Should voters elect Regional chairmen?

Pomeroy's jump may have helped prompt Province to suggest some electoral changes

Pete Pomeroy's jump from Town mayor to Regional chairman and the appointment of his successor by council may be at least partially responsible for substantial changes proposed for next year's municipal election.

With Peel Region chairman Frank Bean watching from the gallery, Halton Regional council last week took its first critical glance at changes proposed by Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Claude Bennett

Saying the current method of selecting Regional chairmen has been "much criticized", Bennett urged council to discuss his concerns and suggestions with area municipalities and let him know the consensus so changes can be made next year.

Council agreed to invite the opinions of the four areas, but balked at Bennett's suggestion that "various community, labor and business groups" should also be sur-

veyed. "We're being neatly put in a box," Burlington Councillor Joan Little said. "He's telling us 'you promote my idea'. Let him find out for himself what people think." "It's the old trap," Mayor Russ Miller agreed. 'The province gets us to do

whatever they want and we end up as the bad guys. I'm happy with the system the way it is now and I've never heard anyone complain about it. Let's dispose of this as fast as possible. If Bennett has a problem, let him fix it."

"The problem", according to Bennett, was outlined in a series of concerns raised in 'major reviews' of Metropolitan Toronto, Niagara, Ottawa-Carelton, Waterloo and Hamilton-Wentworth regions.

"There appears to be a growing consensus that chairmen should be more accountable to their local electorates," he said in a letter to Pomeroy. "The fact that a chairman is not directly accountable to any electorate other than his or her respective council makes people uneasy, as it appears to be undemocratic."

The current system could see any member of the general public elected chairman by Regional council, the minister pointed out. He need not be an elected official. And, if a Regional councillor is elected chairman by his colleagues, he resigns his local seat.

"The electors in the local municipality are denied the representative who was their first choice on election day and the vacancy created must be filled by appointment or through a by-election," Bennett said.

The scenario is familiar to Halton Hills voters. Re-elected mayor of the Town in 1982, Pomeroy jumped into the Regional chairman's seat when Jack Raftis retired in med-term. A publicly-beleaguered Town council opted to appoint a new mayor-Russ Miller-and a new Ward 2 representative to replace Miller. As runner-up in the 1982 election, Peter Norton was named to council.

Bennett said he has already rejected the idea of having all voters of a Region elect the chairman, but "at a minimum", he said, "candidates for the position of chairman in 1985 should seek and retain elected office at the area level."

But should all council members be eligible for the chairmanship? Would a consituency office be enough to let a chairman who is also a councillor handle his workload?

Bennett invited comments. The minister suggested he would draw the



IN FASHION

Decorating gingerbreed men Saturday at Trinity United Church's bezear was Kay Hart. She was wearing an outfit that was perfect for the bazaer's Old-Fashloned Christmas theme. The skirt is almost 100 years old. Hart borrowed her wardrobe from Marguerite Taylor.

Whoops!

From our Better Late Than Never Department come the following names of Acton High School award winners inadvertently omitted from last week's report on the school's annual commencement. Our apologies for the error.

The University Women's Club of Georgetown Scholarship, value \$100, Carolyn Gibson; The Saindard Products Athletic Awward-Value \$200 George Gidman.

The Standard Prroducts Technical Proficiency Award, value \$100, Year 4 Brian Nelles: The Standard Products English Award, value\$100, Adrianna Ranger.

The Standard Products French Award... Value \$100 Monika George; The Sandra Patterson Memorial Award for Music, Jill Morris, Timothy Winiarz; The Acton Lions Clab Award, value \$100, Peter Wright; The Achilles Motors Award, value \$100, Sandra Bendicks, Jacqueline Jennings; The Campbell's Furniture Showroom Award, value \$180, Brenda Looyenga.

The Indusmin Award, value \$386, Adrianna anger The Acton Pharmacy Award, value \$75, Adrianna Ranger; The Clara Grindley Memorial Bursary, yalue \$100, Jean Wong; The Lakeside Chapter of the IODE Bursaries, total value \$300, Jennifer Arbic, Hesty Ann Kochler; The Ames Mason Retary Scholarship, value \$150, Ruth Munro; The Outstanding Grade 12 Scholar Award, GlennArcher; The Outstanding Grade 13 Scholar Award, Christopher Sales; The Teen Crisine Family Studies Award, value \$50, Elisabeth Kosimel; The Knex "R" Fund Accounting Award, value \$100, Emil Milinarevic.

line at having a mayor also serve as chairman, citing both the "onerous" workload and the ethical problem of having one person serve as chief spokesman for two

"I believe that the mayors of the local municipalities should be precluded from serving as chairman," he said.

When the Region sends copies of Bennett's letter to the area municipalities, it will include copies of a response from Waterloo Regional chairman James Gray, who pointed out that his plan to retire next year lends him a more objective perspective.

"The suggestion that the chairman should retain his / her local seat is positively ludicrous." Gray wrote Bennett. "This could only have been conceived by an academic student of municipal government who has never been in the front lines."

As well as the hefty workload, he noted, chairmen must be impartial in order to maintain the support of councillors.

Gray outlined his own plan for resolving concerns in Waterloo next year.

"I have suggested to council that I am willing to step down in September-three months early-with a new chairman to be elected immediately from the existing members of council. This would permit any member to run, including the mayors. It would ensure that all had stood for local election and it would ensure that the chairman had the confidence of council. It would allow the area councils to have their elections with the chairman's position already established and would therefore avoid a later local by-election."

Admitting his plan is imperfect, Gray suggested Bennett change legislation to let the September election of a chairman stand for three years without a confirming election in December.

Preventing mayors from seeking the chairmanship would not only eliminate some of the best candidates, he added, it would invite "subterfuge", with mayors who hope to become chairmen running locally as councillors instead.

Waterloo is not among the Regions criticizing the current system, Gray sald. He suggested only Metro Toronto, "where chairmen have tended to wield a great deal of power", is having serious problems.

Burlington Councillor Steve Toth recalled that former chairchairman Raftis complained about "losing his public base". Toth's colleagues were quick to condemn the idea of a Halton-wide election for the

Campaign costs would be prohibitive for Oakville's Jackie Cutmore added. Fellow the candidates, Little noted, and running the

election would be "a humongous task",

Oakville Councillor Ann Mulvale warned

that a Halton-wide election would see the larger population in south Halton favoring Burlington and Oakville candidates.



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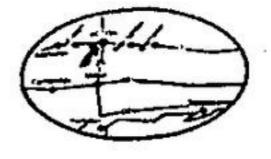
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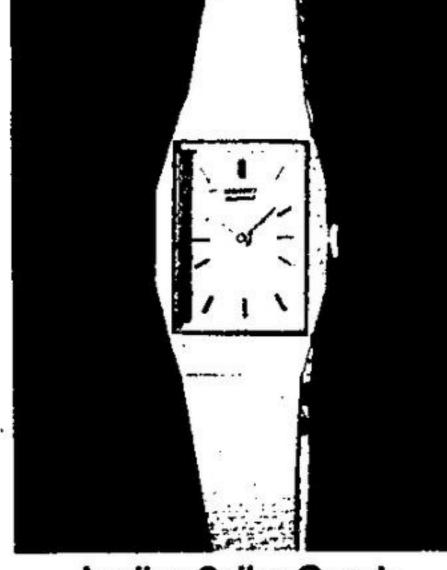
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