

COMMENT

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Bad compromise had a hefty price

It's nice to see Milton town councillors come to their senses, although a disquieting doubt prevails as to why they would have initially contemplated blowing \$200,000 on phasing in property tax shifts.

In a fundamentally flawed twist of logic based, one can only hope, on some skewed sense of fair play, councillors had originally advocated gradually implementing the local property tax shifts taking place under Market Value Assessment (MVA).

Under the MVA system, roughly 11 per cent of local property taxpayers were going to endure a substantial hike in levies, and nine per cent were to get a hefty break. The phase-in program was for these two most affected groups. Both break and hike would be eased in over three years to cushion their effects. The cost for this unwieldy program, to be financed by the two camps, was estimated as high as \$200,000.

The fact that this was almost done probably also illustrates the lengths to which many will go in order to avoid facing up to a hard choice, although councillors would no doubt prefer to believe their foot-dragging compromise was primarily a compassionate gesture.

Milton councillors aren't alone in this line of thinking. Everybody in Halton Region has mulled over the same thing, and in Burlington and Oakville, phase-in programs have been instituted. But before anyone lets local council off the hook for dithering, remember that MVA is far more controversial in those two communities than it currently is in Milton, because bigger tax shifts are taking place there.

Town council is always ready to congratulate itself on its supposedly frugal operations, and there is some merit to that stance, although not as much as councillors would like to think.

Milton has also gone in for various time-wasting adventures, such as the flawed widening plan of Martin Street, and never backs away from the trough when other levels of government start throwing goodies around. Witness the shameless grab at federal infrastructure money.

On top of that, Milton council has always had a penchant for self-glorification. Council poured all sorts of money into signs and dodads surrounding municipal buildings — take a look at Victoria Park, where the garbage cans cost a few thousand dollars, and nearby Hugh Foster Hall, a structure of marginal utility lavishly refurbished with taxpayer's money.

Council has also spent freely on all sorts of outside studies, certainly not all of which warranted their costs, judging from their sophomoric and generalized conclusions.

As cutbacks bite deeply into public operations, council will have to rely on itself more. That means relying on outside consultants less. That means making tough decisions, not advocating \$200,000 compromises because they're politically less threatening.

The goal of municipal operations is now to do more with less while keeping as many people working as possible. It means sticking to your core business, eschewing frills, using common sense instead of hiring some consultants to do your thinking for you, and having the courage to do what must be done up front.

— Rob Kelly



Pages of the Past

One Year Ago

From the January 11, 1995 issue

- The Halton Federation of Agriculture (HFA) wanted direct representation on the Halton Region Conservation Authority. The HFA pleaded its case before Halton council. Before the region made a decision, the province had to change rules regarding conservation authority membership.

- The Milton Six and Family Fundraiser at Memorial Arena raised \$4,000 for six deaf hockey players who represented Canada overseas in the winter Olympics for the deaf. Total fundraising efforts brought in \$22,000.

- Halton regional council elected three of its members to serve on Halton's Police Services Board. Halton Hills Councillor Al Cook, Oakville Councillor Keith Bird and Burlington Councillor Barry Quinn were elected to serve for a three-year term.

20 Years Ago

From the January 14, 1976 issue

- The Chamber of Commerce executive for 1976 was chosen at the annual meeting. Members included Mike Beaver, treasurer, Yvonne Christie, vice-president, Ted

Mist, president, and Pat Palmer, secretary.

- The first meeting of 1976 for the Boston Ladies Fellowship Group was held at Boston Presbyterian Church. The evening was successful with about 25 women in attendance. The group was just over a year old.

- Al Jordan, a constable with the Milton OPP detachment for 13 years, was promoted to the rank of corporal and assigned to the detachment of Wawa, north of Sault Sainte Marie.

50 Years Ago

From the January 10, 1946 issue

- Bill Robinson was the guest of honour at a dinner held by the directors of the Halton Holstein Club for the county's 1945 Holstein exhibitors. Mr. Robinson received a gold pocket watch for his retirement from his position as county sales agent.

- A farewell party was held for Bert Johnson, who was manager of the Dominion Store in Milton for 10 months. Mr. Johnson expected to be the manager of the Dominion Store in Trenton.

- The Farm Forum held their weekly meeting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. George Readhead with good attendance. The subject of discussion was "How Important is Rural Community Organization."

Pud

by Steve Nease

