

Halton can't handle rapid growth — deputy minister

By Rob Savage
Thomson News Service

Current municipal planning policies won't be able to handle the "stress" of rapid population growth in areas such as Halton Region, a government spokesman said Friday.

Gardner Church, the deputy minister of the Office for the Greater Toronto Area, said existing municipal plans and policies weren't designed to handle large numbers of people.

"That system won't deal with the large cross-boundary growth pressures that we're currently dealing with," he said in an interview.

Mr. Church called for the creation of a large-scale development plan for the entire Greater Toronto Area.

The comments followed a presentation to community and environment groups that explained his office's upcoming report on rapid growth predictions and suggested ways to deal with them. The report, expected to be made public in June, looks at options for dealing with the rapid growth.

Mr. Church said the population in the Greater Toronto Area — an

area comprised of the Halton, Peel, Durham, York and Metro Toronto regions — is expected to increase by about two million people to a total of 5.4 million by the year 2001.

Metro Toronto's population isn't expected to change much from its current two million people total. Instead, the growth will occur in the other four regions.

Mr. Church pointed out the figures may be "conservative." One expert, he said, is calling for a total population growth in the five regions to as much as nine million people by 2001.

That could create very serious problems for both the economy and the environment, Mr. Church said.

For example, he predicted Halton Region would more than double in size.

The deputy minister said people who worry about the loss of rural lands have justified fears.

"Our projections suggest you have every right in the world to be concerned about it," he said.

To meet the rapid population growth demands, Mr. Church told the audience of about 50 people that a proactive policy is needed.

Areas surrounding Metro must determine how they want to see the large urban centres develop. He said they could look at focusing urban growth in one very large area or they could consider the development of a number of large urban areas.

One proposal he recommended against was the idea that the population growth could be shifted to another location. While the provincial government may try to persuade people to look at other areas such as Northern or Eastern Ontario, Church didn't think the plan would be too successful.

Mr. Church said similar at-

tempts to move people away from large centres were tried in Great Britain and the U.S.S.R. and failed.

He warned a policy of simply do-

ing nothing could also be harmful. He said environmental concerns about rapid development, as well as the rising costs for housing and transportation, could get out of

control without proper planning. "That's why we need a broader urban structure...to try to give some direction, to try to give some sense to how it will all work."

False alarms

A false alarm was activated at an address in Lot 23, Concession 2 at 7:08 p.m. March 3, Halton Hills Fire Department say.

There was also a fire alarm received from an address on Elizabeth Drive in Acton. The fire department says it was a false alarm. The call came in on March 5 at 10:40 a.m.

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