

Krantz: Big changes coming over next six months

By BRAD REAUME
The Champion

Milton mayor Gord Krantz tipped back his head and laughed.

It's all he could do, given an uncertain economy, a determined and decisive provincial government, crumbling support for the Halton Urban Structure Plan, and fewer dollars to make the whole machine go.

Where will Milton stand at the end of 1996? It's really anybody's guess. Ontario, Halton and Milton are entering uncharted waters this year, the mayor said.

"I think the next six months are going to be as interesting as any six months I've ever spent in government," said Mr. Krantz, who recently celebrated his 30th anniversary in local government.

The variables seem overwhelming. The province imposed dramatic cuts in grants to municipalities and promised more of the same for 1997. They have committed to massive changes in municipal organization and have promised reform of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Halton Region awaits provincial direction before its own political reorganization. Water servicing to the north hangs on the dominoes of decisions. Political types wrangle over money for police, school boards and other agen-

cies. In addition, one decision can have implications on several issues.

Fewer municipalities in the cards

"There are 800 or so municipalities in Ontario now, but I believe there will be no more than 500 municipalities voting in the next (municipal) election (November 1997)," said the mayor. "There will be amalgamations in the GTA and boundary changes and maybe just one level of government."

Everything is on the table for discussion, according to Mayor Krantz, including creating a central Public Utilities Commission for fire, hydro, ambulance, police, and water services.

Boundaries for Halton could change dramatically, Mayor Krantz suggested, with part of Burlington going to Hamilton, a portion of Oakville going to Mississauga, areas of Milton going to Halton Hills, Guelph, or Mississauga and pieces of Halton Hills going to Brampton.

In 1973 when regional government was established in Halton, the province told local municipalities to establish new boundaries or it would be done for them, the mayor said.

"The biggest fear of elected officials is the unknown and there are a lot of unknowns," said the mayor. "The Harris government said there would be a one in four reduction of politicians in Ontario by the next election. That takes radical

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provincial cutbacks would produce anarchy locally," Mayor Krantz said. "I think the province has to look at education. That's where the big bucks are. I get the feeling that the board of education simply passes their increases through to the municipalities without taking a close look at it. The province should be as tough with the boards of education as they are with the municipalities. Unelected people are making a lot of expensive decisions."

Mayor Krantz said the cuts in provincial funding would hurt Milton if its infrastructure had not been kept up. He said there would likely not be any major infrastructure projects in the next few years. He pointed out that several projects, such as Ontario Street and Martin Street, have been recently completed. The town, he said, would undertake smaller capital works during the next few years.

Downloading costs

As the federal government gets its financial house in order it places more responsibility on the provincial government, which in turn asks more from municipal governments, according to the mayor. "The province has been downloading (costs) for the last five years on the property tax base."

The mayor said he was in agreement with
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