

Horse trading to begin over running pipe here from Peel

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
Special to The Champion

Halton regional staff have been given the go-ahead to continue negotiating with Peel for the use of their eastern neighbor's water and wastewater service.

The green light came Wednesday at a joint meeting of Halton's planning and public works and administration and finance committees. It follows an agreement by Peel Region to supply Halton with enough water to service 5,000 new houses and about 200 hectares of commercial and industrial land for future development.

While regional councillors are encouraged by a possible link with Peel, they haven't completely abandoned the idea of letting a private sector partner build and operate the infrastructure needed under the Halton Urban Structure Plan.

Prior to Peel's commitment to supply services, Halton had solicited private sector proposals to deal with its water dilemma. A total of seven were received with three; Halton Water Partnership, Consumer's Utilities and Canadian Clean Water Systems, short listed. Although request for these proposals has been held off, they may still be forthcoming should negotiations with Peel fall through.

Regional councillors approved \$270,000 in funding to be used for studies and legal fees in negotiations. Peel Region will be given \$50,000 of that to prepare a detailed proposal.

Regional councillors hope to have a conclusive staff report with recommended options by January.

While seemingly in support of a Halton-Peel water link, Burlington Councillor Ralph Scholtens questioned why, if services would be shared between the two regions and Peel would benefit through decreased water rates, they couldn't share the initial study costs — or at least secure a way to recover the \$50,000 allowance.

"I understand Milton's need for growth, but I won't recommend spending more money on studies," said Oakville Councillor Kathy Graham.

Burlington Councillor Bob Brechin shot back that Halton doesn't have a choice at this point — referring to the 11 years and \$2.6 already invested in the process — and that study costs and legal fees make up only one-half of one per cent of the money that will be needed for new and upgraded infrastructure.

An agreement with Peel would see a pipeline link the two regions, most likely running from north Peel to Milton. Milton would be the main beneficiary of water and wastewater service, but councillors said parts of Halton Hills and north Oakville could also be allocated a portion of the services. Major benefits of integrating water and wastewater systems with Peel are the savings related to using Peel's existing infrastructure, and the potential sharing of new infrastructure to service both north Halton and north Peel.

Oakville Councillor Steve Sparling stressed his desire for an expedient end to this long process, which has held Milton's development stagnant for more than a decade.

A ratepayer's group opposed to Halton's link with Peel is the Halton-Planning Oversight Group. Representing the organization Wednesday was Burlington's Tom Muir, who touched on — among other things — the fact that Milton would primarily benefit from new services and the subsequent development they would allow, yet all Halton taxpayers will be hit with the bill for a water systems link.

"I'm not opposed to development, as long as I don't have to pay for it," Mr. Muir said.

Milton Mayor Gord Krantz said he is optimistic that the two-region link will happen. "All of Halton will be impacted by this and no municipal lines are being drawn. It's encouraging to see councillors being supportive of a common sense approach to overall development," he said.

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