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*It's all uphill from here*

**M**uch to their credit, the members of the Shores of Essex Resource Corporation (SOERC, pronounced "source") are forging ahead in their efforts to deliver a strategic plan to the Town of Essex. At an economic development meeting held Feb. 12, the group suggested that they could deliver such a plan in about eight weeks but it now looks like it will take a bit longer.

At last week's council meeting, the group reported that they would be holding an "economic summit" on April 28 that would bring together about 250 business and community leaders to participate in a strategic planning session. Identifying problems, defining goals and objectives, and devising action plans will surely form part of that process.

Given the general lack of interest in economic planning witnessed since the Downtown Study Group released its report in the fall of 2005, one has to be optimistic that something useful will come of this summit. A solid vision of our future and a set of achievable goals would certainly help to turn us in the right direction.

But it's hard to imagine how 250 participants will be shepherded along to arrive at a consensus on the issues without addressing some of the same old issues that plague this community. Good luck, for example, suppressing the Business Improvement Area issue when talking about Ward 1. The Downtown Study Group spent meeting after meeting trying to get beyond a discussion of the relative merits of having a BIA versus a chamber of commerce, an issue that didn't even form part of its mandate. The issue is insidious and would certainly derail meaningful dialogue. A tight agenda and a skilful and informed facilitator will definitely be a necessity.

The group has promised to make more information available in the near future.

*Unexpected windfall*

As the Essex 73's fight their way towards yet another Great Lakes Junior 'C' championship, good news has arrived for Essex Memorial Arena. If your reaction to the provincial budget was one of apathy, then you're in good company. But locally we have much to celebrate – a \$2.5-million windfall that was quietly announced last Friday at a press conference hosted by area members of provincial parliament. An increase in the rural infrastructure fund means the arena project is \$2.5 million closer to reality, even if fundraising efforts have slowed down. Grumbings about delays in delivery of the final design and concerns that a twin-pad arena may be just another pipe dream are making it hard to be optimistic about the outcome. All the same, there has never been a better time for renewed interest in this project. Let's get it back on track!



*free press*  
**editorial**

*laurie brett*

**T**he 401 series is alive and well in the American Baseball League, at least for the first two weeks of the season. The Detroit Tigers and the Toronto Blue Jays will meet seven times during that span. And after that? Well, the two teams don't see each other all season. Opening Day in Detroit against the Blue Jays will be sold out to the walls.

Back in the 1980s and early 90s, the hottest ticket in either city was when the Tigers invaded Toronto, or when the Jays chirped at Tiger Stadium. Buck Martinez, who along with Roseville's Ernie Whitt, formed the Jays catching staff of the day once told me that a game in Detroit was like a home game due to the number of Jays fans at Michigan and Trumbull. Similarly, All Star pitcher Jack Morris loved to play in Toronto because of the support from Tigers

fanatics who made their way down the 401 or on Via Rail to support their beloved Tabbies.

Interestingly enough,



**opinion**  
*bill gay*

Morris wound up winning a World Series in both Toronto and Detroit uniforms. In the 80s, he and Toronto's Dave Steib were the top two righthanders in the American League. Both played it tough. Woe to the infielder who botched a pop up or easy ground ball playing behind either pitcher. Known for their need of anger management classes, Morris and Steib gave it everything

they had when they stepped over the white lines. That's why I was surprised upon meeting Dave Steib after a 12-inning loss in Detroit, how friendly and composed he was.

This upcoming season both the Tigers, who stunned the baseball world by making it to the World Series, and the Blue Jays who finished second behind the vaunted Yankees, have improved squads. I guess we'll have to enjoy the first two weeks of April and the seven-game set at Comerica Park and the Rogers Centre, because after that it will be a long season of scoreboard watching by fans of both teams.

The good news is that spring is here and baseball is back. As former Tigers General Manager Jim Campbell used to say at spring training, "Just think, from now to October, there will be a baseball game going on every day somewhere!"



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