

Greenbelt planning, a complex issue

By PAUL MISTELE, ONTARIO FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Ontario's Greenbelt Task Force has published its report, summarizing several months of public consultations, and providing a series of recommendations to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. When this exercise started, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture stressed the importance of viability for agriculture's future.

The Task Force's report mentions viability as an objective, but provides no real solutions.

Part way through the consultation process, when OFA insisted that viability into the future for agriculture was a requirement, the province named Lyle Vanclief and Bob Bedggood as an Agricultural Advisory Team to look exclusively at viability.

The Task Force report says it "hopes this team will address the concern that protection of land alone does not ensure agricultural viability." OFA and Ontario's farmers need to be convinced the advisory team will be able to do what's necessary to make the connection between viability and the protection of farmland from development.

At this stage, we don't even know if or when the advisory team will be issuing a report or what the government's response might be to the advisory team's thoughts on maintaining viability in the farming sector.

The Task Force's report lists a number of possible alternatives for protect-

ing agricultural lands. Residential severances is front and centre in all of them.

There are regional differences throughout the province dictating that a different approach to granting severances is needed, depending where you live. In some areas, granting the sale of residential lots for surplus dwellings should be restricted to enhance agriculture's economic future.

In other areas, the only way a farm can remain viable is if farmers are allowed to sell off surplus residential units. We need local agricultural input into these land use decisions.

Land use policy is only one aspect in ensuring that agriculture and green space are protected. OFA has made a number of suggestions to the Task Force and to the Agricultural Advisory Team. We need to see these thoughts brought forward as policy recommendations:

- public investment in drainage
- stronger farm practices
- protection legislation
- clear commitment to funding the costs of source water
- protection on farms
- confidence in continued government involvement in agricultural research.

These are items that will help agriculture and green space in Ontario.

The Task Force's recommendation that the greenbelt "be branded and marketed as a publicly valued and impor-

tant resource....for cultural activities, recreation and tourism," is not something farmers and their organizations can support, especially when we consider the issues with abandoned rail lines that have been turned into hiking trails.

Farmers, while supportive of maintaining green space, aren't willing to have their crop lands turned into areas for hiking and other forms of recreation by a public lacking understanding or respect for private land rights. These are issues that

erode the economic future of farmland. These are issues that need to be taken seriously by our provincial government.

Before the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and its members can endorse the apparent goals and objectives of the provincial government with its greenbelt report, we need a comprehensive report from the Agricultural Advisory Team and a clear indication of what the government intends to do with that report.

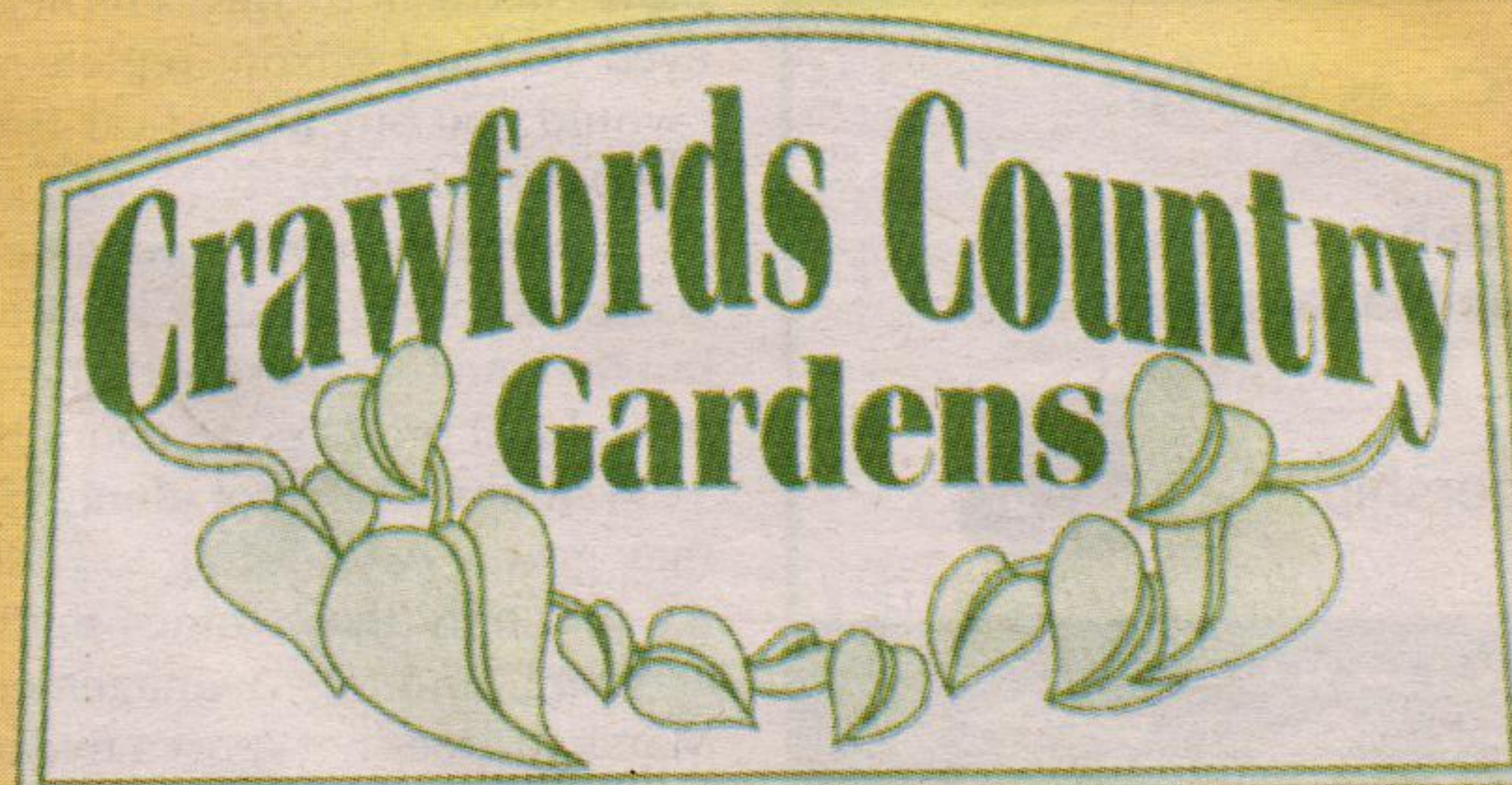
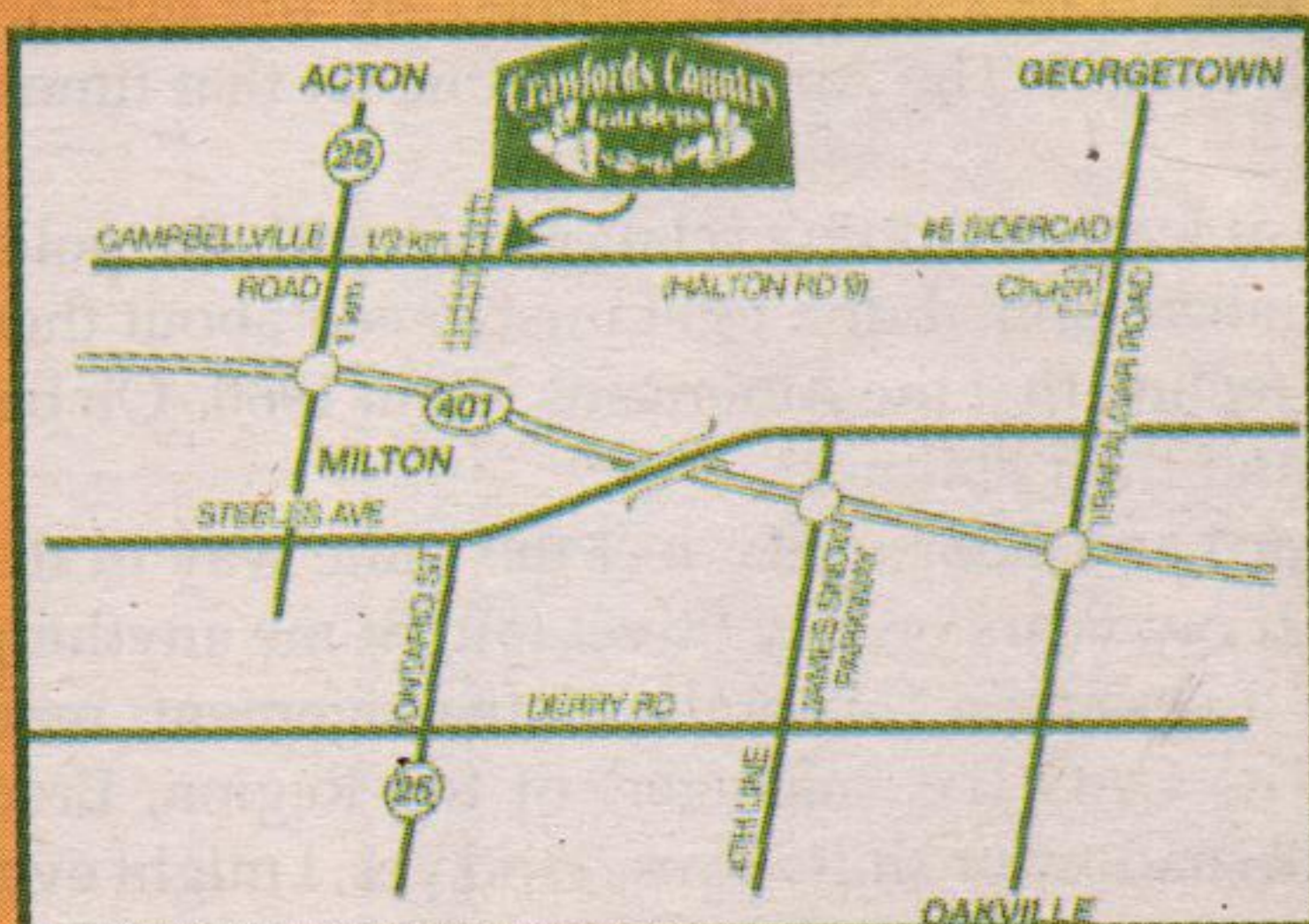
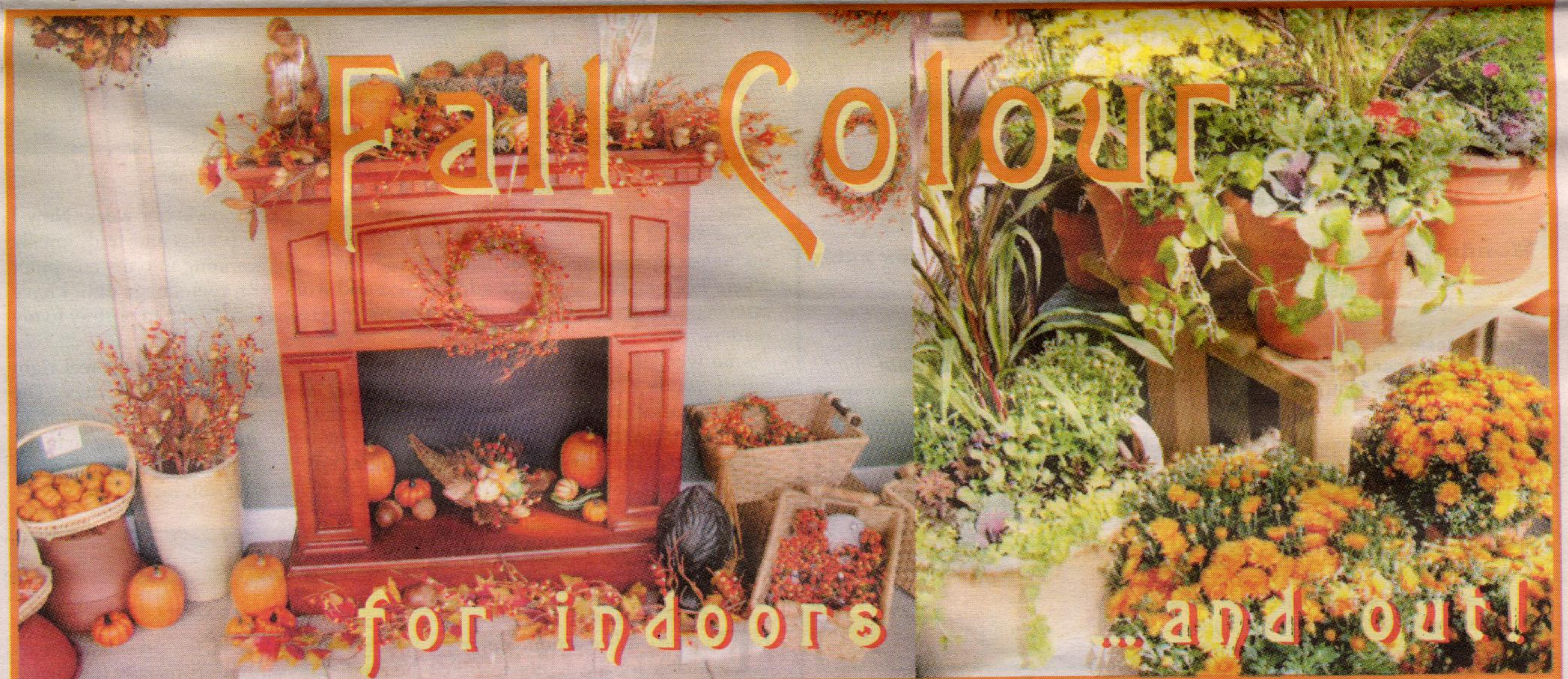
What a price to pay

Continued from page 1

promised \$385 million funding over ten years. Projects currently in the assessment phase, but expected to move into the design phase next year, with construction to begin in 2006 include: \$30 million for new buses, \$39 million for new rail cars, and \$19 million for a bus only Transitway from Mississauga's Square One Plaza to Pearson airport. As well this year, GO will spend \$3.2 million of the long term proposed cost of \$25 million to extend service to Barrie, and the first \$6.4 million for a Lakeshore East corridor, which is expected to have an eventual cost of \$90 million.

"We have not had time to sit down and assess what Halton's share will be and how we will pay this funding," says Savoline. "Staff is working on it, and we

will make an assessment from Halton's point of view." Although both the federal and provincial governments have promised to return part of the gas taxes to municipalities, it is unknown when that will happen or how much money will actually come back to the community, or what parameters will be placed on the municipalities in terms of how they can use this money. Other options could include increased taxes or development charges. Regional staff will be analyzing the financial impacts of the GO Transit budget in weeks to come, before preparing a report for Halton Regional Council. "It won't be easy though, to come up with the money," admits Regional Chairman Joyce Savoline.



Hours
 Mon. to Sat. 9am - 5pm
 Sunday 10am - 5pm

905-878-0223
 8689 #5 Sideroad
www.crawfords.ca