

Editorial

New homes aren't affordable

Our provincial ministry of housing has deemed that a \$148,000 house in Halton Hills, Oakville and Milton is "affordable."

That's absurd.

New guidelines set down by the province, set to go into effect in August, 1991, mean that new development in most of Halton will have to contain at least 25 per cent "affordable" housing at a cost of less than \$148,000.

And Halton Hills Coun. Rick Bonnette is worried that such homes will be "shacks."

That \$148,000 figure sounds more like a formula intended to keep the deed to a house in the hands of people in the upper middle income bracket only, rather than make four walls and a roof available for ownership by the average family.

The province has based that \$148,000 figure on an average household salary of \$52,700 with a down payment of \$35,000.

As Burlington Coun. Pat McLaughlin pointed out, who's got \$35,000 to put down on a house? Probably the only people who have got that kind of down payment are lottery winners and those who already own a house.

So how do young families break into the housing market?

Even if there are two income earners in a household there are likely to be the increased costs of day care which significantly eat into that extra income and lower the real spending power of the two-income family.

The only reason the government is in the affordable housing market is because private enterprise isn't. At least, not to any significant amount.

While we do have a co-op with affordable housing nearing completion in Georgetown, only about 20 units will be in the "affordable" range. And even they are only for rent.

Governments attempted to allow developers to build on smaller lots in hopes of lowering the price of housing.

But one quick trip to a new subdivision on the 10th Line in Mississauga, not that far from the Halton Hills boundary, shows how that policy is working. Developers are building huge \$300,000 homes on tiny lots which require parking spaces on major through streets, just to accommodate visitors on nearby cul-de-sacs.

The government must either force the hand of developers on affordable housing or get into the market itself - in a big way - if the average Canadian's dream of owning a home is to come true.

Under the new rules, one quarter of new development in Halton, with the exception of Burlington, must go for less than \$1,320 a month.

That's affordable housing?

"Buyers don't get much of a house" for \$148,000, Halton Chairman Peter Pomeroy says.

That may be true, but many young families are willing to settle for a smaller home, tightly packed into smaller subdivisions, in order to build up some equity so that they can one day move into something bigger.

They may not be pretty to look at but they can be made eye-catching, modest and liveable.

It's up to us to give them a chance, not shut them out because their new houses won't be as big and beautiful as our old ones.

Davis is nowhere to be found

Derek Nelson

Queen's Park
Thomson News Service



The official unveiling here last week of the portrait of former premier Bill Davis brought a flood of memories to those of us who could recall the pre-1985 days of Ontario's Progressive Conservative dynasty.

Some people were impressed by what they recalled; some weren't.

For anyone who visits Queen's Park, the portrait hangs outside the cabinet offices on the second floor. It is one of a long row commemorating former premiers.

Premier David Peterson did the honors, joking with Davis about the trademarks that came to be associated with him, from the references to home-town Brampton he made in his speeches to his belief the Toronto Argonauts were a football team.

One Globe and Mail reporter suggested that as the list of attributes went on, "the distinctions between the two men began to blur a bit."

"Like his predecessor, Mr. Peterson stands firmly in favor of the eternal verities of Ontario politics - economic development and the province's self-assigned role as the honest broker of Con-

federation," he wrote.

Another Press Gallery colleague, commentator Eric Dowd, took the approach that while a "handsome portrait" of Davis now hangs here, "there is little else left."

Since the Liberal takeover in 1985, "almost all traces of Davis, premier from 1971-85, have vanished like some Inca temple overgrown by the jungle."

As far as it goes, that's true. The Davis name is not much in evidence; the key Davis-linked civil servants are gone; some Davis policies, such as buying Sunco, have been repudiated.

But there is a Davis legacy, and a massive one. For good or bad, he left his mark on Ontario.

Take education:

Davis became education minister in the 1960s when Ontario still had local school boards. He first consolidated small boards into township boards, where some believe he should have halted the changes.

COUNTY BOARDS

But he went on to county boards, and whether the resulting organization is too big and cumbersome is still argued about today. Perhaps it depends on the specific board.

Davis was also instrumental in doing away with the old standard curriculum, including departmental exams, and replacing them with the then new-fangled theories about credits, about learn-at-your-own-speed, and about how self-esteem was more important than knowledge. How well that worked we all know.

On the plus side, however, Davis also founded the community college system and expanded access to the universities to lower-income youth through a combination of student loans and grants.

Or take transportation:

It was Davis who launched highly successful regular air service throughout northern Ontario, and who placed massive emphasis upon public transit - especially the GO trains - and who put much money into it.

Conversely, it was Davis who killed the Spadina Expressway and shortchanged Ontario's road building and repair program for more than a decade, with the result communities like Toronto are grinding to a halt.

Then there is the PC party:

Some claim he brought it kicking and screaming into the late 20th century, with his interventionist and socially "progressive" policies on everything from subsidizing industry to expanding human rights legislation.

But others see a party left horrendously in debt, whose basic policies from opposition to full separate school funding to support of a market economy had been abandoned for short-term political gain.

One could go on with a list of Davis changes that some saw as positive, others as negative. For example, even today, Davis-imposed regional government still haunts the Tories at election time.

No, it's clear Davis has left a major imprint upon Ontario. What is noticeable is how few basic Davis approaches have since been reversed by Peterson.



Salary recommendations are "offensive"



Stewart MacLeod
Ottawa
Thomson News Service

If I were in the betting business, I would offer very high odds against the Mulroney government taking action to implement recommendations recently made on the salaries of MPs.

Yes, it's generally recognized that the government, in these relatively early days of its second mandate, is gung-ho to get all unpopular legislation out of the way. Then, all things being equal, there will be time to re-climb the popularity ladder before the next vote.

The proposed goods and services tax certainly qualifies as unpopular and, to many Canadians, so did the free-trade agreement.

The cuts in VIA Rail service seem to be widely detested.

But there's a difference between being unpopular, or even detested, and being downright offensive. And if some of the recommendations about MPs' salaries are not downright offensive, they would certainly be perceived that way by many Canadians.

What the Commission to Review Allowances of Members of Parliament concluded, among other things, was that salaries should be fully indexed to the consumer price index. In the meantime, MPs should get an immediate four-per-cent pay hike.

The commission, incidentally, consisted of two former MPs - Liberal Francis Fox and Tory Gerry St. Germain. And after reading through their report, one gets the impression that our poor MPs are rather badly off. Not quite bag people, but losing ground every day.

Their \$79,000 annual income - which includes \$19,000 in tax-free expense allowances - doesn't go very far these days.

FALLING BEHIND
Before going any further, it might be worth asking ourselves

whether there has ever been a salary-review commission that decided that its subjects were overpaid? I've looked everywhere without success. But if you come across a copy, save it because it could fetch a fortune at a Sotheby auction.

Anyway, we don't have to worry about that now because this latest study certainly doesn't suggest our parliamentarians are overpaid. Far from it. The report concludes that the average backbencher could earn up to \$20,000 more if he or she were not in Parliament.

Wow, that would be about \$99,000! And to think there are a couple of Tory MPs from Quebec who were actually unemployed before being elected. If employers only knew what they were missing.

One senator, mercifully not identified in the report, figures he suffered a "cumulative loss" of \$105,000 over the past 15 years because his salary was not fully indexed. Where senators enjoy a decided advantage over the rest of us - no, I am not going to list all of them - is all the free time they have to work on their cumulative loss statements.