

COMMENT

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Good people, bad deal

These are of course tense times for the public service industry, which includes many health care workers and certainly those at hospitals. It is now apparent that Milton District Hospital will be closely scrutinized by a provincial panel whose mandate is to cut costs.

Most health care workers — management and union — say they just don't know what is going to happen, and politicians echo that sentiment.

However, even a cursory look at Milton's situation is not encouraging, for a couple of simple reasons.

Most of the things that are done at Milton District Hospital are done elsewhere in Halton Region.

And probably most of the people who go to the local hospital could, with some inconvenience, drive 20 minutes or so to Oakville, or Burlington.

This is not to say Milton's hospital will be closed or even radically altered, and it is certainly not to indicate that what takes place at the hospital is unimportant.

A great deal of substantial import has occurred there. The hospital has been the focus of countless hours of charity fundraising by innumerable people.

One has only to cast back a handful of years to recall the campaign to modernize and expand the facility, to make it a point of deep municipal pride. As well, the hospital, and this newspaper, have both received letters praising care at the institution.

Unfortunately, in the cold glow of today's fiscal realities, these sentiments may not count for much among those who make the decisions about what closes and what stays open.

Clear in the mandate of the panel is a time frame of less than five years — if substantial new growth pressure is not present in the community over that time span, it is likely current facilities will be pared back.

In Milton, there is almost no chance of the type of population growth that could influence the decision over the next five years.

Those who make the choice about what stays and what goes in local hospital care cannot and will not allow themselves to be swayed by the enormous goodwill the institution represents, the work that has gone into making it what it is today, the quality of the people behind the care.

Most probably they will act in the same manner as corporate executives charged with dismissing employees, to reduce overhead in private enterprise — a depressingly familiar scenario in the 1990s.

These executives rarely want to know anything about the people they are going to let go, unless they've hired a so-called out-placement agency to work with them. And even then they leave most of it to the hired axe wielders.

Milton can't count on sentiment to sway opinion — that didn't work elsewhere, it won't work here.

On Thursday, May 8 at the Optimist Centre this issue will be discussed in a public forum attended by stakeholders and politicians. It's important that evidence and reason, rather than emotion, is advanced there and to the provincial panel that will make the decision.

The hospital as it is, will likely change, but to what degree may still be something of an open question.

There is no joy in writing something like this. Hopefully that is obvious to all. But we should all understand what the worst case scenario is, what preparations may need to be made and what's probably at stake.

A strong turnout of concerned citizens at the Optimist Centre meeting would probably be a good first step to finding out about that, and what can realistically be done in terms of damage control.

— Rob Kelly



Pages of the Past

One Year Ago

From the April 24, 1996 issue

• It appeared that factionalism was threatening to tear apart the Halton Board of Education. The board, whose members seemed to be dividing into reform and traditionalist camps, reached a critical impasse when nine trustees voted down the 1996 budget. Only eight trustees supported the budget. Taxes seemed to be the dividing factor as some trustees refused to support an increase in the levy and others argued that the education system could not withstand further cuts. After the vote, chair Linda Glover calmly announced, "We do not have a budget."

• Oakville regional councillor Steven Sparling was pushing to kick-start the Halton Urban Structure Plan (HUSP). This plan involved building water and sewage pipelines north from Lake Ontario to accommodate long-term growth in Milton and more immediate building plans in north Oakville and Burlington. Councillor Sparling asked for an update on the HUSP process at a meeting of the planning and public works committee. As Mr. Sparling explained, "There is a huge pressure for additional water and wastewater capacity in parts of Oakville and Burlington. Some (developers) are going to launch major marketing drives and spend considerable dollars."

20 Years Ago

From the April 27, 1977 issue

• Halton Regional Council would not be deterred in their attempts to situate a landfill site in Milton, claimed chair Ric Morrow. Mr. Morrow said the Region would continue work on phase three of a consultant's report on the controversial Site F landfill and would apply to the Town of Milton for the rezoning of the site near Tremaine and Britannia roads. The Supreme Court of Ontario had previously quashed a by-law passed by the region indicating the Milton site as a future landfill. "The only alternative the Region has," explained Mr. Morrow, "is to spend another quarter of a million dollars studying another site and even then people would hire a lawyer and we'd have the same legal problems."

50 Years Ago

From the April 24, 1947 issue

• The 16th installment of the Halton Music Festival (but the first since the beginning of the war) was held at Knox Presbyterian Church in Milton. Because of the discontinuance of school-taught music during the war years, not as many young people took part in the festival as had been the case before the war. The auditorium was packed to capacity, though, especially during the evening performances. Elizabeth-Anne Marcellus and Gladys Hystead from Milton High School took home the prize for the high school girls' duet under 17-years-old category. In his first singing contest, Milton's Freddie Ambrose was awarded honours for his solo in the class of urban boys, 11 years old and over.

Pud

by Steve Nease

