

Region fears developers will stiff towns

By BRAD REAUME
The Champion

Development charges might not generate public excitement but they are the focus of a battle between municipal governments and home builders.

The groups are fighting over provisions in the provincial government's Bill 98, which outline new rules for development charges. The bill largely dovetails with wishes expressed by the development industry.

Local governments are saying the rules could cost property taxpayers a lot of money. Developers have long advocated limits to development

charges, which they say will give their industry a necessary shot in the arm. While general agreement has been reached on 21 issues, there are three areas of contention remaining.

Greater Toronto Area mayors and regional chairs have forwarded their position to Al Leach, minister of municipal affairs and housing, and asked for his backing.

Halton council endorsed the GTA mayor's position on Wednesday.

In a letter to the minister, Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion said the changes advocated by the development industry are merely a mechanism for home builders to gain additional profit on the backs of property taxpayers. In

addition Mayor McCallion called the negotiating process "very unfair" because the development industry kept falling back on legislative proposals which it favours to wring concessions out of municipalities.

Simply put, developers want municipalities to discount the cost of some municipal services such as police and fire, transit, recreation and libraries. Development charges are set up to pay for the expansion of such services required as communities grow.

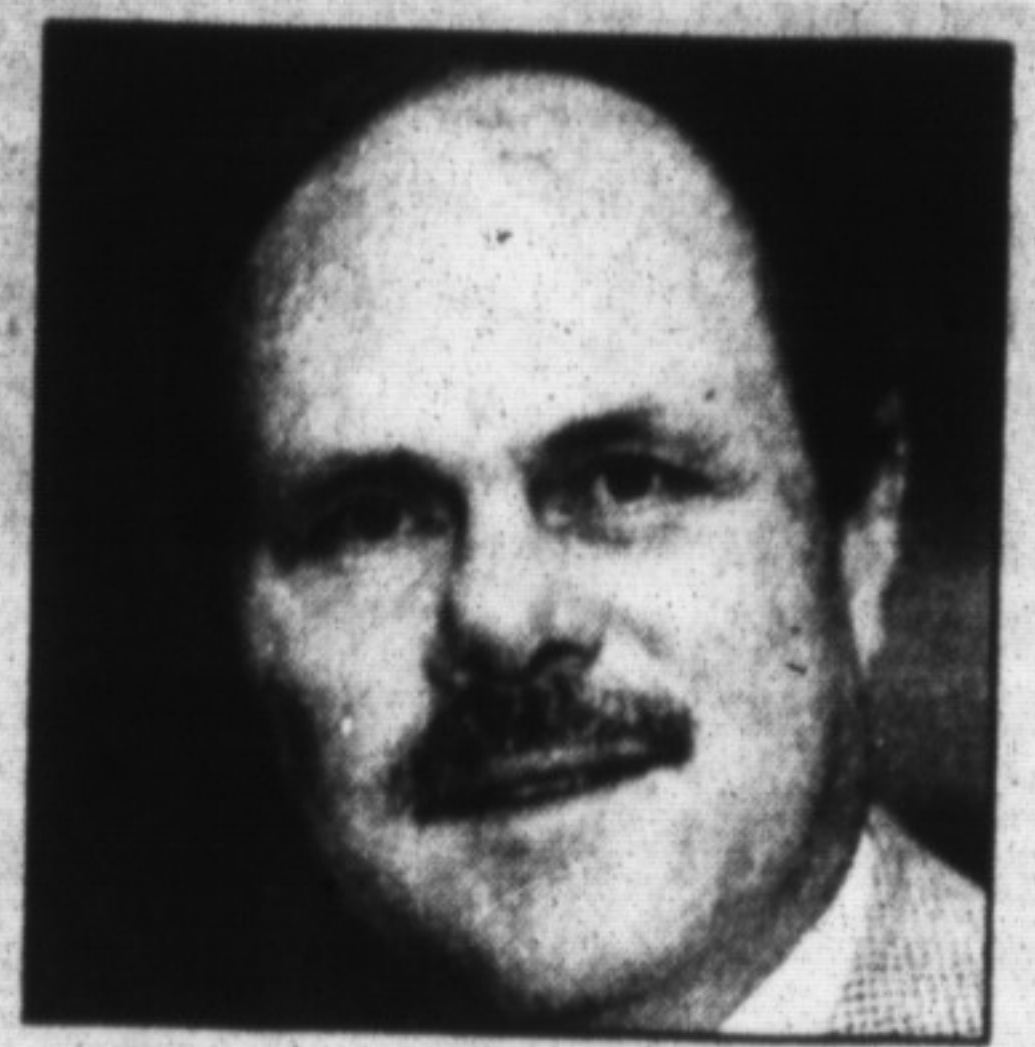
The municipalities counter that discounting will be paid for through increased property taxes, which violates the principle that growth pay for itself.

Some councillors at a recent Halton regional administration and finance committee meeting questioned if there had been real progress in negotiations. Others asked if the GTA mayors' position should be endorsed by each local municipal council.

"This isn't new. We talked about stopping development in Oakville because of potential impacts," said Oakville Councillor Keith Bird.

"Do we allow UDI (the Urban Development Institute, a developer's lobby group) to cherry pick us, or do we present a united front? They want to shove the cost from new homeowners to existing homeowners. Either we

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"They want to shove the cost from new homeowners to existing homeowners. Either we want to make this point or we don't."

KEITH BIRD

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