

Building permit numbers could surpass last year's

By **JASON MISNER**
The Champion

Here's a shock — Milton's residential base is growing and fast. In fact, Town officials say there's a chance the record of 2,003 residential building permits issued last year could be broken this year.

An information report, which at press time yesterday was scheduled to be ratified at last night's council meeting, detailed construction activity in Milton — residential and industrial-commercial-institutional (ICI) — for the first quarter of this year, between January 1 and March 31.

The Town issued a sizzling 759 building permits. During the same time last year, 551 were issued as the Town finished the year by issuing a record 2,003 permits. "We're off like a rocket," said Mel Iovio, Milton's director of planning and development. "January-February-March is usually a slower period." He said there's a good possibility the Town could surpass 2,003 permits issued. "It's a good start and exceeding last year's pace."

But he cautioned there are many months left and anything can happen to determine how the housing market reacts, though there's every indication to believe the market will remain healthy and vibrant.

"I think the market is still strong in Milton for housing," Mr. Iovio

said. "I think it's going to maintain a good pace and meet our target for 1,871 building permits."

Residential growth of larger proportions became an almost instant reality once Halton Region installed the 'Big Pipe', an intricate water and wastewater piping system that draws water from Lake Ontario to service new development areas in Milton.

Before the pipe came on-line in late 2000, residential growth in Milton was stagnant to say the least. In 1999, there were 92 housing starts in Milton and 77 starts in 2000, before ballooning to 1,192 starts in 2001, 1,765 starts in 2002 and 1,973 starts last year.

Ted Tsiakopoulos, acting regional economist for Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, said the Milton housing market will probably cool this year but only slightly. Housing starts will likely drop by about 10 per cent in 2004 across the GTA, including Milton.

"Home starts will likely not keep pace with levels we saw last year, but we still expect some pretty strong activity," Mr. Tsiakopoulos said, noting interest rates still remain low and the job market seems to be performing well.

"That high level of growth is very difficult to match," he said.

There were 5,485 total housing starts in Halton last year. The bulk

of residential development in the region is expected to occur in Milton and north Oakville over the next few years.

Milton Mayor Gord Krantz — who has seen the town grow since becoming mayor some 30 years ago — said the expansion in Milton is mirroring what officials projected would happen.

"We're pretty well on target where we always expected it to be — maybe a little over," he said.

He said the Town has learned a few things from the residential boom, like ensuring proper garage sizes through revised bylaws.

He's heard residents' concerns about Milton's rapid development, but stressed the Province set out policies years ago detailing growth in the GTA, including the kind expected to occur in Halton.

"A 'no growth' scenario is not an option — and I underline not an option," he said. "The economy dictates how fast or how slow it goes ahead. There's no such thing as stopping growth and especially in this part of the province."

Based on projections made last year, Milton's population is expected to grow to 106,000 by 2021, spread out between more than 34,000 residential units.

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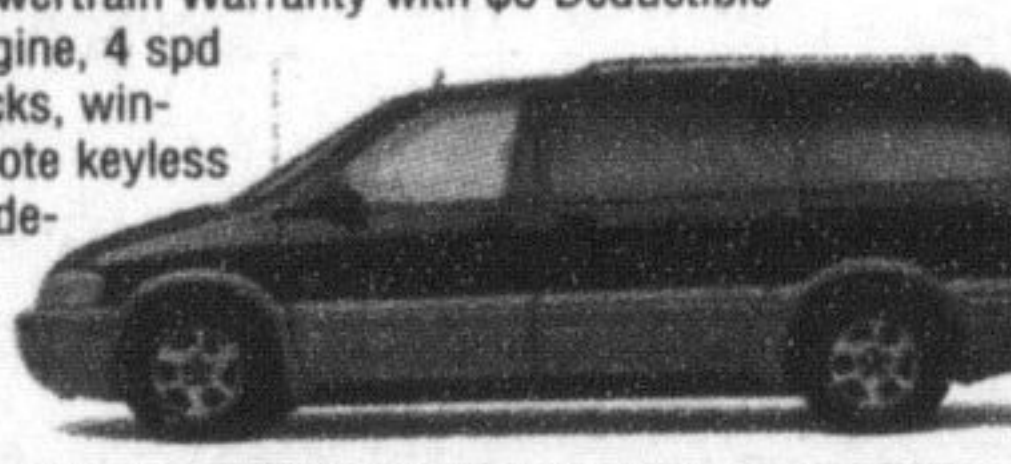


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