



PORTRAIT GIFT: Well known Halton Hills resident, Dr. Tom Ramautarsingh, presents a cartoonist's portrait to Her Honour Hillary Weston, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, at the Commonwealth Contest Awards in Toronto. The cartoon, a first for the Lt. Gov., was drawn by J.R. Artinger, a colleague of Lynn Johnston (*For Better or Worse*). Dr. Ramautarsingh is chief Examiner of the International Commonwealth Essay Contest. *Submitted photo*

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Significant tax changes on for local business people

By **FRANCES NIBLOCK**
The New Tanner

Provincial elimination of the business occupancy tax means owners of 207 commercial properties in Acton will see, on average, a 43 per cent increase in their interim tax bill, expected shortly in the mail.

Under the new Fair Municipal Finance Act tax bills will no longer be sent to tenants of commercial properties, but instead, to the property owners who now must collect the taxes from their tenants.

At a briefing on the new legislation last week Town Treasurer Andy Koopmans

said the change will have a significant impact on some property owners, especially those who have gross leases with their tenants.

"Property owners who have business tenants working under gross lease arrangement may find they have difficulty in recovering these extra taxes that they may not have anticipated when they negotiated the leases," Koopmans said. Gross lease arrangements don't specially say that the tenant is responsible for paying the taxes on the property. Under net lease deals tenants are responsible for paying their share of property taxes.

"This is one of the areas

in particular where the province has mentioned it, the Assessment Department has mentioned it and we continue to mention it to a few of the property owners that have called us, that the municipality is not the one to get in the middle of negotiations between the property owners and their tenants," Koopmans said.

Acton Councillor Rick Bonnette said the impact of the change concerns him because there are enough empty stores now.

"What about a strip plaza that has say, four of seven units empty, what you're saying is that the owner will have to pay tax on those empty units," Bonnette asked.

Koopmans explained that it would be up to the owner to decide if he wants to prorate the taxes among his tenants and that there is tax credits available for empty units.

Other changes in the legislation include:

- Assessment appeals must be launched by March 31 of each year - essentially a 90, not 21 day, appeal period.

- Farmers will no longer have to pay taxes and then apply for a farm tax rebate of 75 per cent from the province at the end of the year. Farm taxes will be reduced by that 75 per cent up front.

- Land will be assessed at its current market value.

Bonnette against electing Halton Regional chair

A politician from the north of Halton will never again be chosen to chair Halton Regional council, according to Acton Councillor Rick Bonnette after council voted 18-1 last week to make the Halton Region chair an elected position.

"On the surface, the change from having the chair elected by members of regional council may look like it's democratic, but in my opinion, it will exclude any-

one from the north from ever being chair again," Bonnette, who cast the lone no vote, explained in an interview on Friday.

"Look at the population in Oakville and Burlington - they outnumber us four to one and by sheer numbers will decide who the next chair is," Bonnette argued, adding that a campaign for the regional chair could cost \$200,000, well beyond the fund raising abilities of poli-

ticians from smaller communities.

Bonnette also said that since Halton was formed in the mid-70's there had been an "unwritten tradition" of alternating between choosing a chair from the north and south.

The proposed change was suggested by an Oakville councillor who argued that since the region is responsible for 46 per cent of the tax bill, voters should be able to pick the person who decide how tax dollars are spent.

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