

# Legislation calls for greater openness among politicians

By Noel Duignan  
North Halton MPP

On December 19th, 1991, the Minister of Municipal Affairs released for public consultation a package of draft legislation for significant reform in the areas of municipal conflict of interest, open meetings, and the disposal of municipal lands.

In the area of municipal conflict, the amendments to the existing Municipal Conflict of Interest Act are substantial and include the following:

1. Municipal councillors, school trustees, public utility commissioners, and police village trustees must disclose assets, liabilities, and income sources within 60 days after taking office. This disclosure would include the existence of, but not the value of, assets, liabilities and income sources of the member, the member's spouse, minor children, and companies controlled by any of them.

2. A central registry would be established to keep the written disclosures of assets and pecuniary interest. The register would be available to the public.

3. The courts would be able to levy fines against or suspend, for a period of up to 90 days, persons who contravened the Act. These penalties would be in addition to removal from office and restitution that are currently available. Members who are found in a contravention of the Act would be penalized even if the member's

conflict occurred by mistake or because they believed they were acting legally.

4. Acceptance of gifts and benefits would be prohibited, except for those of a social or protocol nature. Gifts and benefits valued at more than \$200 must be disclosed.

The proposed amendments for open meetings would require that regular, special, or committee meetings of municipal councils and local boards must be open to the public. The public's right to attend meetings would be limited in the following circumstances only:

- discretion to close a meeting for certain prescribed topics, including litigation, security, property acquisition and negotiation.

- mandatory requirement to close a meeting if discussing matters which must not be disclosed under the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

Municipal councils would be required to adopt procedure by-laws setting out the method of calling meetings as well as meeting procedures.

The proposed changes for disposal of land would require a municipal council or local board to declare that the property to be

sold is surplus to its need and available for sale. A council or board must obtain an appraisal of the value of the property to be sold, unless the property qualifies for an exemption. Exemptions will be established by regulation and include:

- resale of expropriated land to original owner

- sale under municipal small business assistance program

- undevelopable land

Municipalities may offer surplus lands to other public bodies within their boundaries before offering lands for public sale. Councils and local boards would be required to follow procedures setting out the internal process and public notice requirements for the sale of real property. Depending on the outcome of our government's consultation on provincial acquisition of land for housing, the province may reserve the right to acquire surplus municipal and local boards' real property.

I believe that governments need to make greater efforts to show how decisions are made and the public needs to know more about decisions made on its behalf by local government across this province. I encourage the public to comment on the pro-

posals before legislation is introduced in the spring. Information on the proposed draft legislation can be obtained from my office or from the Ministry of

Municipal Affairs Central (Willowdale) Field Office at Suite 207, 47 Sheppard Avenue East, M2N 2Z8. Call (416)250-1251 or 1-800-668-0230.

## Tax planning seminar

The Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce as part of ongoing program called Lunch and Learn is pleased to present a seminar on Tax Planning for Small Business. In the last few years all levels of government have introduced many new and complex taxes that businesses must deal with.

For many small businesses the paper work burden has been overwhelming and many owner/managers find that they don't always understand the forms and procedures used. Many businesses end up paying more taxes than they should and don't always know it. This seminar will help small businesses to save money and lessen their tax burden by utilizing sound tax planning practices. Our speaker for this event will be Robert R. Jason, Vice-President and Director of Taxation at

Leadley, Gunning and Culp International. Leadley, Gunning and Culp have just recently opened an office in Halton Hills and Gary Dykstra is the manager of this office.

Mr. Jason is both a CA and a Lawyer and has consulted extensively with both the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants and the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. He is co-author of the book "The Accountants Manual" published by the former group.

The lunch and seminar will take place on January 15, 1991 at the North Halton Golf Club, tickets are \$18.00 each including GST and may be reserved by call the Chamber office at 877-7119. The Chamber is planning a number of Lunch and Learn seminars for 1992 and we hope that members of the business community will participate.

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