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Shortage of contractors in wastewater industry driving up costs of plant upgrades

By **JASON MISNER**
The Champion

A shortage of contractors in the water and wastewater industry is driving up costs for plant upgrades and new construction in Halton, and across Ontario.

Halton Region budgets for projects to reflect and forecast as best as possible actual pricing. But Patrick Murphy, Halton's planning and public works commissioner, said a lack of contractors with the technical expertise to complete these complicated water/sewage projects combined with ample construction opportunities are forcing up prices.

In other words, they can essentially pick and choose their projects and largely dictate the costs.

And Mr. Murphy said it's possible this trend could continue for the next four or five years.

"There's a capacity problem in the industry right now," he said. "Over time, the industry will respond" with more contractors coming on line to compete for tender bids.

This trend isn't indicative of the water and sewer pipe industry, he noted.

"A big driver is the fact there's a lot of work in the GTA."

There are projects on-going in York, Peel, Toronto, Durham and

Hamilton and those municipalities are all battling for contractors, Mr. Murphy said. Some projects are to address provincial requirements borne from Walkerton recommendations while others are to meet growth demands or upgrades to older facilities.

Costs at Milton plant up by \$1 million

Halton has already been dinged by the rising construction costs.

In a planning and public works committee report approved at regional council Wednesday, it stated the costs for upgrades to Milton's wastewater treatment plant have ballooned by almost \$1 million.

It was budgeted in 2003 at \$1.4 million but eventually came in at a tendered price of almost \$2.4 million.

The extra costs will be covered by reserves.

The Region will make upgrades internally to improve how the Milton plant handles and contains sludge, which can produce a smell. The automated system will remove sludge more regularly.

Sludge is currently moved from open tanks into closed tanks once per day for treatment during a regular eight-hour shift. The upgrades will allow the sludge to be removed a few times over a 24-

hour period. The sludge, as a result, will spend less time in the open tanks, cutting down on potential odours.

The upgrades are needed to accommodate extra servicing from industrial and residential users without having to physically expand the plant, usually an expensive venture.

Further, the report noted that three other construction projects — including planned upgrades to Burlington's Skyway water plant — all saw costs spike by about 50 per cent due to this supply shortage of contractors.

Tim Dennis, Halton's director of engineering, said these cost impacts will be addressed in future budget years.

"We're going to take steps to accommodate that," he said.

Burlington Regional Councillor Mike Wallace, also chair of the planning and public works committee, said budget forecasting needs to be improved.

He's worried about how much more prices will rise over time versus what was budgeted.

"If this trend continues, we're going to have to decide if projects get delayed or not."

Jason Misner can be reached at jmisner@miltoncanadianchampion.com.



THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF MILTON

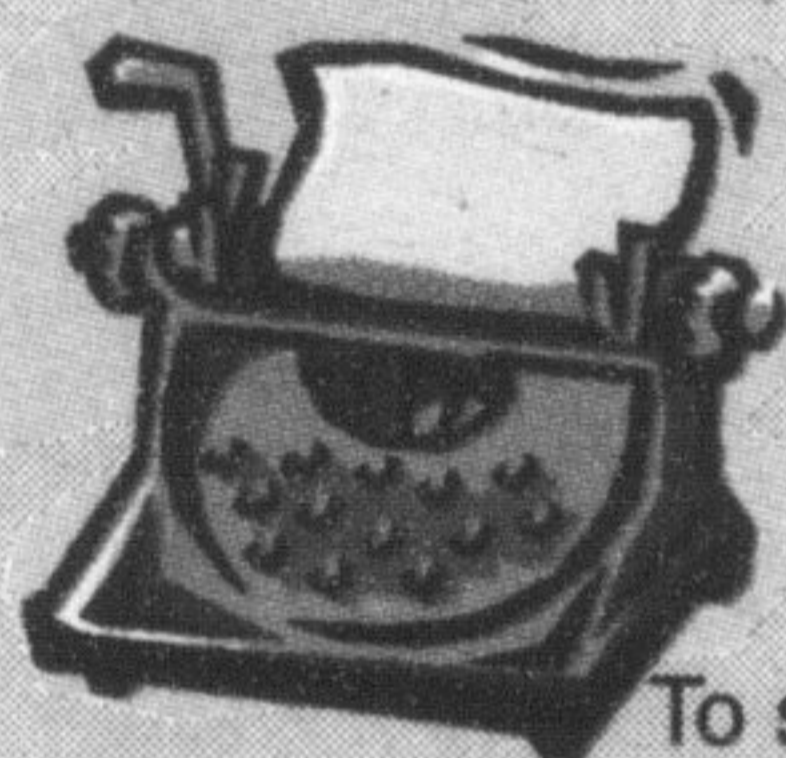
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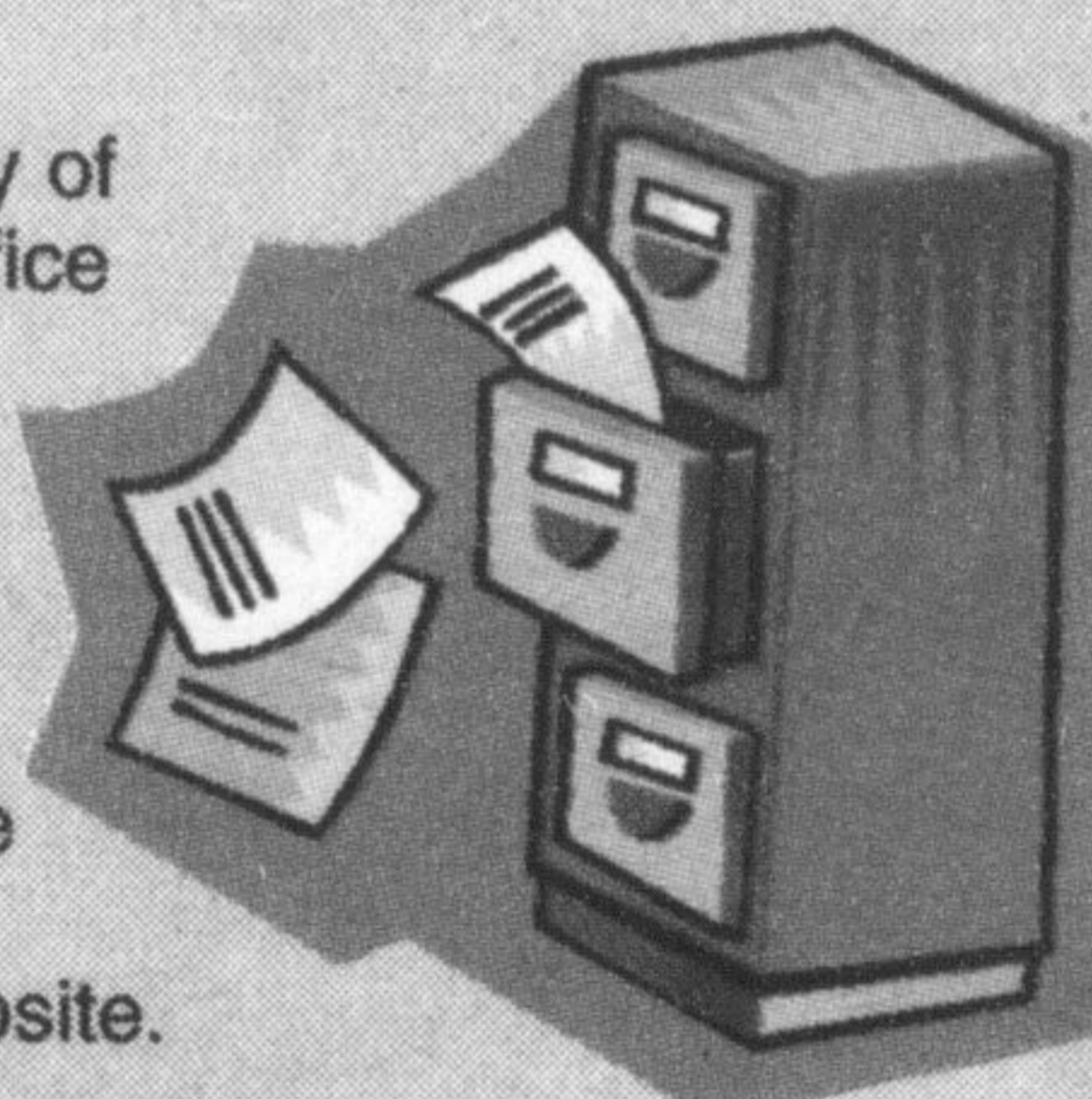
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Mattamy Wellwood and Mattamy Brownridge Bike Path NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING

On September 22, 2003, Engineering Report "Mattamy Wellwood/Brownridge Bike Path 005-03" was presented to the Town of Milton's Mayor and Members of Council for information purposes. At issue with some of the residents within these developments is the location of the proposed bike path within the boulevard of the municipal right of way. A requirement that was noted within the above-mentioned report was for a future meeting with the affected homeowners, public, developer and town staff to discuss the situation, and receive comments for consideration.

Therefore, in response to concerns raised by Milton residents regarding the location of the proposed bike path within the Mattamy Wellwood and Brownridge subdivisions (Clarke and Beaty neighbourhoods, respectively) within the Bristol Survey Secondary Plan, a public meeting has been organized for:

Tuesday, February 24, 2004

at Milton Memorial Arena

at 77 Thompson Road South

(in the Lions Hall on the second floor)

between the hours of 6:30 pm and 9:30 pm

The purpose of the meeting is to solicitate public comments on the proposed bike path location and potential alternatives that may be considered.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact:

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Town of Milton

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OR

Ken McAlpine OALA

Manager, Parks and Open Space

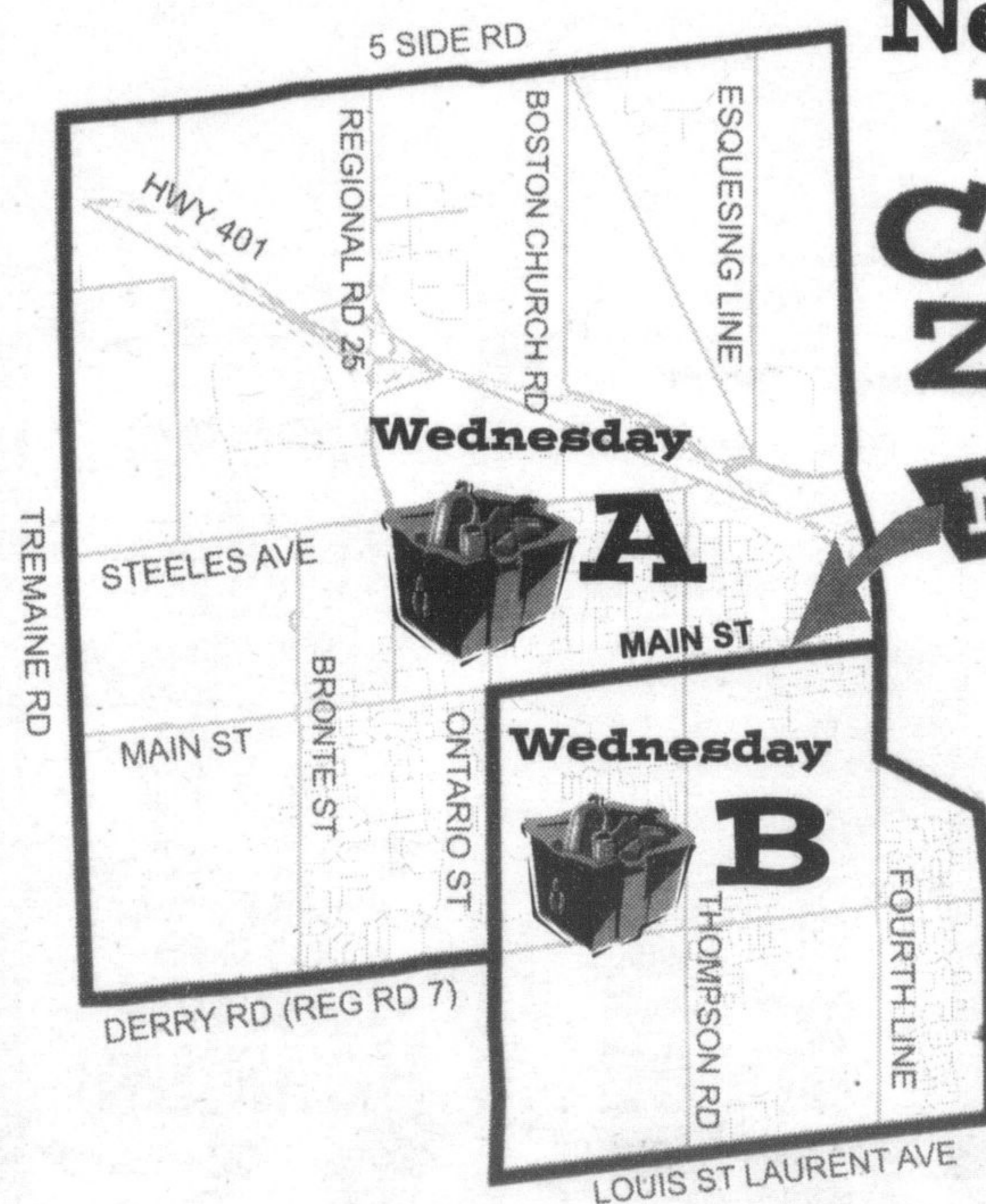
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New Milton Waste Collection Zones

NEW

Please note the Waste Collection Zone for Milton has changed. The boundary between zone A and B is now at Main Street.

Blue boxes in the A zone will be collected on **Wednesday February 18th**. Please refer to your 2004 Curb Appeal Waste Collection calendar for more information or contact Access Halton at 905-825-6000 or Toll Free at 1-866-4HALTON (1-866-442-5866).



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or visit us at: www.region.halton.on.ca