

Region in jeopardy?

Mayors looking out for local interests

By BRAD REAUME

Special to The Independent/Free Press

Nobody rallied around the flag of Halton Region on Wednesday.

While planning a regional paper on municipal reform in light of the Golden Report on the Greater Toronto Area, Halton's four mayors made it very clear — local interests are more important than regional ones.

Burlington Mayor Walter Mulkeiwich said Burlington is in a unique position because the report suggests his city, due to its geographic position, should be allowed to choose the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) or aligning itself with Hamilton-Wentworth.

"In Oakville we have different needs than they do in Burlington," said Oakville Mayor Ann Mulvale.

Halton Hills Mayor Marilyn Serjeantson said her local council would "work for a vision of what we expect for our town."

Milton Mayor Gord Krantz spelled it all out. "Assuming Queen's Park tells us one level of government is gone and we have to decide which one it is, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to know we will probably not support the region."

Members of the newly formed Golden report review committee said they wanted the best solution

for Halton residents, but also agreed that if the best solution turns out to be disbanding Halton, that is what they would recommend to the provincial government.

"If that's the logical way to proceed then let's do it," said Halton Chair Joyce Savoline.

Mulkeiwich insisted that each mayor outline what their local council is doing in response to the report. Mulvale said she planned several open forums before March break for citizens to speak and a council debate. Krantz said Milton council would be studying how close the Golden Report is to submissions presented by town council to the task force.

Mulkeiwich said Burlington city council will debate the merits of any affiliation with a larger municipality. He said Hamilton has been asked to wait on finalizing their reform package until Burlington has had time to debate the issues. Serjeantson said she is arranging to have an open discussion on local cable television. She held the door open to review, saying the "aim is for what best suits Halton Hills."

Suspicions were evident early in the discussion, with Serjeantson demanding an "open and honest" process in light of a report by suburban regional chairs which suggested local municipalities be

disbanded.

Other reports by various groups were cited. Mulkeiwich said he thought the so-called 'Four Mayors Report' by the mayors of Oshawa, North York, Mississauga and Toronto was "moving in the right direction." The report calls for strong local government and a weak inter-municipal board to coordinate water, transit, planning, and economic development.

Giving the business of the new committee the highest priority, councillors effectively slowed or stopped most matters from moving forward at Halton Region in favor of producing the position paper on their future.

Halton Chair Joyce Savoline said it might be necessary to hold meetings in the evening and on weekends because of tight schedules for comments imposed by the provincial government.

Committee heard the province is looking to have comments in by March, with their legislation on municipal reform following soon after.

That legislation will be debated through the summer and dealt with in the fall.

The timing is essential because it is generally assumed one year is required to effect the changes before the next municipal elections, slated for November, 1997.

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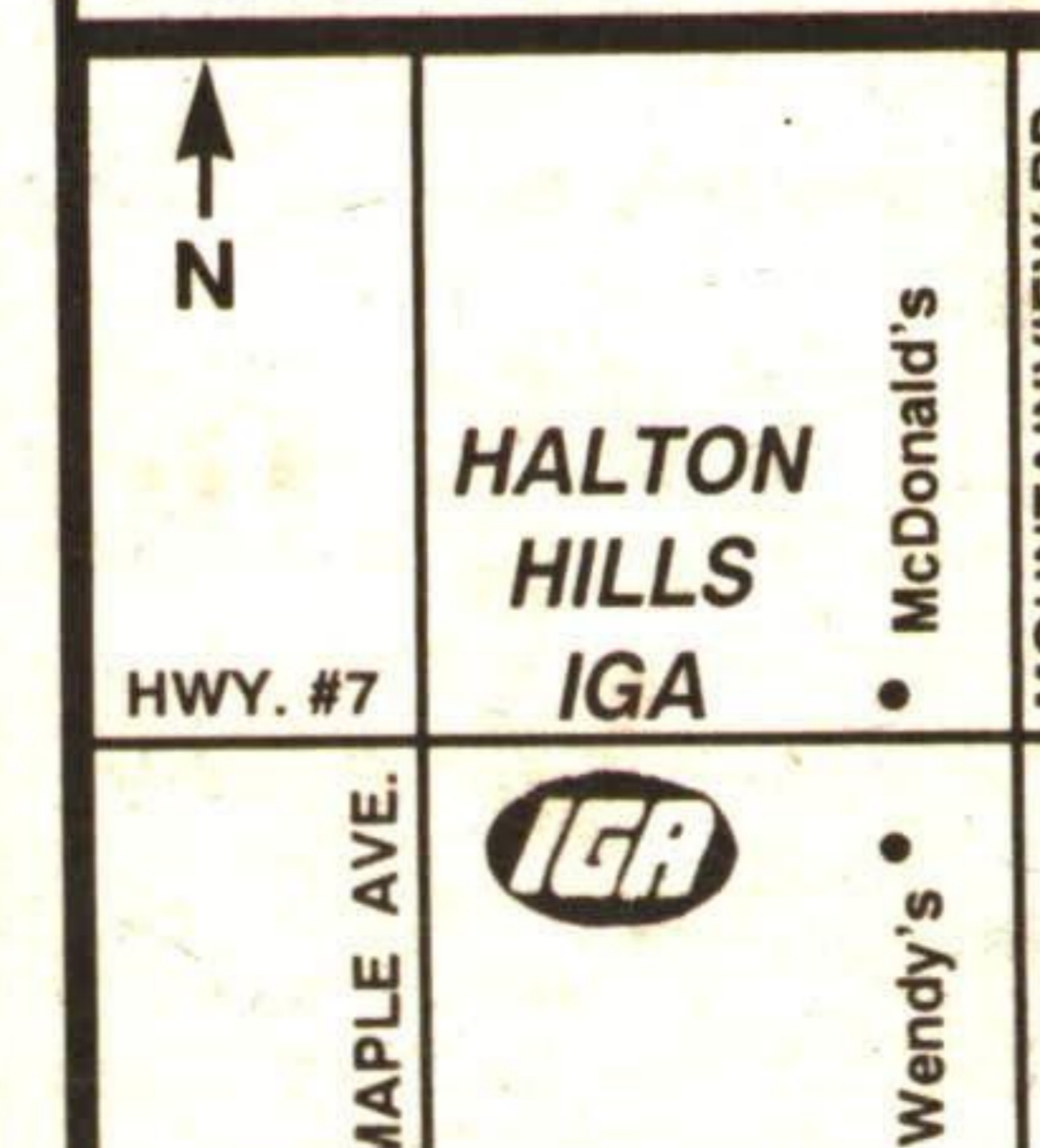
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