

The world's changing and Halton's right on track

by Donna Danielli

"We're living in a bit of a different world now," said Halton Region Chairman Joyce Savoline as she began her comments at a recent breakfast hosted by the Milton Chamber of Commerce.

Since Chairman Savoline last spoke with Chamber members at a breakfast in the spring, the Greater Toronto Services Board has been disbanded, the province has repatriated GO Transit back to the Region, Milton has seen unprecedented growth in residential homes and the province's first Smart Growth Panel has been introduced.

"As a strong partnership of municipalities, Halton has become an enviable community to live in," commented Chairman Savoline before touching on a few of the issues the Region is currently working on. In consultation through over 100 meetings with the public, the Region determined priorities for the citizens of Halton including respect for the environment, safety and maintenance of groundwater and urban separation. Development in Halton may seem to be moving quickly some days, but it is all in accordance with the Halton Urban Structure Plan (HUSP).

"Even with the new development, over half the area of Halton is rural and agricultural," explained Chairman Savoline. "We've developed defensible policies that protect our agricultural community. Agriculture is our heritage in Halton and there is a desire to continue that heritage."

This summer should see a draft plan available for public viewing on Phase Two of development in Halton.

At the moment, Halton Region is the only community in Ontario that has a Development Charges Advisory Committee, which is made up of community members, stakeholders and Regional staff. Currently development charges at the Regional level are discounted 50 per cent.

"There is a group that believes that development should pay every red cent but it's difficult to understand where the benefit to the old community stops and the benefit to the new community begins," explained Chairman Savoline. "Residential development is revenue negative to a community. Commercial development brings in profits and provides jobs."

Recently downloaded to the Region were the responsibilities for ambulance service and public transportation. After determining the \$4 million budget for ambulance services was inadequate to meet provincial standards, the Region doubled the budget to \$8 million.

One of the first projects initiated was the creation of an ambulance substation in Campbellville which should be completed by the end of 2002.

Transit issues are being addressed in a Transportation Study which is being created in partnership with the municipalities. A major component of the study will look at transportation needs in north Halton.

"We know that with growth, it is wise for us to focus on cost effective and safe transit for those who can and will use it," said Chairman Savoline.

High profile concerns expressed by members of the Chamber included the proposed CN intermodal and the new Smart Growth Panel.

While Chairman Savoline stressed the Smart Growth Panel is only an advisory board to the provincial government, she also expressed concern about what the panel's position on waste management might be. She has requested a guarantee, in writing, that the Halton Waste Management site is off limits for the province.

"If we're used as a megacity landfill, we'll be at capacity within three to four years," she predicted.

Until CN Rail actually makes the application for its proposed intermodal, there is little the Region or its municipalities can do.

"There's a fundamental principle that we should have ownership of our own house, and in this case we don't - and that's frustrating," she said. "We will make the best of whatever is dealt to us and that's because we are working in partnership with Milton and local groups."

While CN has not formally made its application at this time, Chairman Savoline confirmed CN has bought even more land in the last few weeks.

As developments unfold, the Region will continue to keep the community abreast of the situation.

Making Halton Hills proud




Photo by Deborah Quaille

The 2002 Municipal Awards Evening held on March 25 allowed the Town of Halton Hills to show appreciation to individuals and groups who brought recognition and honour to the community through their achievements in 2001. Awards were given for achievements in academics, arts, culture, sports, and recreational pursuits.

Mayor Gastle noted the Community Affairs Committee and the Parks and Rec department put a lot of hours into this program. Guests for the evening were also treated to demonstrations of highland dance, Lego robotics, and refreshments after the ceremony.

Pictured above are the evening's award winners with Mayor Kathy Gastle.



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