classifieds 884-1105 - 1106 THE LIBERAL



Receiving the certificates which indicate they attended all sessions of the six-week series of lectures on local government by the Ontario Conference on Local Government are Judy Calder, Barry Case and Ruth Cook (on the right above.) Presenting the certificates is Ontario

Minister of Housing Don Irvine (left), with Eric Baker, vice-chairman of the OCLG, who chaired the final seminar, in the background. The lectures were sponsored locally by the Richmond Hill Citizens' Advisory Group and were held in the auditorium of Don Head Secondary School.

Receive local government certificates

The Davis government is not planning any more regional governments for Ontario, Minister of Housing Donald Irvine told the large group of interested citizens at the concluding evening of lectures on municipal government, October 29.

Instead the government is now planning county restructuring, the important difference being that in the new counties separated towns and-or cities must be a part of the county to provide a broad tax and sound economic base.

The series of six lectures (one a week) was presented in Don Head Secondary School by the Ontario Conference on Local Government and was sponsored locally by the Richmond Hill Citizens' Advisory Group. Knowledgeable speakers talked on 10 phases of municipal government and its relationship to the province. Eric Baker, OCLG vicepresident was the chairman on the final evening.

Rural times In the days when Ontario was predominantly rural there was very little government at the local level, the minister said. "In the villages the residents counted themselves well served if their elected representatives kept up the roads and bridges and made sure an adequate and usually lowly paid teacher was in the little red schoolhouse. Each municipality was isolated from its neighbors and Queen's Park was far away. Each continued to run its own show until the growth of industry, social mobility, growth of cities, eternal (or infernal) combustion engines forced the whole world to

change. "We now have piped water and sewer services replacing wells and pumps and backyard privies, roads and highways reaching out to the farthest corners, more industries and more and more homes. More important is the fact the taxpayers are demanding more and more services from their governments which gives every level of government concern," he said.

New situation

The old horse and buggy methods can no longer cope, the minister continued. The tax basis is too narrow, the tax revenue is too small. It took a lot of time and experience to manage a town with all its problems, and all its perplexities.

Proposed solutions included widening the tax base, to lighten the councillors' work by farming out some responsibilities and to let the province provide all additional revenues needed.

Annexation and amalgamation as alternatives for redrawing boundaries were discussed by the speaker, who pointed out the many problems caused by amalgamation. Consolidation of Timmins and Porcupine in the new city of Timmins and of Fort William and Port Arthur in the new city of Thunder Bay are working out quite well, he said. He admitted these new cities have some problems "but have achieved more for their people than they would have if they had continued as separate municipalities". Little empires

Creation of special bodies led to them becoming little empires on their own. Such bodies often declined to co-operate with council, he said. Council was also often unable to co-ordinate one board with another. This put policy making, which should be the responsibility of the elected representatives, in the hands of appointees.

The third solution "get it from the provincial government" raised the question by the minister. "Where does the provincial government get it? Right from the people, right from you. There is just no way anybody in Queen's Park know what you want for your municipality. You are the people who should decide priorities. You are the people who should raise the money. Let's get it out of Queen's Park and back to the municipal voters," was his plea.

He described the policy of some councils in permitting development just for the revenue that can be gained from that development as "a very shortsighted policy but in some cases the only way a council can see to satisfy their electors."

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Reform reasons

Local governments had to be reformed to provide a strong and broad financial base at the local level, to function properly and responsibly to the demands of the people. "To do this it was decided we had to have regional government," Irvine stated.

He added he believes York was an excellent example of regional government, providing a good mix of rural and urban communities and a good tax

"No longer is there any need for an individual municipality to plan to lure industrial assessment for the sake of balancing industrial and residential assessment since the region is the tax base. The government provides a property stabilization grant so each municipality benefits from the whole region's assessment," he said.

"Your government is as close as you want it to be," he said. "It's time to get close to government as you people who have undertaken this course have."

Housing mix He then gave a resume of his ministry's work in trying to meet the need for housing in this province.

"We want to broaden the mix of housing, see that more and more alternative forms are available and reduce all the 'blue' tape we had in the past, thus streamlining procedures. To help with this we are providing very substantial sums for mortgages at lower than usual rates.

"We want councils to provide us with serviced land. In the past we have not had full co-operation on the federal, provincial, and municipal and people level to provide housing, he said in conclusion.



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