council I feel that I must consider our agenda in the interests of Halton Hills. Seldom do we vote on a motion that benefits one ward over the rest of Halton Hills.

Granted there may be one project in Public Works or an item of expenditure in Recreation that benefits the people in one ward but when you view the total budget—council has been very fair to everyone.

Yes, I believe that the majority, and notice I said the majority, of councillors work well together. I consider myself one of the majority group.

9. What do you think of coverage of council meetings in the Free Press?

Duby: In fairness I must say the Free Press gives very impartial and accurate coverage to council meetings—especially when

the reporter is from Acton. The Georgetown and Esquesing representatives also receive good coverage, which is more than Georgetown reporters do for Acton representatives.

I recognize that it is impossible to quote councillors verbatim, and that much reporting is interpretive. However, satisfying my own conscience is my guide—quoted, misquoted, or not quoted. Considering the need to expedite council business, it is really the voting that counts.

On matters which concern Acton, I am sure all councillors would appreciate being asked for additional comment after Committee or Council meetings to clarify their position on specific matters on which they may not have had the opportunity to speak.

Hurst: I must confess that I do not always read every page and line in every issue of the Acton Free Press, and so I do not consider myself an authority on the reporting of Council meetings in the local press.

However, specifically, I do object to factual errors, and, in support of this opinion, I attach the following excerpt:

HURST TAKES

"The chairman of the Halton Hills works committee for 1975 will be ward two councillor Joe Hurst."

"Hurst will take over for Len Cox who served as the chairman the past year."

McKenzie: Prior to Regional Government when your reporter came to our meetings he or she was writing for one newspaper "The Free Press" and I felt that we had very good coverage and that our local newspaper promoted the best

in Municipal Government. It has all changed now. At the Regional level we see one reporter covering our meetings for three newspapers and trying to report for two new towns Milton and Halton Hills. At our local council meetings one reporter is reporting for the Free Press and the Independent, and I ask myself can one person do an adequate job for the two communities?

I believe it can be done if everyone realizes that the reports are for the new Town of Halton Hills. If this is your paper's philosophy than I accept the coverage the people are receiving. However, if that is a correct statement then you have asked me to answer many questions that are irrelevant to our town.

(Continued next week)

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