

No new funding to be gained immediately

• from CAR-SMITHERMAN on page A5 on to the federal government.

No new funding for Halton was immediately announced by the Province after the meeting between Smitherman and Carr, but the Province will send a team of ministry staff to Halton to advise the minister on how to "expedite economic development in Halton," Smitherman said.

Throughout 2008, Carr has pushed for the Province to address various issues, including hospital, infrastructure and operations funding. Currently, some of Halton's hospitals are overcapacity and Regional politicians of all stripes were not happy by a 13-month delay announced by the Province on the construction of a new hospital in Oakville, pushing opening of the new facility on Dundas Street to 2014. Additionally, the Province has made no major announcements on the expansion of the Milton District Hospital.

Smitherman said he has been working on expediting the construction of the Oakville hospital with local Liberal MP Kevin Flynn. Infrastructure Ontario, which oversees the building of new hospitals for the Ministry of Health, originally pushed back the groundbreaking of the Oakville hospital because of shortages of qualified mechanical, electrical and instrumentation staff, said Flynn. However, he said he has asked the Province to at least begin servicing and grading the hospital site and start pouring the foundations in an effort to be ready for the actual building construction when qualified construction staff become available.

Halton Conservative MPP Ted Chudleigh argued however that the Province should have never delayed the Oakville hospital due to expected employment shortages without sending out a request-for-qualification proposal to construction firms in the Province. Though Flynn said there are only three or four firms that can feasibly undertake a project as large and complex as construction of a hospital, Chudleigh said that number's closer to eight.

Carr had wanted the Province to amend the law governing development charges to allow the Region to

start forcing developers to pay for new or expanded hospital operations. However, the Province said this past fall it doesn't plan to start changing the Development Charges Act in the current economic climate.

Halton Region is, however, currently negotiating with developers for them to pay for the cost of roads, water and wastewater projects needed to service residential development in north Oakville and Milton between 2009 and 2021.

Gary Gregoris, vice-president of Mattamy Homes, said his company "supports the notion that growth must pay for itself." But he said the \$38,500 per-unit cost the Region is asking for, an additional \$12,000 per-unit cost than now, isn't simply being used to service future residential communities but also to cover the Region's "debt financing

charges." He added, with home prices dropping, developers that need to pass on Regional charges to homebuyers might be pricing themselves out of the market.

Carr was less than sympathetic. "Don't complain to me about the \$38,500," Carr said was his message to developers. "Because it would have been a lot more if they had to pay for the hospitals."

If developers don't pay the extra infrastructure costs, Carr added, then it would be forced onto existing Halton taxpayers, something Council is not prepared to do.

The third sticking point between the Region and the Province has been the increased operations costs the Region has taken on since it started its massive growth.

Currently, the Region's health

department isn't receiving its full share of Provincial subsidies, said Carr. The Province caps subsidy increases for public health programs at five per cent a year, but demands due to population growth are more than that, Carr explained, meaning the Province is dropping below its funding targets.

A further example is how paramedics paid by the region have been forced to wait at local hospitals because of delays in offloading patients at packed emergency departments, Carr added.

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