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# Halton ~ a year of growing, freezing and changing

## 2004 - A personal view

By STEPHEN BAKER

This has been a year of contrasts and controversy.

We have environmental factions, in and out of government, pushing for the preservation of almost all farmland in Halton Region and a goodly chunk of Wellington County. This preservation is supposed to be complementary to the Province's "Places to Grow" initiative. How one can freeze almost all the land and at the same time provide an adequate inventory of building lots is legerdemain of the highest order. Luckily we have two separate ministries working on the problem, but not necessarily in the same direction. What we are likely to get is "push-me, pull-you" politics with the winner taking all. What is unclear is which initiative the Province would prefer to prevail. Cynics would say that the Greenbelt is only in favour with the government because there is no tangible dollar cost to the government in announcing a freeze, especially as Minister Gerretson has announced publicly that there will be no compensation to those whose land has been frozen. It is a no cost way to live up to the spirit of some of the pre-election promises made by the Provincial Liberals. At the other end of the spectrum is the Federal Liberal government's commitment to keep immigration at the quarter million per annum mark. With over half of new immigrants opting to settle in the GTA, this means that the GTA municipalities must find additional housing for 125,000+ people each year.

It's a thorny issue. Those of us lucky enough to live the pastoral life would like

to see that continue. In that regard the farmers and the environmentalists are of one mind. Where we differ is in the fine print. Farmers, and I am one, love the land, preserve the land, and hold it in trust for the next generation. What we can't stomach is being told what to do with our land, as if our ownership counted for nothing. Proponents of the Greenbelt suggest that if there were no freeze there would be a stampede of farmers trying to turn their unprofitable fields into valuable sub-divisions. This is patently false. With or without the Greenbelt, there is no mechanism that allows for free-for-all development. We in Halton spent the best part of the last decade buffing up the Halton Urban Structural Plan, a fine piece of planning that sets out the limits of development in Halton for the next two decades. Essentially, under HUSP, any land that is not already zoned urban residential has little or no chance of being rezoned before the year 2025. Any land that is already zoned is outside the arms of the proposed Greenbelt Act. What difference will the Act make? In practical terms, almost none. Perhaps that is why the passage



Jayne Laari, a 16-year-old Mississauga resident, came to the Milton Fall Fair in September to compete in a horse jumping event with Matilda.

of the Greenbelt Act has now suddenly been deferred until the Spring session of Parliament.

In large part, what we see with the Greenbelt Act is a clash of cultures. The pressures of urban living are forcing more and more people to re-evaluate their lives and prompt them to seek a more relaxed and gentler existence. Unfortunately the dream of country living is not quite the same as the reality. When one is busy signing the real estate offer, there are no explanatory clauses

in the document about wells, septic systems, fence maintenance, the Noxious Weeds Act, and smells and sounds from neighbours who are an even bet to be working farmers. Waking up on your first blissful morning to the sounds of a harvest in full swing when you are not expecting it is likely to try the sweetest temperament. On the other hand, being a working farmer suddenly confronted on the busiest day of the year by a brand

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*All the Best in 2005*