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REGIONAL NEWS, NOTES AND NEIGHBOURS

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'A great place to live and work'

By DONNA DANIELI

A recent report by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) examines the quality of life in twenty municipalities across Canada; including Halton. The report examines demographic changes, economic vitality and civic engagement.

"Much of the picture in Halton is actually quite positive," says John Burrett of the FCM. "These are really prosperous communities." He points to Halton's relatively low crime rate, low unemployment rates, and superior education standards (Halton has the highest number of teacher and guidance counsellors per 1,000 students in all of Ontario).

The report's data shows an increase in 0 to 14 year olds, as well as people over 65 years in Halton's population, with dwindling numbers of young adults 25 to 34 years old. This could speak to a future need for services including education, childcare, health and housing for the increasing areas of Halton's population, while having implications for Halton's economic sustainability as the work force of 25 to 34 year olds decreases.

"We recognize that if Halton is to remain a great place to live and work, we must meet the needs of a changing and aging population," said Regional Councillor Rick Craven, Chair of the Health and Services Committee. "Regional Council has put strategies in place to attract and protect a young work force, as well as address the need for more affordable housing."

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PHOTO BY STEPHEN BAKER

MP Mike Chong and local realtor John Drewry, pictured at the recent Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce IT Conference held at the North Halton Golf and Country Club.

New all-party committee listens to the public on Greenbelt

By BERNADETTE WARD

They say the devil is in the details, and nowhere is this more apparent than with the myriad groups and individuals speaking out on the provincial government's proposed greenbelt protection legislation, Bill 135.

Speakers at the hearings held across GTA this past week indicate that most people are supportive of the idea of a healthy, thriving greater GTA and perhaps even of a greenbelt, but that's where the common ground ends.

"This whole green belting exercise is extremely and terribly flawed," says a passionate Lieven Gevaert, a director of the Halton Region Federation of Agriculture.

Gevaert feels that the motivation for the legislation is political - the Liberal Party working to keep election promises that will come at the cost of farmers and their land.

Graham Flint, chair of Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment thinks the legislation is a very smart thing for the province to do, but is also empathetic to individual landowners.

"It's a difficult situation. I don't think there's an easy way to deal with this," he says of the farmers concerns about land rights and compensation.

He cites the often-touted slogan about protecting both the land and those who work it, but adds that this issue alone is not enough to give up the idea of the greenbelt.

"People believe in this concept and I don't see how you can argue with caring for the life sustaining environment around us," says Flint.

Sustenance is also on the mind of Gevaert and he was able to succinctly describe the details or lack of which are problematic for farmers.

"THIS WILL HAVE A DRAMATIC EFFECT ON FARMING"

Lack of compensation for loss of rights and use of land is an issue, although not everyone agrees that farmers should be compensated. There are those who point out that the zoning that currently exists on farmland will simply remain as is.

"This idea that you're taking rights away from the farmer is wrong," says Allan Elgar, a councillor with the

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The grass is always greener...


By DONNA DANIELI

There are 4,700 acres in Halton Hills that may just become the most talked about lands in the Region. The Town of Halton Hills, upon finding its official plan displaced by the Ontario Places to Grow Strategy, sought to protect this area of farmland by asking for its inclusion in the province's controversial draft Greenbelt Protection area. Then, Halton Hills Council reconsidered this request at a special council meeting a few weeks ago and rescinded the

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