

COMMENT

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Compromise is key

The problem with market value assessment in Halton Region is that even if MVA is fairer than the system it replaces in the long term, in the short term it will cause nothing but grief no matter what happens tonight.

Tonight, in a specially convened meeting, regional councillors are scheduled to debate MVA one final time and pass a binding resolution that either supports it as is, or at least defers it.

If MVA as originally presented becomes the status quo, politicians, lobbying groups and many citizens in Oakville and Halton Hills will be livid.

If MVA is deferred, Burlington elected officials and ratepayers will taste the bitter frustration of defeat snatched from the jaws of victory.

Already there are rumblings among Burlington regional and local councillors being reported to the effect that Burlington should secede from Halton if MVA is disdained. This may involve a certain degree of sabre rattling on the part of the Burlington representatives. Then again, it may not.

Their feelings are no more pronounced than those of Oakville Chamber of Commerce president John Hogg, who has angrily, vocally, energetically led the grassroots charge against MVA in his community.

In a nutshell, MVA would mean a \$4 million tax shift to Oakville from Burlington. Both Milton and Halton Hills enjoy lesser tax reductions, again picked up by Oakville. But while Milton supports MVA, Halton Hills doesn't, because the residential sector there is to be hit harder while other types of property will be taxed less.

So Oakville and Halton Hills (12 regional councillors) are squaring off against Burlington and Milton (12 regional councillors). Emotions are taut, the stakes are high, no one is willing to back down and the factions are so equal that the last time they clashed regional chairman Peter Pomeroy had to break the tie to vote in MVA (at least temporarily).

What is the benefit of this brinkmanship? Why evolve this type of winner-take-all scenario? And could the timing be worse, in the trough of a recession that has pummeled Halton's businesses and taxpayers?

The blow was to be softened for whoever loses this fight by phasing in the tax increases, or, particularly in Burlington's case, phasing in the tax decreases. But even that wasn't enough to mollify those opposing MVA, who have angrily complained the year chosen for the MVA study, 1988, was a time when property values were highly inflated relative to today.

Stripping away all the hype, it is clear that economic times are precarious enough at present to warrant changing the year so that 1992 property values are used to calculate the tax rates, not the inflationary 1988 figures.

It is also clear that those who will enjoy the benefit of an unexpected windfall, primarily the Burlington ratepayers, should be prepared to gradually gain that benefit, in recognition of the hardship this will inflict on their Oakville neighbours.

It is almost impossible to implement a controversial new property tax involving major shifts in assessment unless that assessment is in tune with the current economic reality. Real estate values in 1988 bear little semblance to the ones of today, especially in the retail sector. People are not only unwilling to accept taxation based on such calculations, they may well be unable to pay it.

We realize, as some municipal financial officials have pointed out, there is a contradiction in admitting MVA is essentially fairer taxation and than prolonging unfairness by phasing it in, slowly, and further delaying it by altering the base year. But in light of the current economic difficulties and tensions that's what should be done.

LOOKING BACK



Ho, Ho, Ho, who's sitting on Santa's knee? Gloria Peruscillo and Helen Hume were greeted by Santa Claus at the annual Milton District Hospital recreation association dinner and dance at the Galaxie Club in December 1985. Helen offers Santa a light as he enjoys one of the cigars distributed.

PAGES OF THE PAST

One Year Ago

From the December 4, 1991 issue

□ Miltonians were to be given the opportunity to call anywhere in the world for free. BCE Mobile would be providing cordless telephones on which the calls could be made and a display was to be set up at Milton Mall. Between noon and 4 p.m. on December 8 users could make the no-charge calls with a five-minute time limit. The cordless telephones were being tested in Milton and more than 100 were currently in use. The free phone-link to the world was part of a promotion to attract more users to take part in the pilot project.

□ Milton dairy farmer, Harold Middlebrook had recently won the Halton Outstanding Farmer Award in 1991 for his dedication to the farming industry. Mr. Middlebrook, who had run his business on Walker's Line just south of Derry Road for the past 42 years had said the recognition was both a surprise and an honour. Mr. Middlebrook was presented with the award at a special banquet. He did not know beforehand that he had won the award which was co-sponsored by the Halton Federation of Agriculture and the family of the late Ross Segsworth.

□ Santa had paid his annual visit to the Halton Radial Railway Museum during the Ladies Auxiliary Christmas Fiesta. Santa drove one of the antique street-cars and visited with children. The event included a craft and gift sale, hot cider and rides on the track at the Guelph Line museum. The next event at the museum was to be the Christmas Night Show, when the street-cars would be covered in festive lights.

20 years Ago

From the December 6, 1972 issue

□ Included in the seven new members headed for

county council were reeve Bob McCuaig and deputy-reeve Marjorie Powys of Milton.

□ The Ontario School For the Deaf had capped a perfect football season by winning a 7-0 CWOSSAA championship game against the Fergus Falcons. Milton had won all eight games during the regular season and never suffered defeat, even in exhibition action. It was the first time the school had gone through a year without a loss. During the season the club had travelled to Thorold, Ontario and Rome, New York for exhibition games.

□ There was to be no Santa Claus parade in Milton that year. In previous years, the Milton Chamber of Commerce had organized the event. However, the purchase of new lighting for the Main street core area had dealt a blow to the Chamber's financial position and the lack of money and time made planning a parade a very unlikely venture that Christmas.

□ Two Milton students at Sheridan College were recipients of \$100 scholarships at the Oakville campus's Awards Night. Lee Swallow of Milton received the Indusmin award for his combined academic and athletic ability. Roy Zwolman received the Canada Packers Award for the highest standing in accounting and financing in the business administration course.

50 Years Ago

From the December 3, 1942 issue

□ The Milton Arena was to be open for the winter months as soon as it was possible to make ice. The caretaker for the season was to be Harry Coulson.

□ St. Paul's United Church would soon be holding their Christmas Bazaar. On sale would be beautiful quilts, children's wear, aprons, candy and homemade baking.

□ The Palermo Women's Institute would be holding a Euchre and Dance in the Palermo Community Hall.

PUD

BY STEVE NEASE

