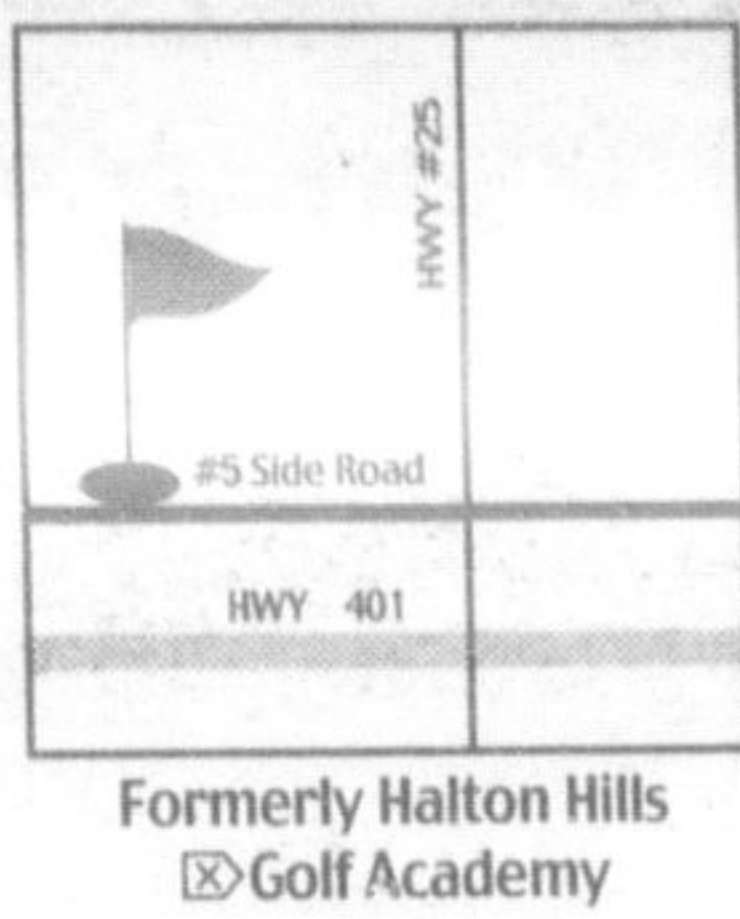


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Region urged to cut taxes instead

• from GTA on page A1

Toronto pay for its social service costs. Pooling has cost Halton about \$41 million each year, or around \$180 for the average taxpayer.

Before committee made its decision — which will go before regional council next week for consideration — it first heard from Milton resident Gary Ellis, who urged the Region to put the money back in citizens' pockets.

"The pooling funds do not belong to the Region. They never did. The Region was merely the tax collector," he said.

"The only responsible thing to do is return any freed-up pooling funds to Halton taxpayers."

He also suggested that if the Region needs more money, it could cut some current programs or try for an increase at budget time.

A lengthy debate among the regional councillors in attendance ensued, with Burlington Councillor Jack Dennison kicking things off.

He argued if the Region doesn't give the money back through a tax reduction then local residents are going to be taxed twice for pooling, referring to the fact the \$6 million Halton doesn't have to pay for pooling this year is going to come from provincial tax dollars.

"Taxpayers are going to be double-taxed," he said.

Acting Commissioner of Corporate Services Mark Scinocca pointed out to Dennison that Halton has serious needs in its transportation program that have to be dealt with.

The other council members present largely spoke out in favour of setting

the money aside for infrastructure projects.

Oakville Mayor Rob Burton said the funds would build assets that belong to taxpayers and are needed by taxpayers.

"I can't accept the assertion that if we take money and put it to the needs of the taxpayer, that's somehow misappropriating it," he said.

Burlington Councillor John Taylor also said he supports the notion 100 per cent.

"I heard very clearly from my residents that they want the transportation issue addressed," he said.

'Fairness for Halton' campaign could be hurt by tax cut: Carr

Regional Chairman Gary Carr contended if the money goes back to residents through a tax cut, the Fairness for Halton campaign "goes out the window."

The campaign was jointly launched by the local municipalities to ask the Province for changes — such as to the GTA pooling requirements — that would in turn give Halton the necessary financial capacity to address infrastructure deficits.

"A tax cut would kill Fairness for Halton," Carr said, noting that taxpayers will benefit if the money goes into roads.

Burlington Mayor Cam Jackson expressed doubts about the seemingly good gesture from the Province when it comes to GTA pooling.

He said he thinks the Ontario government could give the Region additional financial responsibilities that would use the freed-up tax dollars.

"It's not uncommon for a govern-

ment to replace one inequity with another," he noted.

Oakville Councillor Keith Bird then suggested that if the money is going back into infrastructure, it should be filtered down to the local municipalities to fix up the roads they look after.

He put forward an amendment to the motion, and while the wording was still being finalized at press time, it basically calls for the surplus funds to also be offered to local municipalities for their infrastructure needs.

Milton Mayor Gord Krantz voiced his support for the amendment, noting he doesn't have a problem with the funds going back to the local level.

And Halton Hills Councillor Jane Fogal said the bottom line for her is that the money goes into roads somewhere. She noted that in Halton Hills, the greatest need is for regional road improvements, not local.

Now it's up to regional council

The motion is on regional council's agenda for Wednesday.

Halton has long been pushing for an end to pooling, with its most recent effort in protest to the system being a motion passed by regional council to freeze its 2007 pooling payment at the 2006 level.

Under the Province's plan, pooling will be reduced by one-sixth of its 2004 levels each year until the program is completely eliminated by 2013.

Melanie Hennessey can be reached at mhennessey@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

Feedback positive: Schau

• from SOME on page A3

are causing issue for all emergency services.

He also said he appreciates the changes would be inconvenient for people. "But, in the name of public safety, inconvenience isn't one of the factors considered. We believe it's the right thing to do."

The fire chief pointed out the Milton Fire Department's dispatchers are all local people, while police are dispatched from Oakville and ambulances from Mississauga.

Ward 4 Councillor Wendy Schau noted she has received positive comments on the name changes from two people who would be affected.

To have your say, visit www.milton.ca or call (905) 878-7252, ext. 2546. The Town is accepting input until April 27.

Melanie Hennessey can be reached at mhennessey@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

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