

EDITORIAL

With Hartley Coles



The 'Golden' years

Although publicity for the Anne Golden Report on the Greater Toronto Area has been out of the limelight recently while the media returns to more important subjects, such as the Stanley Cup play-offs, the imminent opening of the trout fishing season and the lacklustre performance of the Toronto Blue Jays, it has not gone away, nor will it.

Perhaps public officials in Metro Toronto were surprised at the vehemence of their counterparts in nearby cities and towns, as well as those in the "boonies," in rejecting an alliance with Metro Toronto which would result in any loss of identity.

Although most of us continually carp about officials and the methods they employ in doing municipal business, we guard our independence as sacrosanct and untouchable, especially if it means we may experience a substantial increase in taxes.

We've heard all the arguments about bigger being better. During the days when regional governments were being touted as the means to create a much better world for all, most of us swallowed the reasoning hook, line and sinker. As it turns out, it was neither necessary, nor necessarily reasonable. Small municipalities which avoided the regional juggernaut are just as well off and have preserved most of their independence.

If I recall correctly, the reasoning behind the dissolving of Halton County into four municipalities from the original nine was to ensure everyone in the new Halton Region would benefit from lower tax rates and the duplication, which logically occurred when everyone bought the same equipment and hired the same kind of personnel. It would also reduce councils to four from nine and leave five less the province would have to deal with.

Although I haven't got the figures, it also necessarily followed that those who remained in authority would require higher salaries in view of their increased responsibilities. Councillors who served for a few hundred dollars a year and a free Christmas party were now able to command thousands of dollars in remuneration and expenses to boot. Same for personnel. They had bigger headaches now and salaries had to reflect it. The savings were diminished.

Obviously there should have been savings in buying equipment from the larger tax base, one area in which regionalization has been a boon. However, it might have originally been just a matter of sharing equipment on a rotation basis.

School boards are a good illustration. Sixty per cent of your tax dollar in Halton Hills now goes for education - some of it caused by less government support, but also seriously impacted by the large bureaucracy that has grown around education. There are better schools and equipment in them is far superior to the days of local boards, when every penny was pinched. Is education any better? Obviously in some areas it has improved. But there are others where it has gone downhill despite the efforts of some educators to keep the standards of the past.

So what regionalization has done, primarily, is create a new set of problems while solving some of the problems from the past. Is the answer then to make the regions even bigger? We're hearing the same arguments we heard in the '70s:

1. Metro would benefit by being able to tap into a larger tax base, which would produce a more prosperous region with a solid downtown core.
2. Economic development would be coordinated across the Greater Toronto Area, to compete with other urban regions internationally.
3. Local governments would still handle local planning but the new super region would handle region-wide planning issues.
4. Reducing the number of politicians and merging police forces would create unparalleled savings.

Familiar arguments that experience tells us just doesn't work. The same old inequalities exist under a new set of masters.

Take police, for example. Take Acton for another. When Acton was a mere 4,000 people, there were six policemen here on a 24-hour basis, with an office open 24 hours as well. Now Halton Regional Police are having a hard time justifying a permanent station in all of Halton Hills because of a brand new headquarters being built in Milton to handle all of North Halton. Georgetown would be reduced to a satellite, which Acton already is.

I'm not suggesting crime is more prevalent and policing hasn't changed in these days of improved communications. I am suggesting police presence and their accessibility reduce the amount of crime in any municipality. If not, why the village constable concept?

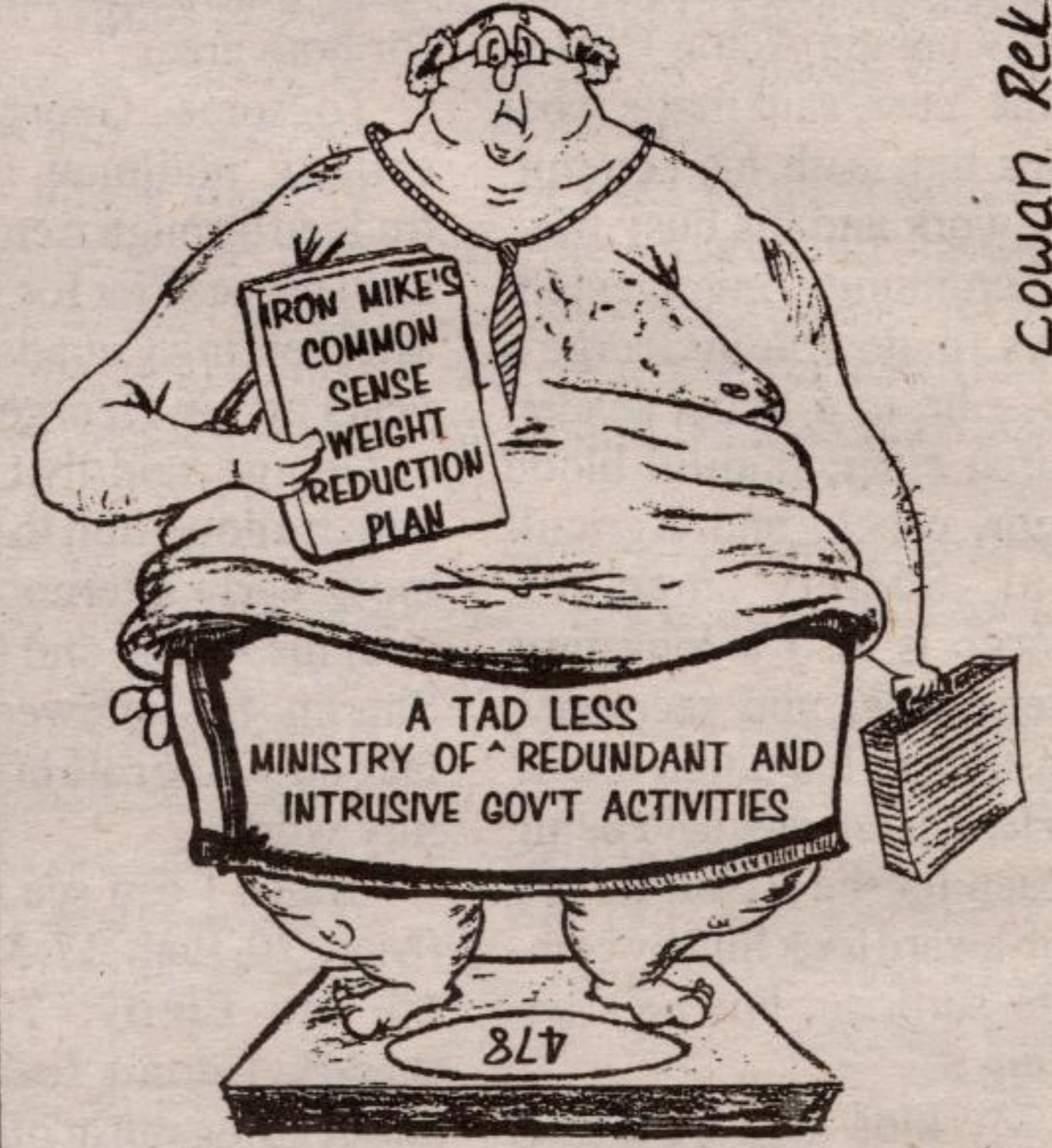
Forgive this rant, but let's not have all the same stuff farmers spread on their fields to justify another grab for power on the part of Metro Toronto. We've got enough problems as it is.

Toronto's business core is in trouble. Name a town or city where it isn't, Acton included. Empty stores are everywhere. If governments think they are going to solve these problems by more regionalizing, we've got real problems - with governments.

BEFORE



AFTER



Cowan Rekker © 1996 Tanner

Your LETTERS

Club keeps students out of trouble

To the Editor,

Your recent article on the closure of Hoops, Pockets and More did not come as a big surprise. How can a business of this nature survive by depending on the youth of Acton to keep it going? It was a good try, but Mr. Labombard and Mr. Manes, kids need money to patronize your place. A large percentage of pre-teens and teenagers do not have \$5 to \$20 a week. The "kids" you mention probably didn't have the money either, so they loitered and this led to vandalism.

I agree with Mr. Manes' suggestion that, "somebody in Acton should get something for the kids to do." Perhaps the time has come for more

"cost-free" Acton drop-in centres.

As an actively involved volunteer of the McKenzie-Smith Bennett School Drop-In Centre, for Grades 6 to 8 students attending that school, I can attest to the fact that this is a very successful venture and much needed in the community.

Approximately 120 students attend this centre one night a week. We run several activities including basketball, volleyball, ping pong, video games and of course, the ever-popular "jamming" room. Special guests have included a line dancing instructor, Promar karate instructor, beauticians from Shoppers' Drug Mart, and a live band. All of these people have volunteered their time.

The success of the drop-in centre is due to the organization and dedication of a few teachers and parent volunteers. We are assisted weekly by senior and co-op students from Acton High School.

We are proud of the students, who, because of their good behaviour, have allowed us to keep going so they can have "something to do."

*Helen Chumley
Rosemary Road*

A.S.A.P. questions the fate of Acton

To the Editor

I would like to clarify a few items that appeared in last week's *Acton Tanner* on the Acton Sovereignty Association Party, or A.S.A.P.

Yes, I was shocked to hear that the residents of Acton only contribute 14 per cent of the total tax bill in Halton Hills. Shocked by the inaction that has caused Georgetown to grow in such a substantial way, while Acton has had only small developments to add to our residential base. It raises the question: what percentage do we receive back in services?

A.S.A.P. was formed tongue-in-cheek, out of concern that a new arena and community centre has been proposed for so many years, with few tangible results. Now it seems we might see the light at the end of the tunnel. Will we still be waiting a year from now for construction to begin? Acton councillors should be commended for their tireless efforts in seeing this project come to fruition. I would like to ask, though, how many arenas could have been built for the price of one Hungry Hollow Expressway bridge?

For 20 years there has been discussion about the lack of water,

which would allow for growth in Acton. Meanwhile, the Acton quarry is pumping huge amounts of water to continue their operations. Can we not look into diverting quarry waters to facilitate town expansion?

Why isn't there a Town employee stationed in Acton, even part-time? It is hard to feel like an integral part of Halton Hills when you have to travel to Georgetown for face-to-face contact with a Town employee.

Will we ever review the town and regional structure? Would we be better served by not being part of Halton Hills or even Halton Region? People I've spoken with agree we would fit better with Wellington County, as it is a rural-based community like Acton. We would see a reduction in our insurance and licensing costs in Wellington as well.

I would like to thank all the people who have contacted me in support of these initiatives. I've had inquiries from people in Esquesing, Brampton, Orangeville, Oakville and even Vancouver - all of them former Actonites concerned for the welfare of the town they love.

These concerns should be addressed, especially with the possible implementation of the G.T.A.

Clark A. Somerville

MORE LETTERS ON PAGE 9

THE ACTON Tanner

'Neighbourhood News' from Acton's Award-Winning Hometown Newspaper

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THE ACTON TANNER is published weekly on Wednesdays by Wicklow Hills Publishing Co. Inc. at 12 Church St., E., Acton, Ontario, L7J 1K4. Mailing address: P.O. Box 150, Acton, Ont., L7J 2M3. Telephone: 519-853-5100. Fax: 853-5040. Reproduction without permission is prohibited. Ideas expressed herein are those of the author only.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Rates are: \$28.80 for one year (50 issues for price of 48) and \$4.80 for two months (eight issues).

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Publications Mail Registration
Number 10457

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