

Assessment ratio better...but still low

By **CYNTHIA GAMBLE**
Staff Writer

Halton Hills's assessment ratio changed only marginally last year, but enough for Mayor Rick Bonnette to call it a "good news story."

Municipalities rely on taxes generated from the assessment of properties to pay for Town operations and capital spending. But if that is assessment base is predominantly residential, it can create a burden on homeowners who have to reach into their wallet to pay increasing tax bills.

In 2009, the residential versus non-residential (commercial/industrial) assessment was set at 89.6%:10.4%. In 2008, that ratio was 90.3%:9.7% and in 2007, it was 90.7%:9.3%.

Halton Hills's assessment ratio is the highest residential ratio of the four Halton municipalities. Milton and Burlington both sit at 82:18% and Oakville is 86:14.

"It's sort of good news and bad news," said the mayor at a recent council meeting. "The good news is that we have increased our non-residential assessment from 2007 to now it's over 10 per cent. But when you compare to anywhere else in the region, we are by far the lowest, and when you compare us to municipalities in the GTA, we're probably near the lowest in (non-residential) assessment."

Bonnette blamed the lack of commercial/industrial growth on the high development charges imposed by Halton Region. He pointed to the assessment ratios in Guelph (83:17) and Wellington County (not part of the survey), where there are lower DCs.

"Halton Region has to realize that Guelph and Wellington (are) our competitors. We have had businesses that have come here and looked around but they have gone to Guelph or Brantford (81:19)," he said.

This is why Halton Hills council and its regional councillors recently went to bat for two Acton companies facing high Halton Region water and wastewater servicing costs for planned storage expansions— even though they had no plans to use the services.

"This council has been very adamant in protecting the industries we do have," he said. "It's very frustrating."

He pointed out the 401 Corridor is a 'work in progress', but if the Town hadn't helped to upfront servicing costs there six years ago, "we would have been really stagnant. At least we've seen some growth, and some development, but we still have a ways to go."

In a 2009 BMA Management Consulting Inc.'s Municipal Study, which surveyed more than 80 towns on its residential vs. non-residential assessment ratio, Halton Hills ranked below the average (86:14).

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