

Some say posturing interferes

By BRAD REAUME
The Champion

Amid charges of politicking and failure to lead, Town council has decided to begin the difficult 1998 budget process without consulting the public.

Council did agree to publish budget meeting dates and topics and allow an open house on budget concerns once clear transfer figures are available from the provincial government. Milton chief administrative officer David Hipgrave said those numbers might not become clear until July.

According to Jim McQueen, Milton's treasurer, several figures provided by the province are being called into question. There are concerns as to validity and the potential application to Milton or Halton Region.

Recently Councillor Wally Hunter took a swipe at senior Milton staff who proposed the public consultation. He suggested the forum be an open house, where questions could be informally asked, rather than formal speeches to a meeting of municipal council.

"I agree the public needs to know, but I fail to see what will be accomplished except a lot of politicking, which has gone on far too long."

Mr. Hunter said he was amazed that local governments have raised taxes to cope with increased demands on their funds. A business, he said, cannot do that.

"Simply raising prices doesn't wash," he stressed. "(Public meetings are) a political game. We have to deal with the issues at hand. We have to decide what's going to change."

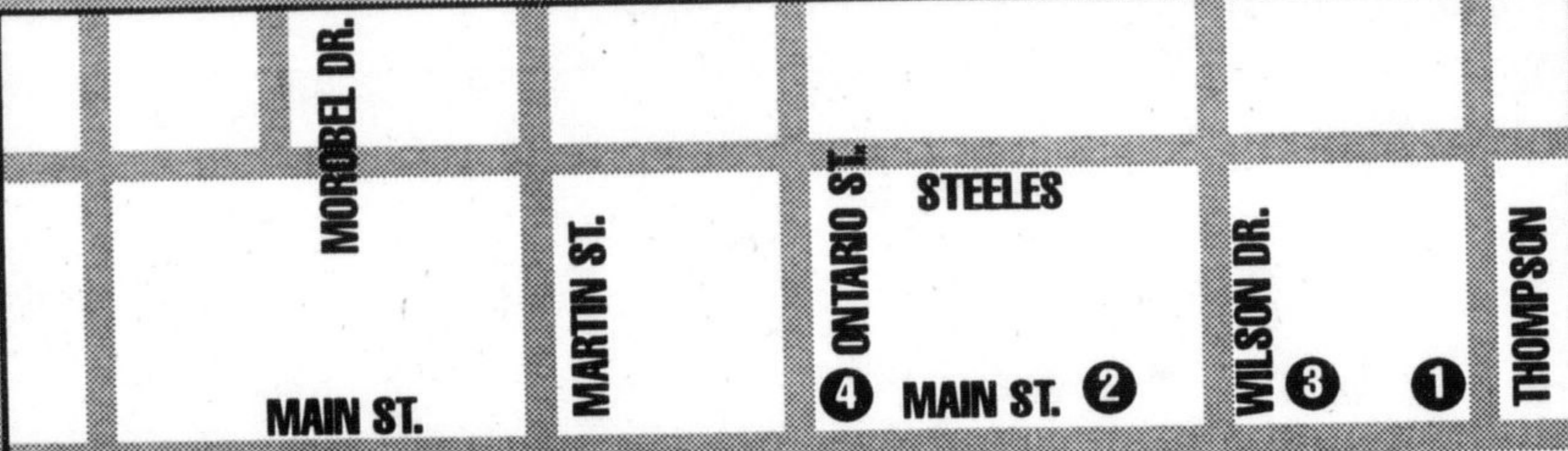
Councillor John Challinor reminded Mr. Hunter that prices for gasoline do rise at the pumps and that even Mr. Hunter's employer, The Royal Bank of Canada, has been known to increase service charges.

Mr. Challinor said the Town could not continue to operate indefinitely without additional spending. He said assessment growth alone is not enough to handle the fiscal pressure.

Noting a public meeting can sometimes be a "political dance" Mayor Gord Krantz said he wanted to have the public involved

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