

MUNICIPAL ELECTION



Mayor: It's about leadership

The Independent & Free Press sat down with Mayor Rick Bonnette, 51, to question him on issues in this year's municipal election campaign. He was elected in 1982 and has served the last three years as mayor. The following are excerpts of his responses.

Q. Why are you the best candidate for mayor?

It's leadership. Three years ago we had a town of very low staff morale, we were talking about renaming streets in Acton, that got everybody upset. We were talking about public transit, we were talking about expanding the urban boundaries...and we had a split council. Now fast forward to today, we have good staff morale...the street names were off the table so the people in Acton are happy, we didn't expand the urban boundary... and we didn't get into the public transit debate and we have a real teamwork in council.



RICK BONNETTE

I think part of the leadership I showed, was with the hospital...I think I engaged the community...I didn't do it all on my own, I had some other councillors (working on it), we did it as a team.

I think the Curwood Packaging (closure)... I think as much as (councillor) Mike Davis is criticizing how I (dealt with the closure) of Curwood Packaging— here's the president of the union for Curwood endorsing me.

I think we were the first community to bring in closed captioning without having to be forced to by human rights.

I'm inclusive of councillors.

We've engaged the farming community. We've had two open forums for the farming community...

Q. How can council keep tax increases as low as possible and maintain services?

I think what we've proposed to do, the 2 per cent pavement management plan has been supported, it was something I went to the public with three years ago, until we get caught up a little bit...

Our fire department, that's another thing we have to look at, we have to hire more full time firefighters...

Lastly is to have the industrial base. That's very important...It's still low it's about 13 per cent. Even though we're just starting to kick in the 401 Corridor.

Attracting business, that's the key thing.

Q. What do you foresee for the future of the 401 Corridor by the end of this council's term?

This is going to tie into the Durable Plan. I can see it being developed right up to Trafalgar Rd.— minimum.

Q. Are you happy with how the Corridor has developed over the past three years, or are you disappointed with it in the challenges you've faced, with Mold-

Masters for example?

I don't think anyone predicted that three years ago \$150,000 an acre which was what land was being bought up for in the Corridor would jump to \$300,000 or \$350,000 an acre. With people putting that kind of money in they're basically going to market to whomever they want...

As far as the offices (head office type development), yes the market's changed. Who knows, we may get that back. We may get that back in the next two years.

Q. How disappointed were you with Mold-Masters decision to delay building a facility in the corridor, and are you worried that they're not going to build there, or that Mold-Masters is making the Town dance to the song its playing?

I would be a liar if I didn't say I was disappointed. I'm still hopeful.

About the agreement we did, I don't regret that decision at all. That's something that had to be done.

Q. With the pressures from the province's Greenbelt and Places to Grow plans and Halton Region's Durable Plan how will the Town be able to control development here?

I can't predict with the Durable Plan. There's a real concern I have...if we got challenged to go to a board hearing and you've got a provincial message out there from Places to Grow. Is it wise to spend \$2 million on a losing battle to fight an OMB (Ontario Municipal Board) hearing that you know you're going to lose?...That's a real dilemma.

We have to get (to Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister) John Gerretsen and say, 'Are these numbers etched in stone' that Halton's population has to double?'

The Places to Grow doesn't even have an inclusion on waste management.

I think Oakville, Burlington and Milton are around 25 per cent

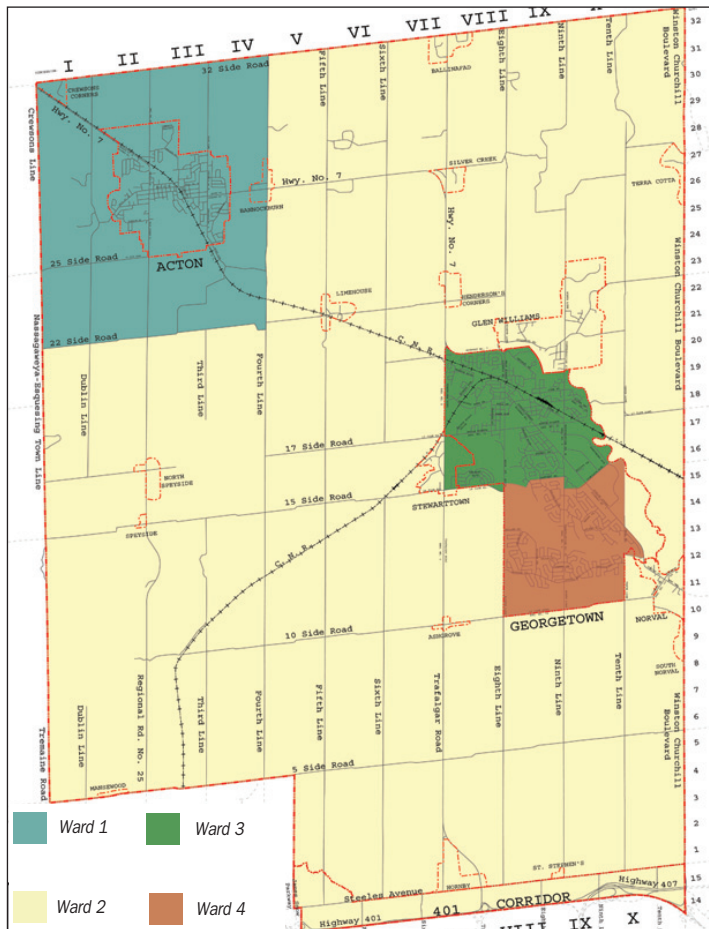
industrial and I don't think our town should be growing until we get up around that ratio.

I'm still against lake-based water for residential growth because if you bring the pipe up Trafalgar Rd. you've lost all control.

Give us the (growth) numbers (for Halton Hills) early in the game and let us plan our sandbox. We have to have the respect of the province. When we make a decision we don't want it challenged at the OMB. But in the short term, no lake-based water.

There's room for intensification. I don't want to see us like Milton and double the population in four years, because we'll lose all sight of what this community is about.

One idea I've been toying with is charging a community fee for any new development. If you're paying \$385,000 for a home, what's the difference adding another \$2,000 going directly into your community?



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Q. What are the biggest challenges facing the town in the next four years?

Growth.

Q. Do you want to see Places to Grow reworked?

I think so, because if it's not reworked Oakville and Burlington are almost to the max. Milton's got a wide space and is likely more of a target than even us, but if we don't (rework Places to Grow) we know we're targeted for who knows what population ratio.

With growth comes all the spin-offs—the services, and recreation will be coming up. Right now we're working on a recreation master plan in anticipation to try to find out what the needs are of the community... We're just not talking a hockey rink. We've had requests about cricket in the past, baseball diamonds... One baseball diamond, lit, fenced, with drainage is around \$250,000 to \$300,000.

The library. I think we handled that well. We made a decision it's going to be built where it should be— in the downtown.

We have the fire halls, which won't be a tax burden because we did a pay as you go plan.

There is, I believe, an arena scheduled for 2010 in Georgetown. With all of these projects the challenge will be getting them done.

Q. What was your biggest disappointment the past term?

I think it would have to be the business decision by Mold-Masters not to proceed on schedule (relocating 401/407 Corridor).

Q. Your best achievement?

I think the hospital...not only how we got to the minister's ear and kept obstetrics open but it evolved to the point that we got the hospital moved right out of William Osler. Now I hear today that they're hiring two more obstetricians in Georgetown Hospital.

I think the 401 Corridor agreement is something I'm very proud of... I couldn't have done that without regional help.

Q. What is the future of transit in Halton Hills?

Right now it's not on the table. We did increase transit for seniors and for handicapped people

Q. An amalgamated region building—are you for or against it?

I'm for it...Despite what (challenger) Rob Heaton is spreading around in his brochure that we're tearing down that (region) building. We're not tearing down that building, we're adding to it...It's going to be close to \$20 million in savings...I think it's prudent.

Q. The pavement management plan. Will you push to have it continue?

Our streets are much improved, but there could be other projects that we have to do...I don't want to say a yes/no answer...there might be other priorities, but we can still do some street improvements from the gas tax.

Q. Do you like the Barber Mill plan?

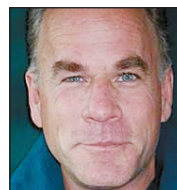
No. There is too much density. It's 14 storeys, plus a commercial area, there's no off-street parking. I think the plan is too saturated...It has to be scaled down.

Q. Are you for or against the Energy From Waste plant at the landfill?

I'm definitely for it...That will add another 15 years to that landfill site. Technology has never been better than it is now...York's been doing it, Japan's been doing it...Brampton's EFW plant is right on the 407. There's thousands of cars driving past it per minute and people probably don't know what it is.

Challenger mum

Mayoral challenger Robert Heaton did not respond to several requests from the Independent & Free Press to be interviewed for an election profile in this issue.



ROBERT HEATON