

# OPINION

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Phone: 905-873-0301  
Fax: 905-873-0398

## Premier can run but he can't hide

While Halton's elected officials pumped up the volume on their protest of the provincial Places To Grow plan last week, Premier Dalton McGuinty and his government appeared to be turning a deaf ear.

The premier was conveniently pre-occupied by an announcement of his own when the political contingent that calls itself Durable Halton came calling.

Unfortunately, few media outlets normally assigned to cover Queen's Park were in attendance for last Thursday's Toronto press conference hosted by regional chair Gary Carr and mayors Rick Bonnette (Halton Hills), Cam Jackson (Burlington), Rob Burton (Oakville) and Gord Krantz (Milton).

Despite last week's hollow reception, Carr and the mayoral quartet have pledged to continue to challenge the province to explain how municipalities are to fund the population increases outlined in the provincial plan.

While growth is inevitable, Halton's elected officials raise a valid point when they suggest the region can't be expected to cope with a 68 per cent population increase in the next 24 years, while simultaneously sending tens of millions of dollars to Toronto each year to help fund its social services.

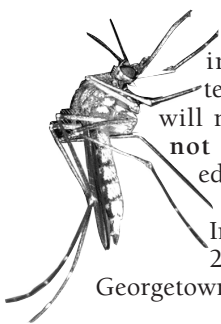
With a provincial election just seven months away, Carr insists Halton's demand for answers will continue to intensify in coming weeks.

Halton is not alone in its fight. Other regional governments— including Peel and York— have put a freeze on the amount of money they are prepared to send Toronto's way in the province's GTA pooling arrangement.

With Carr encouraging voters to make Places To Grow a provincial election issue, it may only be a matter of time before the premier will be forced to answer the questions he and his government managed to duck last week.

## Something bugging you?

Send us a letter!



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Independent & Free Press,  
280 Guelph St., Unit 29,  
Georgetown, ON., L7G 4B1

E-mail:

jmcghie@independentfreepress.com

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Steve Nease



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Mayor chastised for strategy in fighting province...

(This letter was originally sent to Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette and a copy was made available for publication.)

Dear Mayor,  
Having read *The Independent & Free Press'* (Feb. 21) coverage on the impact of the provinces *Places to Grow* plan, I think your position reveals that you are out of touch with the residents of Halton Hills. Your plan is to provide the province with stiff resistance to their initiative— unless they come through with lots of money.

Mayor Bonnette, money is not the issue. The issue to the residents of Halton Hills is about preserving the character, charm and appeal of our town. The issue is about not becoming the next Mississauga or the next Brampton. The issue is about controlled and gradual growth.

Under your tenure as mayor, south Georgetown, in particular, is now mentioned in the same breath as Milton when discussing growth. This doesn't surprise me, as you and most of your current council had every opportunity to add a 4,000+ acre buffer zone between Georgetown and Milton less than two years ago, as well as introduce more greenspace into Halton Hills. Instead, to the glee of developers and land speculators, you chose not to.

To provide resistance at this advanced stage of the province's planning seems to be little more than posturing. The *Places to Grow* initia-

tive was introduced for discussion in 2004, where was the resistance when it mattered? Here we are today, facing an increase of 312,000 more people (by 2031) in a town a fraction of that size.

However, I do think that you still have an opportunity to take clear and definitive action against the proposed

### ...but mayor defends giving province 'reality check'

Dear Mr. Pita,  
Thank you for your e-mail expressing your opinion of my stance on growth.

*Places to Grow* was NOT approved in 2004 as you suggest. It was the Greenbelt legislation that was approved. The 4,000 acres that you speak of was not a buffer in south Georgetown— it is on the Tenth Line and would not be any buffer that you would speak of.

I have spoken out against the *Places to Grow* on many occasions. The difference is this time, I have support with the other mayors and the regional chair (strength in numbers ) where I didn't have the support last term. *Places to Grow* is about future growth in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). We would be naive to think that there will be zero growth. Canada allows 255,000 immigrants a year. My information is that 82 per cent come to Ontario and out of that 62 per cent come into the GTA. The Province feels that they must be at the planning table to accommodate it.

pace of growth. I would also expect that our Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh joins you in representing our values to the province. For the sake of Halton Hills today and the Halton Hills of our children, I think this request is most reasonable.

Rui Pita,  
Georgetown

Mr. Pita "Places to Grow" is legislated. It is not by OUR choice. Again, our resolution is to bring the Province a "reality check" hoping they will get a clear message of what they are doing. It is my belief to keep Georgetown with the small town charm, hence one of the reasons why I have been against public transit. Many Georgetown residents have said to me, "we will start looking like a big city if we get buses running up down our streets."

I am in touch with Georgetown— maybe not with you, as you and I have a history of agreeing to disagree.

Fighting the Province on the cost (of its plan) is the best way to say, "we can't afford your plan to have Halton expand by 68 per cent". With the Provincial election coming it will be time for all parties to question the costs and affordability of this plan.

In closing, I think you and I both want the same thing, it's the means of how we get there.

Rick Bonnette,  
Mayor of Halton Hills

## STAFF DIRECTORY

**Publisher**  
Ken Nugent

**Advertising director**  
Steve Foreman  
(sforeman@independentfreepress.com)  
**Retail advertising manager**  
Cindi Campbell  
(ccampbell@independentfreepress.com)  
**Managing editor**  
John McGhie  
(jmcghie@independentfreepress.com)  
**Distribution manager**  
Nancy Geissler  
(distribution@independentfreepress.com)

### ADVERTISING

**Advertising co-ordinator**  
Jennifer Christie (jchristie@independentfreepress.com)  
**Retail Sales:**

Jennifer Spencer (jspencer@independentfreepress.com)  
Adam Spinney (aspinney@independentfreepress.com)  
Andrew Key (akey@independentfreepress.com)

**Real estate:**  
Sue Spizziri (realestate@independentfreepress.com)

**Classifieds:**  
Kristie Pells (classified@independentfreepress.com)

### ACCOUNTING

Rose Marie Gauthier, Michelle Wimmer

### EDITORIAL

Cynthia Gamble: News editor

(cgamble@independentfreepress.com)

Ted Brown: Photography

(tbrown@independentfreepress.com)

Lisa Tallyn: Staff writer

(ltallyn@independentfreepress.com)

Eamonn Maher: Staff writer/sports

(emaher@independentfreepress.com)

### PRODUCTION:

Mary Lou Foreman, Kevin Powell,  
Shelli Harrison, Dolores Black, Debbie MacDougall