

OPINION

MPAC getting much-needed assessment

Local property owners owe Ontario Ombudsman André Marin a debt of gratitude.

Marin, who spent five months investigating the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. (MPAC), couldn't have been more scathing recently in his report on the government body that sets property value assessments.

Marin said the MPAC has a "superiority complex" that "engages in cloak and dagger behaviour" and "cutthroat maneuvering around property owners."

To put it bluntly, he said the MPAC has been sticking it to Ontario property owners for years.

That's not news to property owners and certainly not surprising to anyone who's fought with the MPAC over an assessment.

"Never in the 30-year history of this office have so many complaints been received in so short a period about a single public agency," said Marin, adding he had heard from more than 3,700 disgruntled property owners.

Key among Marin's 22 recommendations is that the MPAC should rely less on its mass appraisal computer system when setting property values and dealing with appeals. Having an assessor visit to focus on characteristics specific to a property would be far more fair.

As well, when a property owner appeals an assessment the MPAC should prove why the assessed value is correct instead of the current unjust system where the owner must prove why it's wrong.

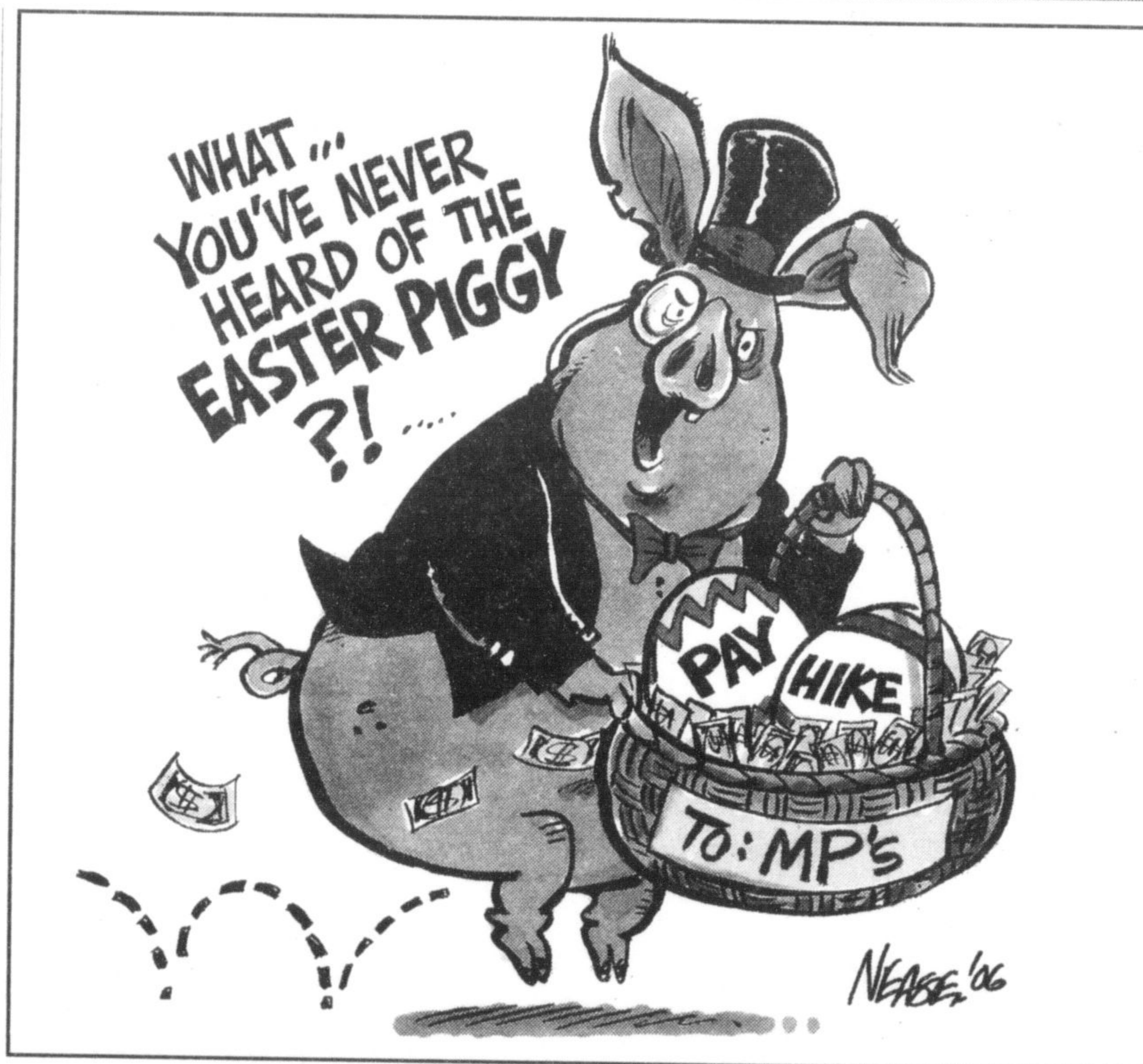
An attitude adjustment at the MPAC is also required, according to Marin, who likened challenging an MPAC assessment to a "David vs. Goliath mismatch."

"The MPAC treats the taxpayer and property owner as the adversary," said Marin.

The Ministry of Finance and the MPAC have agreed to implement 18 of the recommendations immediately and study the remaining four.

In the wake of Marin's report, Finance Minister Dwight Duncan announced the March 31 deadline for appealing assessments has been extended 90 days, and that he takes Marin's recommendations "very seriously."

Too bad no one took a "serious" look at how the MPAC operated before Marin.



ReadersWrite

Send us your letters to miltone@haltonsearch.com or drop them off at 875 Main St. E.

More help needed for our farmers

(The following letter was addressed to Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh, and a copy was filed with The Champion.)

DEAR EDITOR:

My family and I have only lived here less than a year, having moved from Sudbury last June. Driving around Halton, we appreciate not only the beauty of the farms, but also the hard work that farmers put into maintaining a sustainable living.

The food I feed my family is of primary importance to me. I do my best to support local farmers and purchase quality food.

Please ensure that the province's farmers get the aid they need, so that

they can compete with farmers south of the border who receive millions, if not billions, of dollars in government aid.

Our government so willingly uses our tax dollars to support people who don't work, and here we have a group of people who work so hard each and every day to provide such a valuable service and they have to literally beg for financial aid.

I want the produce and the meat I buy to be locally grown as much as possible, and I'm sure most people feel the same way. I hope you can do everything possible to keep our farms in business.

**NANCY DENI
SOMERVILLE TERRACE**

Editor'sdesk

Numbers may not show it, but I think crime is on the rise

It sure seems like crime is increasing here, especially incidents of a violent nature.

Lately our news pages have been filled with occurrences like, most disturbingly, a 13-year-old Milton girl being lured on the Internet by man making sexually suggestive comments.

And late last month, a Campbellville man was robbed at gunpoint in his driveway, while a teenaged babysitter looking after an infant was confronted by home intruders brandishing a machete.

Then there was a loaded handgun found in a car stopped on the highway, a man hit with a baseball bat in a park and a gas station robbery — all in the last few weeks.

And the people committing the crimes seem to be more bold, as we saw April 3 when a suspect was caught in the act trying to break into a vehicle during rush hour at

Hwy. 407 and Britannia Road.

While some of the incidents were domestic, many were random acts where any member of the public could have been in jeopardy.

It's not a good feeling. Are we losing the relatively safe community Milton has enjoyed for so long?

But the peculiar thing is, while crime sure seems like it's increasing, the statistics don't show a rise in crime overall. In fact, the numbers show crime is actually on the downturn in Milton.

This strange phenomena was addressed by Halton Regional Police Superintendent Joe Taylor during a recent meeting of the citizen-based Milton Community Policing Committee, of which I'm a member.



Karen Smith

He explained that since it simply doesn't make sense that crime is down with the population increasing so rapidly, something else must be at work here. And that something else, he believes, is that many crimes are just not being reported.

The reasons for that, he says, vary, but one is that sometimes people don't think police can do anything about the crime committed against them, so they don't bother to report it.

Or they think the crime was too petty to bother police with.

But Sgt. Glen Randall made a point we all must remember. It's important to report all crime because many times police can indeed do something about it like possibly lay more charges on a repeat offender.

The Canadian Champion
Milton's Community Newspaper Since 1860

875 Main St. E.,
Milton, Ont. L9T 3Z3

905-878-2341

Editorial Fax: 905-878-4943
Advertising Fax: 905-876-2364
Classified: 905-875-3300
Circulation: 905-878-5947

Publisher: Ian Oliver

Associate Publisher
Neil Oliver

Advertising Director
Wendy McNab

Managing Editor
Karen Smith

Production Manager
Tim Coles

Circulation Manager
Charlene Hall

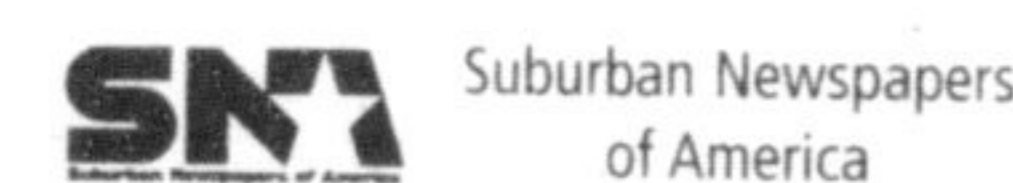
Office Manager
Teri Casas

The Canadian Champion, published every Tuesday and Friday at 875 Main St. E., Milton, Ont., L9T 3Z3 (Box 248), is one of the Metroland Printing, Publishing & Distributing Ltd. community newspapers.

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