

STAFF COMMENT

By Chris Aagaard

Two councils had varied styles during 1980

I sank my journalistic teeth into the Halton Hills and Halton regional council scene six months ago when the former was enjoying an appreciable amount of public admiration for running a tight ship.

The latter, however, was on the eve of a restless and divisive period in which it would eventually see its public credibility dwindle before a botched operating budget and a tiresome, self-destructive debate on its method of collecting revenue to pay for its sewer program.

Pleased with the past record of Mayor Pete Pomeroy's administration, the Halton Hills electorate either refused to challenge second-term bids by many of the incumbents, or re-elected veterans Nov. 10. The only sign of discord came from Acton, where, in the most surprising outcome of the election, incumbent regional councillor Ed Wood was ousted by former real estate agent Dave Whiting.

Thanks to teamwork between town councillors and staff, the 1980 budget for the town enabled it to embark on an ambitious \$1.7 million library-cultural centre.

The town's share of the endeavor, which will be raised through lot levies, debenture financing and part of the town's operating budget, will amount to about \$900,000, while most of the remaining balance will come from a \$200,000 fund-raising drive and provincial assistance which surely would not have been available had not

the town shown financial responsibility in planning the project.

REDUCE HEADACHES Within the last three years, town council has also moved to reduce enormous planning headaches both in Acton and in Georgetown which, if left untreated, would certainly affect the town's ability to attract new industry and housing.

And while some taxpayers may anguish over the costs, the outcome of planning studies in Acton and Georgetown will enable the town to determine what sort of industries are best suited to the sewer and water services Halton Hills can offer. The town can thus accommodate industry and housing and provide the evidence badly needed to meet developers' challenges to the town's current planning policies before the Ontario Municipal Board.

But the one thing which makes Halton Hills council click neatly—the team effort among councillors to work for the common good and clear communications with town staff—is lacking at the regional level.

PUBLIC REELED This was clearly apparent in July, when regional representatives and the public reeled at the announcement that the region had incurred a \$135,000 deficit in its 1980 operating budget, largely through sloppy accounting and government money which never arrived in the amounts expected.

The deficit climbed to over

\$600,000 by August, and while some councillors maintained that, out of a \$45 million operating budget, the short-fall was hardly worth screaming about, it indicated that, somewhere along the line, communications between councillors, regional staff and the auditors who submitted their late report had broken down. Ironically, the region was prepared to launch a management study even before the deficit was revealed. The study was finally underway in September, and is looking

into ways in which the regional administration can be more effective, providing not only better service to the public but also better communications with regional councillors.

Regionalized sewer and water rates, once touted as an example of how Halton can work for its member municipalities, was dragged through six months of debate sludge as a large bloc of Burlington and Oakville councillors sought to dump the sewer surcharge system through which south-

ern municipalities help pay for expensive works projects in the north.

Since July, Burlington Councillor Jean Allingham has headed a strong lobby of councillors who wish to see their towns pay for their own sewer works projects rather than help Halton Hills finance its \$5.5 million Georgetown sewage treatment plant. Under the proposed scheme of paying the region back for sewer services, Halton Hills residents would see a whopping increase in their mill rate.

Nevertheless, the debate continued to crop up at council meetings throughout the remainder of the year, despite a municipal consultants study which recommended keeping the sewer surcharge system.

The arrival of seven new councillors around the regional table brought little change to the argument. Most are content to see the surcharge method stay at least for another year while regional and municipal staff sit down to modify the surcharge system or come up

with a plan for collecting sewer revenue which Milton, Oakville, Halton Hills and Burlington can swallow.

In fact, the most glowing achievement of regional council in the last six months was the signing of Halton's official plan in August, although this, too, has been marred by recent court challenges from the region's gravel producers.

While parts of the plan are still under negotiation between regional planning staff and its objectors, the plan was drafted swiftly and

efficiently and now sets long-awaited guidelines for development in Halton's rural areas and urban centres.

As one-quarter of Halton's composition, Halton Hills has fared well under the regional structure, accounting for its strong lobby which, on three occasions has defeated a Burlington proposal to scrap the sewer surcharge system.

And perhaps it's out of respect for this kind of leadership (as well as the town's past record) that

other councillors voted Halton Hills representatives to head key decision-making regional committees for the next two years.

Perhaps those councillors who still have faith in the regional system are hoping that Mayor Pomeroy, who now chairs the region's most important decision maker, the finance and administration committee, will be able to draw upon his past success at the local level and bring some public respect back to Halton's regional government.

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Farm advisors end second year

The Halton Agricultural Advisory Committee has completed its second year, presenting the viewpoint of Halton farmers to regional council and acting as an avenue through which council can receive opinions on agricultural issues.

In 1980, a total of 13 regular meetings were held along with a few special meetings such as the farm tour, sewage plant tour and the rural forum.

Some of the topics discussed at the meetings during the past year:

- Discussion with Gerry Wade and Roy Maxwell of CBC re agricultural broadcasting. We agreed to give our comments if and when asked.

- Review of "Agricultural Section" of the Niagara Escarpment Plan and sent this to the Region to be used as part of their comments at the Niagara Escarpment hearings.

- Bruce Trail Association - Expressed the concern of the farmers along the Bruce Trail re trespassers, damage from dogs, etc.

- Rural Development Outreach Project - Met with the Halton Community Pulse Group to decide how we can work together for the improvement of the rural community in Halton.

- Sub-committee of Harold Middlebrook, Bill Allison and Henry Stanley working with Marilyn White, Bruce Wood and Val Walters of the Community Pulse Group to plan our bus trip and rural forum. These two events brought together rural farm and non-farm people, planners and politicians to discuss our future.

- Sludge - Worked with the Public Works Department and Envirosearch Limited, Regional consultants on sludge, to get the proper testing equipment and to improve the quality of our Halton sludges in order that they can be used for future fertilizer application on our crop land. Four trials re use of sewage sludge has been set up for winter wheat.

- Dog Control in Halton - Evaluating the costs of dog control in each municipality, the receipts from the sale of dog tags and possible action to cut down the losses to livestock from dog attacks.

- Viability of Farm Operations - Preparing guidelines for viability for each farming enterprise (will continue this in 1981).

- Deer Season in Halton - Assisted the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Region of Halton in making this possible.

- Comments on Subdivisions and Severances - When requested by farm organizations in Halton or by the Region have made comments on the increasing number of subdivisions and severances.

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