

# OPINION

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## Ombudsman savages MPAC

Ontarians owe Ontario Ombudsman André Marin a vote of thanks.

Marin, who spent five months investigating the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. (MPAC) couldn't have been more scathing this week in his report on the government body which sets property value assessments.

Marin said MPAC has a "superiority complex" which "engages in cloak and dagger behaviour" and "cutthroat manoeuvring around property owners."

To put it bluntly, MPAC has been sticking it to Ontario property owners for years. That's not news to property owners and certainly not news to anyone who has fought with MPAC about an assessment.

"Never in the 30-year history of this office have so many complaints been received in so short a period about a single public agency," said Marin, adding he had heard from more than 3,700 disgruntled property owners.

Key among Marin's 22 recommendations is that MPAC should rely less on its mass appraisal computer system when setting property values and dealing with appeals. Having an assessor visit to focus on characteristics specific to a property would be far more fair.

As well, when a property owner appeals an assessment MPAC should prove why the assessed value is correct instead of the current unjust system where the owner must prove why it is wrong.

An attitude adjustment at MPAC is also required according to Marin, who likened challenging an MPAC assessment to a "Davis vs. Goliath mismatch".

"MPAC treats the taxpayer and property owner as the adversary," said Marin.

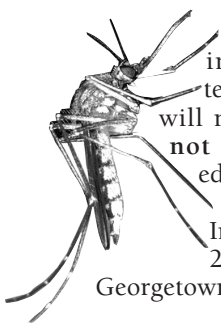
The Ministry of Finance and MPAC have agreed to implement 18 of the recommendations immediately and study the remaining four.

In the wake of the Marin's report, Finance Minister Dwight Duncan announced today's (Friday) deadline for appealing assessments has been extended 90 days and that he takes Marin's recommendations "very seriously".

Too bad no one took a "serious" look at how MPAC operated before Marin.

## Something bugging you?

Send us a letter!



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Steve Nease



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### One regional centre not best for region

(This letter was originally sent to Halton Regional chairman Joyce Savoline. A copy was made available to The Independent and Free Press.)

Dear Ms. Joyce Savoline,

I applaud you, your council and the staff of Halton Region to consider ways to make our tax dollars go the extra mile.

However, when reading your column in March 15 *Independent and Free Press*, the following concerns me and I hope you will take it in consideration.

I consider myself a resident of the region with average needs and have never had the need to use on the same day any two or more of the services you want to combine in the same location. Nor will I expect to ever have such a need. Therefore, I see no benefit for the residents of this region to combine the services into a physically same location.

However, as with any centralization, I do see a potential problem with the traffic being generated to the regional grounds. All services you mentioned use regular office hours and thus there is a concentration of traffic for both the public and employees to the same location.

For a government organization it would be prudent to show leadership in considering this social aspect of doing business, both from the point of an employer as well as of a service provider.

Decentralizing services and spreading them evenly throughout

the region is not only beneficial for the public, but also for employment opportunities.

With the current state of technology, there is no boundary to the level of co-operation possible between departments in different locations. Some companies are going as far as providing virtual offices and showing the possibility of dislocating the service from their actual physical location.

As being a provider of service to the public, it is imperative to make

### Cut development charges to pay for a new library

Dear editor,

Re: New library coming, but taxpayers will have to pay for it, *The Independent & Free Press* Feb. 10.

It's exciting to read about the new library and I'm very much looking forward to using it when we get it. I also believe there is a way of paying for it without further burdening the residential tax payers.

I believe that using \$2 million from development charges to help finance it is doing things backwards and is going to hurt our future tax base. For non-residential construction, Halton Hills has the highest development charges in the country. Our high development charges are driving businesses away, rather than attracting them.

Our development charges for industrial are over \$10 per sq. ft. of new construction, payable before a building permit can be obtained. By

the accessibility of the service paramount and I fail to see how congesting disparate services would aid to that effect.

If you would like to make better use of your facilities, I would keep in mind the usage patterns; like usage outside of office hours.

Thank you for serving this region and I hope you will add this concern in your decision-making process of the project at hand.

Chris Klomp,  
Georgetown

comparison, the City of Brantford instituted zero development charges in order to attract new construction and new contributions to their tax base. Over the last three years, two million sq. ft. of new industrial developments considered the Halton Hills 401 Corridor and went to Brantford instead, where they are now contributing \$3 million per year to the local tax base.

In my view, an attractive solution for financing our new library is to reduce the municipal development charges for non-residential, non-retail to zero in order to stimulate industrial development in the 401 Corridor. The additional tax base would then finance the library without requiring the 5 per cent surcharge on residential properties.

Peter Scholz, Limehouse

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