

# Savoline says Halton isn't broken, so why fix it?

By PAUL MITCHISON  
Special to The Champion

Joyce Savoline doesn't seem to think much of dismantling Halton Region.

And as the sole politician who represents only Halton Region, she doesn't think it's necessary a choice be made between Halton's continuing survival versus Burlington's.

"Where there have been forced amalgamations in other parts of the province, none of the scenarios have remotely resembled ours in Halton," she said. "We're probably the only people who don't realize how well (Halton) works."

Ms Savoline disagreed with the criticism of Halton Region contained in Burlington's new White Paper on Governance, but chose her words carefully.

"I guess that it's written in a spirit of strengthening local government, and I can understand that," she said. "I look forward to the opportunity to participate in any kind of discussion about that."

Prepared by Burlington city manager Tim Dobbie, the paper states regional government in Halton lacks the accountability of Burlington city council. It calls for strengthening Burlington and reducing Halton into a non-taxing services board.

## Savoline tries to remain open-minded

Ms Savoline said she wants to remain part of the discussion as Burlington prepares to sell the proposal to other Halton municipalities, including Milton.

"Naturally I'm interested in any proposal providing benefits that are spread equally across the region. So I'm not going to try and pre-judge anything."

But she clearly believes Halton Region has been a success.

"I think we've done a good job. I think in this region, more than any other, we've eliminated duplication," she said.

"I think we've got a great record to build on, we have lots to celebrate. I think if we can be criticized, it's for not getting that message out. So we'll try and do that job better."

The newly-formed Greater Toronto Services Board (GTSB) is still in its infancy and Ms Savoline doesn't agree with Burlington Mayor Rob MacIsaac, who feels the GTSB will likely evolve into a level of local government.

Mr. MacIsaac has said he doesn't want to see the City of Burlington eliminated if the province seeks to streamline things. Eliminating Halton seems to make the most sense, he said, though he's still open to ideas.



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Ms Savoline said it's strategically important that top Halton political officials present a united front as they participate on the GTSB. "I think we need to present a unified position, one that shows we are not fragmented at home as we take our place at the Greater Toronto Services Board table."

A part of the White Paper states that having separate councils (Burlington city and Halton) divides the attention of council members.

As well, very little of Halton Region's budget is controllable by local council, according to the report, which states that regional government isn't as accountable.

"Council members tend to have a greater commitment to their local council and its agenda, as there is a greater ownership of issues at the local level," the report said.

Ms Savoline doesn't think that's necessarily an issue.

"If they're not paying as much attention here, they have to answer to their constituents," she said. "It's not because it isn't warranted."

## White Paper calls for Region replacement

The White Paper calls for a cooperative services board to replace Halton Region, with many of its powers transferred to local municipalities. Social services like distribution of welfare cheques, road maintenance and garbage collection would then move under the umbrella of Burlington City Hall.

Burlington and the surviving municipalities would be free to buy other services, like water, sewers, land-fill space and, possibly, policing, through a services board. It could possibly be constituted by a six-member board of politicians from Milton, Burlington, Oakville and Halton Hills.

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