

## Heed the warning

Halton Councillor Bill Johnson is worried that the new rules governing the Region's Land Division Committee won't keep the committee "squeaky clean."

In the face of three charges laid against applicants to the land division committee in recent months, including one charge against the former secretary treasurer of the committee, his warnings shouldn't be ignored.

The investigation into the land division committee is still going on. Halton Regional Police are poring over hundreds of applications for severances to see if indeed, as several local agricultural organizations have said, there are many fraudulent applications.

Halton wants to preserve its farmland. It's that farmland that's helped the Region retain its unique image. It's one of the few areas with Regional government that has managed to retain its rustic countryside.

Local agricultural organizations are warning us that the huge profits to be made out of gaining land severances are putting that rustic countryside in danger.

The new rules require all eight people who sit on the citizens committee to take part in land division committee hearings with a minimum quorum of five people. That's up from five people with a quorum of three. That move alone should ensure a better and more intense level of discussion.

However, just as we have seen at council tables, discussions can often get side tracked and sometimes there is need for "sombre second thought."

At local council, the general committee's actions are approved by town council the following week, thereby allowing that sombre second thought.

The land division committee should operate much like the Ontario Municipal Board. That is, it should hear the application, take time to discuss it together and issue the decision later - perhaps at the following meeting in two weeks.

It would take the pressure off members at each and every meeting, and allow members a deeper personal analysis of the application.

## Don't lose sleep over this one



### Editor's Notebook

Brian MacLeod  
Herald Editor

Did you know that May is "Better Sleep Month?"

Did you lose any over it?

Yes, there is actually a Better Sleep Council set up with a headquarters in Downsview to tell us "walking weary" how to catch all 40 winks each and every night.

The Better Sleep Council tells us how often to replace our bed (every eight to 10 years) and how to relax into sleep. (I've always preferred the "nice dream" solution myself).

You can even dial a toll free number during the month of May to hear "the pajama'd superhero, Mattress Man, give sleep tips in a 90 second adventure that's sure to put you to sleep."

So what happens when you dial? Well you'll here Mattress Man meet Miss Murdoch and offer helpful hints in typical superhero

fashion.

Miss Murdoch, desk filled with papers indicating her lack of sleep (huh?), is told that she should "ease out of a long day with mind games."

Mattress Man says you should imagine yourself painting a long white fence with a tiny little brush counting every little stroke."

I guess counting sheep is out of fashion.

A few other tips offered by Mattress Man during the sleepy month of May are:

- keep regular hours (I guess that counts me out - pun intended);
- quality of sleep matters more than quantity;
- exercise every day - but not too close to bedtime;
- don't smoke;
- avoid coffee and alcohol late in the day;
- don't nap;
- unwind in the evening;
- don't go to bed starved or stuffed; and
- develop a bedtime ritual.

Oh yes, if you want to talk with Mattress Man sometime in May, his phone number is 1-800-223-NITE!  
Pleasant dreams.

## Liberal musings on payroll tax not a particularly novel idea



### Queen's Park Derek Nelson Thomson News Service

TORONTO-Now, Treasurer Bob Nixon is musing about a payroll tax.

That would mean a percentage levy made on the total payroll of many or all businesses in the province.

Nixon was responding to a reporter's question about what kind of tax he might substitute for OHIP premiums.

Among others, he mentioned a payroll tax, which isn't particularly new. The Liberals considered that possibility even back in the days when they were in opposition.

But the story grew beyond that, stimulated by the treasurer's tendency to wonder out loud about all kinds of taxes to pay for his accelerating spending.

A payroll tax might be "an innovative to pay for the costs of government," he said.

In short, it is the emphasis Nixon is putting upon it that is making ears perk up in interest.

He appears to be looking at a payroll tax not just as a possible substitute for OHIP premiums, but as a general revenue-raiser.

His thinking appears to be that this would be one way of absorbing some of the annual 10 per cent or so increase in the costs of health care.

Ontario, of course, has always used premiums to pay for a portion of medicare costs, about 20 to 25 per cent of the cost in the days of the Conservative government.

But the Liberals are pledged to abolish OHIP premiums someday because they are "regressive" (everyone who pays OHIP - most poor are exempt - pays the same amount).

Thus, when the Grits came to power in 1985, they froze OHIP premiums. The result is that, every year, premium pay for a continually decreasing share of health-care costs.

They are now down to about 12 per cent of the \$12.5-billion health budget (itself, one-third of all provincial spending).

Nixon's problem is that 12 per cent is still a huge chunk of money, about \$1.8 billion currently. If he abolished premiums, he'd have to find a way to replace that money somehow.

### BUMP TAXES

He estimates it would bump personal income tax another four or five points if he took that route, for example.

In any case, it isn't abolishing premiums that seem to be his immediate concern, but simply the desire to take in more revenue overall.

If he raised the same percentage of medicare costs by a payroll tax as the Tories did with premiums, Nixon would have another billion dollars to spend.

There is a negative side to a payroll tax, one the former provincial Conservative government

discovered when it fleetingly considered such a tax in the early 1980s.

It hits small business disproportionately hard. That's why the Tories backed away from it.

Large employers and most unionized operations currently pay all or part of OHIP premiums for their staff.

A small payroll tax (instead of OHIP premiums) would have minimal financial effect upon them. (A large one, with the sole aim of raising revenue, would be another matter).

It is the small and struggling shop that would have difficulty affording such a payroll tax.

And, as Progressive Conservative Leader Andy Brandt pointed out here, 68 per cent of Ontario businesses operate with under four employees and 92 per cent operate with under 20. All are under increasing cost pressures in everything from workers' compensation payments to unemployment insurance premiums.

No wonder Nixon likes the idea of such a tax. It would be a virgin field he could plow for cash.

Yet, small business is also the key generator of most new jobs, and, according to provincial finance officials in Manitoba (which has a 2.2-per-cent payroll tax), employers tend to do without some employees because they can't afford the additional cost.

There could be exemptions for businesses up to a certain income level, say \$100,000 - though this would seemingly destroy the point of the tax in the first place.



## Leaf stock rises as Pal Hal falls



### Your Business Diane Maley Thomson News Service

An embarrassing thing happens every time Harold Ballard gets sick.

Investors start snapping up shares in his company, Maple Leaf Gardens Ltd., sending the stock price leaping. The company owns the Gardens (a Toronto arena) and the Toronto Maple Leafs of the National Hockey League.

Apparently, investors believe the company would be worth more without Mr. Ballard than with him. Mr. Ballard owns 80 per cent of the stock, so not many shares are available for public purchase. This makes it easy for investors to drive up the price by buying and selling the remaining 20 per cent.

Ironically, Mr. Ballard, as major

shareholder, benefits most from these ghoulish price run-ups. Monday's rise earned him nearly \$10 million.

This exercise in bad taste has happened so many times now that stock market analysts believe Mr. Ballard, who is 85, will have to strike a deal soon for succession. Odds are he will sell his controlling interest. If so, the buyer will extend the offer to minority shareholders as well.

### RAW CAPITALISM

A few years back, when Mr. Ballard first took ill, speculators clamored after hidden profits in Maple Leaf Gardens stock - the valuable downtown property on which the hockey arena sits. Such a choice piece of real estate would net millions from a developer.

But the prospect of fat real estate gains was clouded recently when the City of Toronto said the Gardens should be preserved as a historical property. The proposal enraged the crusty Mr. Ballard, who viewed it as confiscation. The battle continues.

Always optimistic, speculators

are looking to another source of easy gains. Molson Cos. Ltd., the beer company, has hinted it would be interested in buying Mr. Ballard out. Minority shareholders would be included in the deal.

Molson, a big industrial company with good management, could turn Maple Leaf Gardens into a much more profitable operation, analysts believe.

### RAISES QUESTION

The ongoing saga of Mr. Ballard, the Maple Leafs and the hockey arena that bears the team's name points to the problems that attend shareholders in family-run companies. That Mr. Ballard runs his company as if it were private does not seem to bother shareholders now that he is getting on in years.

Indeed, the gyrations in stock price have led speculators to pick up the shares dumped by longer-term investors.

Investors bailed out because they did not believe Mr. Ballard was running the company as efficiently as he could have. Mr. Ballard, an old-time entrepreneur, chose to do as he pleased.