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Chamber against proposed changes to GTSB

By FANNIE SUNSHINE
The Champion

Voters and taxpayers in the GTA's 905 regions should be worried about the impact of proposed changes to the Greater Toronto Services Board (GTSB), say Milton Chamber of Commerce officials.

"We've been watching the power struggles and the political bi-plays carefully," said Dawn Case, Chamber vice-president.

"We've had discussions with our municipal, regional and provincial representa-

tives and we've consulted with major residential developers and local businesses. We see the potential for far-reaching, negative financial and economic impacts throughout the GTA if the Province grants the GTSB broader governing powers for transportation, growth management and water and waste management."

The GTSB was originally established two years ago by the Province as a co-ordinating body to deal with transportation issues and to manage the operation of GO Transit.

The GTSB is comprised of 41 councillors, mayors and regional chairs with 110 weighted votes. Toronto has 50 per cent of

the votes.

The GTSB recently applied for extended authority including co-ordination of all transportation planning in the GTA with allocated federal and provincial funding for capital investment in transportation, plus mandated responsibility of growth management and development of a growth management strategy for the GTA and the ability to engage in 'non-transportation service delivery' if desired.

The Chamber is in favour of a centralized co-ordinating body for much-needed transportation management but opposes wider-ranging powers that would create, in effect, a fifth layer of government but one

that isn't accountable to the electorate.

"There has been no public consultation and more importantly, no financial analysis," said Carol McDonald, chair of the Chamber's government relations committee. "Furthermore, we will always be opposed to a controlling agency where Toronto has 50 per cent of the votes. We're talking GTA amalgamation on a grand scale when Toronto's amalgamation problems have yet to be sorted out. We don't want the 905 region to bear the burden for Toronto's debt load."

Halton Regional Chair Joyce Savoline said a GTA-wide transportation service would be a great opportunity for the region.

"It would be a huge opportunity for the transportation agency to see capital funding for the partners."

But according to residential developers, any new governing body that slows down or re-thinks approved regional growth plans could have a devastating economic impact on housing starts throughout the GTA, she added.

Endorsement of the new powers for the GTSB was defeated at the recent Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) convention after the Milton Chamber and others spoke against it. The OCC passed a resolution stating, "the OCC immediately write the Province requesting they proceed without delay and provide the GTSB with whatever it takes to make the GTSB work or disband it post haste, no later than June 30."

"We strongly questioned the ambiguity of the phrase 'whatever it takes' when we opposed this motion," Ms Case said. "We're looking at the provincial government to think this through logically; to move forward with a funded GTA-wide transportation-only agency. Transportation alone is a huge issue. We believe this is the only reasonable and responsible course of action."

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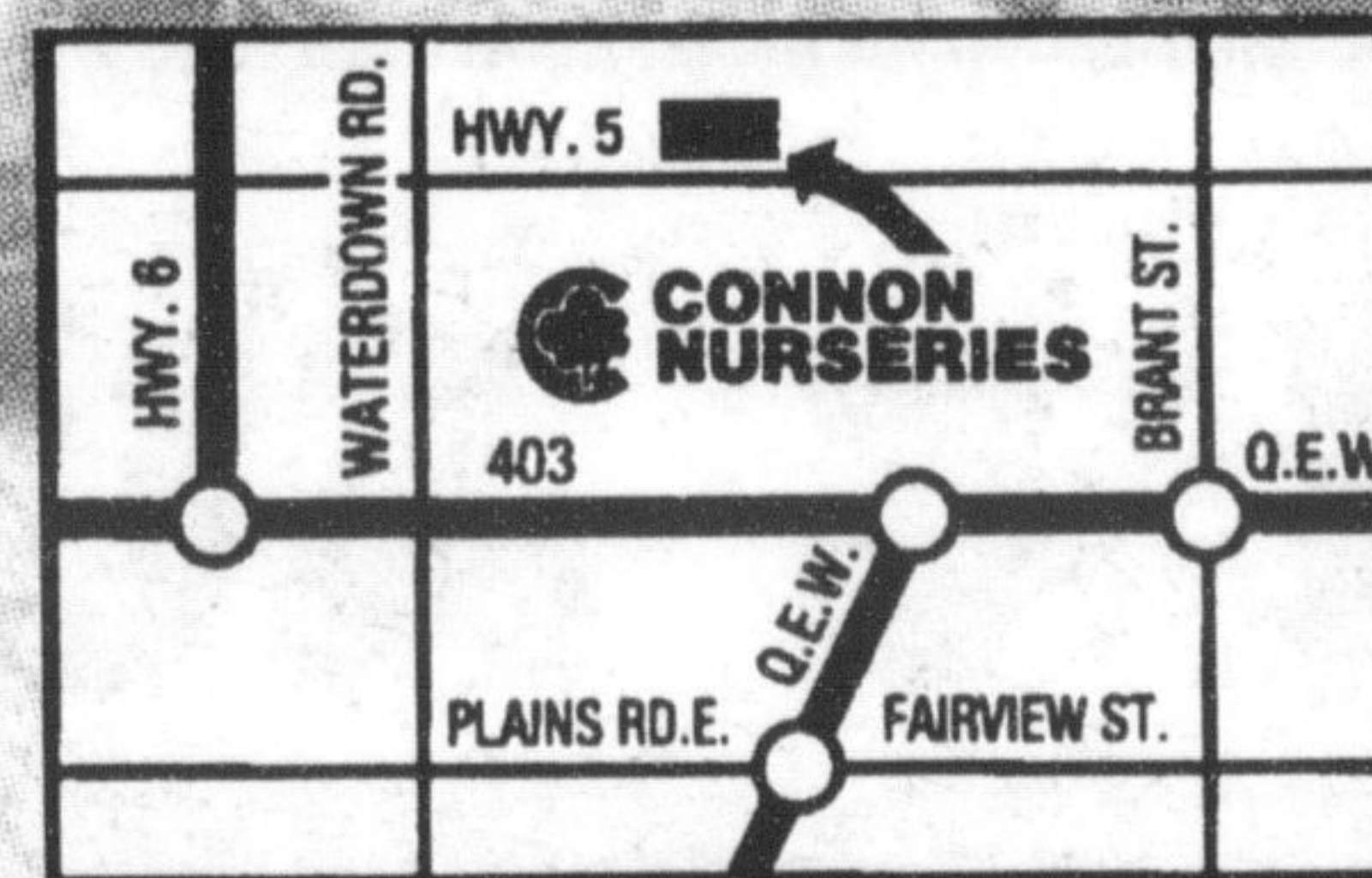
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