EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

Unbridled growth

The Town of Milton is justifiably proud of the almost unbridled growth experiences since the Big Pipe from Lake Ontario was extended to the community.

For years the town, once the county seat for Halton, was hampered by a lack of portable water for expansion and lobbied hard to tap in to Lake Ontario's vast water resources. When it happened it set off a flurry of economic activity the likes of which had never been experienced before. Milton is starting to resemble Mississauga, its nearest neighbour to the east, the fiefdom of Hazel McCallion who candidly acknowledges the city made some mistakes on its headlong rush for expansion.

Now that Mississauga has used up almost all the available land for expansion, the eyes of developers and business are turning west to Milton. The pattern in Milton is following Mississauga's lead in paving over some of the best farm land in Ontario and creating gridlock on roads never designed to accommodate the volumes of traffic growth entails.

The fact that Milton is situated on Highway 401 is another factor in its tremendous growth. In 2006, for instance, the Town issued industrial and commercial permits which represented over 1.8 million square feet of new space. Some of that is warehousing being built on spec that tenants will come. Much of it is solid commercial and industrial business that helps relieve the tax burden on residents.

Halton Hills, which has its own corridor along 401, would just like to share in the industrial bounty. Some industries have already located in the Halton Hills corridor. More will likely come but it will likely never reach the extent of Milton's expansion which is a good thing because again a lot of the land along the corridor is better suited to agricultural pursuits.

Of course we must always have growth but we're not convinced the tremendous growth such as Milton's in such a short period of time is necessarily a positive. Far better is controlled growth where services can match expansion.

Need better deal

Small business, which accounts for more than half of Ontario's jobs, is asking for a better deal from Queen's Park in the upcoming budget.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) presented pre-budget recommendations to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs this week alleging optimism has been steadily declining among Ontario's small and medium-sized business owners and they want some signal from the Province that would give entrepreneurs some reason to believe things will improve (in the next budget).

The pre-budget submission, titled Choose Small Business for a Change, highlights the fact that, although SMEs account for 98 per cent of all firms by number, are responsible for more than half of Ontario's jobs and are the province's strongest job creators, an examination of the government's record shows the balance of new initiatives has gone against small business interests.

Andrew pointed out that since the government's prior budgets have focused elsewhere, this time around the SME sector is looking for some support for being the economic bedrock of communities across Ontario. Based on the feedback of its 42,000 members in Ontario, Andrew said that would mean: lower taxes for businesses, lower taxes for individuals, and less government intervention and regulation.

CFIB members identified corporate income tax, personal income tax and property tax as the top priorities in tax relief. They are also calling for a moratorium on all new provincial legislation and regulation that adds to more burden on small business. The CFIB says budgets are about choices and the government has a choice about whether it will give small business the "wherewithals" to expand, create jobs, invest in new equipment and improve employee benefits and salaries or continue to ignore them.

It's a good time for the CFIB to speak out with many small business people struggling through a post-Christmas slump which has been exacerbated by the good old Canadian winter. It's time for some good news about budgets instead of the inevitable annual 2-3-4% hikes we experience from lower levels of taxation. Few business owners or wage earners either can keep abreast of the increases.

It's time for a better deal.

FORAGING FOR FODDER: The winter winds may rage and a heavy blanket of snow may cover pastures everywhere but these horses observed from the Dublin Line know that underneath the white stuff is green grass which is like lettuce on a ham and cheese for two-legged animals. Framed by a cedar rail fence and the bleak silhouettes of maples and other indigenous trees, the photo captures some of the serenity in this area's rural areas during our winters.

Report shows:

Province underfunding Halton's social services and health care

Halton Regional Council has endorsed three recommendations highlighted in the Strong Communities Coalition Report – Growing Pains.

The report highlights the growing funding inequities for health and social services in the GTA/905 regions and urges the Province to take immediate steps regarding funding for these services to improve access to them.

The report shows GTA/905 residents which includes Halton, receive $181 less per person for social services and $246 less per person for health care services compared to the average person in Ontairo.

"The report demonstrates that provincial funding for health and social services in the GTA/905 are not keeping pace with the population growth taking place in Halton Region," says Gary Carr, Halton Regional Chair. "While Halton is taking a proactive approach in including health and social service issues in its response to Places to Grow through the Durable Halton Plan, we urge the provincial government to take action, along with the federal government in coming up with solutions to fix the funding gap."

The Growing Pains report was based on the findings of a recent PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) audit, which showed services in the GTA/905 receive significantly less funding compared to the rest of Ontario and that the gap in funding for these services is growing.

Growing Pains reports that the annual funding gap for provincially-funded social services in the GTA/905 has grown over the last several years to more than $550 million, while the health care gap is over $900 million. More specifically, GTA/905 residents receive $181 less per person for social services, and $246 less per person for health care services compared to the average Ontarian.

The gap has widened most in developmental services and children's services (children's mental health).

The Coalition made three recommendations to the Ontario Government:

1. Immediately provide growth funding for health and social

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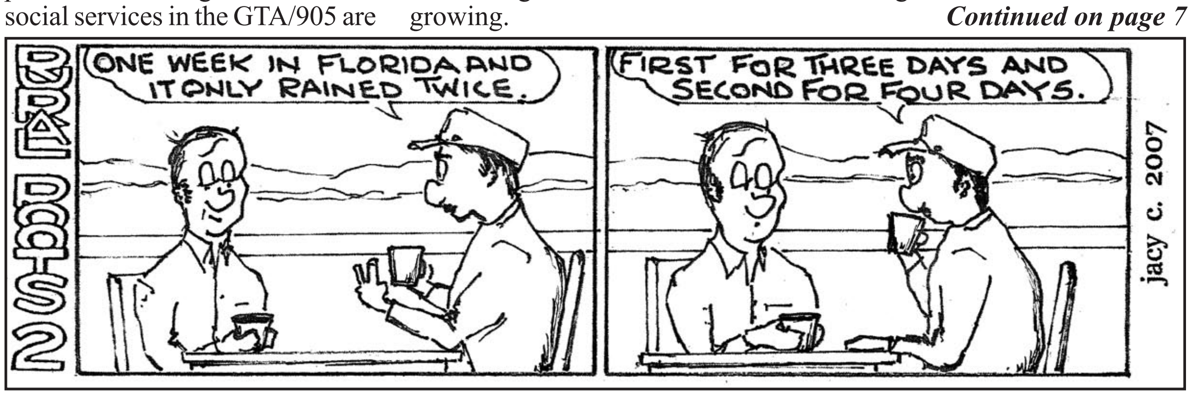

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