

Halton's taxpayers shouldn't front bill for Oakville hospital

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What's going on at the Region of Halton headquarters?

Halton Regional Chair Gary Carr suggests to us that all Halton taxpayers should be on the hook for up to \$100 million for the new Oakville hospital. The Champion's sister publication, the Oakville Beaver, recently quoted the CEO of Halton Healthcare Services as saying, "Really, this is a site for Oakville into the long future."

Why should all Halton taxpayers be on the hook for the parking lot, cafeteria and equipment of a hospital whose primary function is to serve Oakville?

Does Milton District Hospital receive similar tax support for its equipment purchases? I don't think so.

The Milton District Hospital Foundation and other dedicated Milton community members take on the responsibility and work hard and long to raise much-needed funds for the local hospital. So why should Oakville community members be excused from their responsibilities?

And hasn't Carr been a major proponent of uploading social services costs, rather than putting them onto the property tax base? Why change that tune now -- for Oakville?

I appreciate that Halton taxes have decreased somewhat for 2008, but we should recognize that a good portion of the decrease came from the Region downloading the collection of the GTA pooling tax to the lower-tier municipalities.

An increased Halton-wide tax burden is totally unwarranted. Halton residents have demonstrated they will contribute on their own to worthy causes. If they believe an Oakville-focused hospital is good for them, then I'm sure they will respond voluntarily and generously to fundraising endeavours on behalf of that hospital.

In the May 2 Champion, Carr also seems to have defended a proposal that Halton residential taxpayers should be hit with an additional \$70-plus tax surcharge to subsidize new industrial and commercial profits.

Commercial and industrial development has been going like gang-busters -- just take a look at the 401 corridor. Property taxes have gone up and, in my opinion, quality of life has dropped. Why exacerbate the situation?

Halton is a prime development region -- Places to Grow has seen to that. So why do existing taxpayers need to take on more taxes to subsidize developers? Why should developers not pay their fair share?

The Region website states, "The purpose of development charges (DC) is to recover the growth-related costs associated with the capital infrastructure needed to service new development." The key word is

'recover' -- and it doesn't mean cover as in 'cover by increasing property taxes.' In my opinion, we don't need any developers who wish to avoid their financial responsibilities by not paying for growth-related costs. And since existing non-discounted and non-waived development charges will 'winnow the wheat from the chaff,' that's fine with me.

Furthermore, didn't we hear at the last municipal election that action would be taken to slow growth down and start to manage it? Why the switch-aroo? Why is virtually unbridled growth, and an increased property tax burden, such a good thing now?

I hope too that Carr will change his mind about the publication of municipal employee salaries over \$100,000. His comments in a May 2 Champion letter to the editor would seem to indicate he considers individual municipal employee salaries of \$100,000 to be so prevalent, and the amount to be so comparatively insignificant, that taxpayers shouldn't be made aware of them.

Stats Canada reports that the median Canadian family income is close to \$69,000. I would argue that salaries of individual municipal employees who make almost 50 per cent more than half of Canadian families are of great interest to taxpayers.

Carr needs to do much better. I believe he can, and hope that he will.

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