

Amalgamating Halton would be a big mistake, says Regional Chair Savoline

By **KAREN ROBBINS**
Special to *The Champion*

If it's not broke, why fix it? That's the reasoning Halton Regional Chair Joyce Savoline uses in rejecting overtures to amalgamate the four municipalities that comprise Halton — Oakville, Burlington, Milton and Halton Hills — into one large municipal body.

Speaking to about 60 people at the Canadian Club of Oakville May 17, Ms Savoline said there's no point in disrupting a system that works.

However, she would consider amalgamation if the provincial government appears bent on splitting up Halton and distributing portions to other regions.

Halton is currently conducting a governmental review and plans to have public meetings on the issue, but Ms Savoline said she doesn't want restructuring to interfere with important issues such as traffic.

Her speech entitled 'Municipal Restructuring — Where Do We Go From Here?' dealt with the myths and misunderstandings of regional governance.

One of the myths she tried to dispel was about the Greater Toronto Services Board (GTSB). She said, despite what some politicians claim, the GTSB, which was set up 18 months ago with the amalgamation of Toronto, doesn't need greater powers to function well and should not replace a level of government.

"If you give them more power over services, policies and infrastructure, you may not have the services and high quality of life that we enjoy now," she said.

There are 41 members on the board with 110 votes, which are divided by representation by population. Toronto has 55 votes and Halton region has eight votes.

Ms Savoline said despite the difference in numbers, Halton is quite effective at the meetings.

"I can promise you, we battle with our brains. We work with them, influencing them to help them under-



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JOYCE SAVOLINE

stand our policies, our way of life here," she said.

Even though the board has only been around for 18 months, Ms Savoline said it has been active, particularly in terms of transportation matters.

She said the GTSB was set up as a coordinating body — not to become a level of government.

"Elimination of one level will not lower costs. Instead you will lose services. It will not make governments more accessible or responsible," she said.

Ms Savoline also said any restructuring of government should be done slowly.

She cited as an example the region's decision not to accept a section of east Flamborough into the region. She said they were not given enough time to look into the implications of such a decision, so they turned it down. "We would have had more information if we were buying a house. There is a need to do it right."

Rather than join the new super city of Hamilton, Flamborough residents were given the option of dividing itself up between neighbouring regions. That plan hit a stumbling block when Halton refused to accept its portion of east Flamborough.

The Province is now mulling over the fate of Flamborough.

When asked about when the final decision about

Flamborough is expected, Ms Savoline said she can't even guess. "I will wait for the premier to make up his mind," she said.

For the first time this fall, residents will elect the regional chair directly. Ms Savoline said she intends to run for the post.

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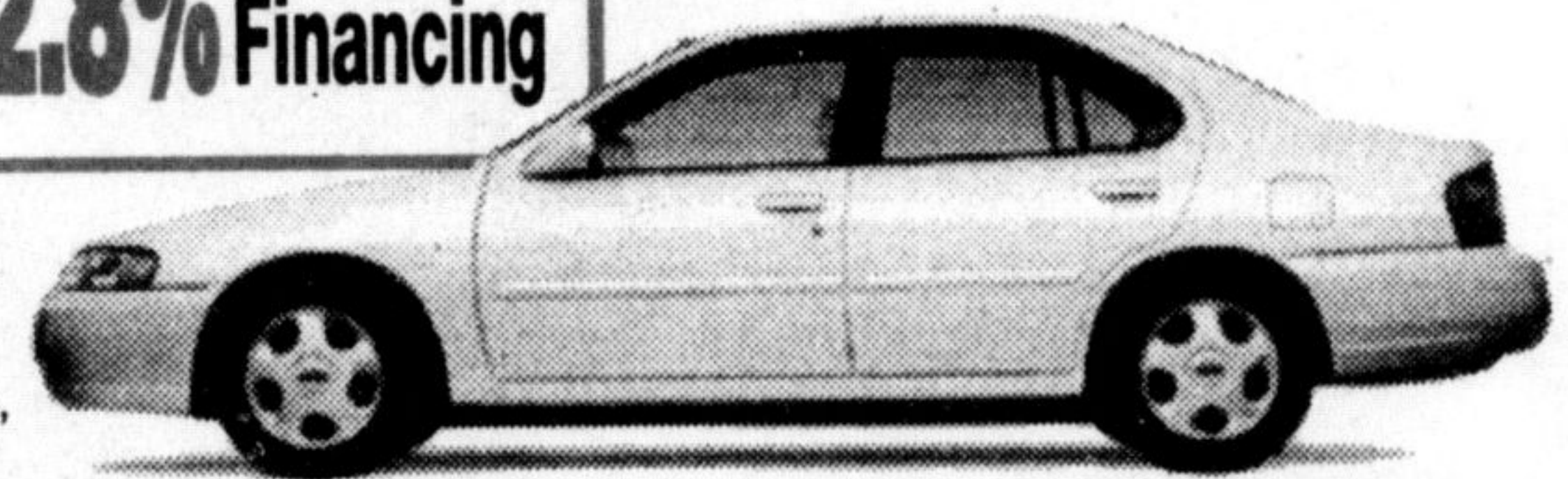


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