

Regional government...

pro and con

'Peel needs fourth borough, full time councillors'

Bill Johnstone and Derek Skinner tendered this brief on behalf of the membership of the Peel Association for Good Government (PAGG). Their comments will form the basis for a position paper to the provincial government.

BY BILL JOHNSTONE AND DEREK SKINNER

On various occasions, provincial authorities concerned with regional development have made claims that regional governments will better serve residents by:

- Improving community planning through the substitution of an integrated regional plan for a number of imperfectly coordinated municipal plans.
- Balancing assessment rich areas against assessment poor areas in the same region so that all communities may achieve relative equity of services, including educational opportunities.
- Making it possible, through tax equalization, for individual municipalities to resist the temptation to misuse land for the sake of tax revenues.
- Minimizing the cost of such major services as road networks, water and sewerage systems, police protection and education by taking advantage of economies of scale.



Derek Skinner

• Creating stronger units of government below the provincial level which will arrest the erosion of municipal powers by curtailing the need for additional provincial agencies to provide services which individual municipalities cannot afford.

The Peel Association for Good Government (P.A.G.G.) endorses and subscribes to the soundness of these claims and recognizes the need—long past due—for the province to simplify its dealings with municipalities by reducing the number of local governments with which the province must share the task of governing.

However, the January Proposal for Local Government Reform in the area west of Metropolitan Toronto does not deal adequately with the principles of representation. P.A.G.G. suggests that these principles must be accommodated before technical details can be successfully implemented and appropriate measures should therefore be incorporated into legislation covering the following aspects of representation:

- The maximum number of voters to whom a municipal representative is responsible should be kept to a reasonable level.
- Representatives at the regional level should be full time—and paid accordingly—even if municipal representatives are not.
- A provision for citizen input and communication with municipal councillors on a regular basis should be agreed upon.
- Provision should be made to minimize the risk of one municipality dominating the Region.

REPRESENTATION

Now dealing with each point in turn. The existing municipalities making up the three new municipalities proposed for the Peel Region have apparently interpreted the provincial proposal as indicating that area (i.e. municipal) councillors—5, 6, and 10 respectively for North, Central and South Peel—will also act as regional representatives.

P.A.G.G. questions this need for 21 regional representatives.

If only to facilitate decision-making, a lesser total number could serve effectively and act as the essential communication link with their respective municipalities.

Municipalities, on the other hand, have to cope with ward and problems and should have councillors responsible to a reasonable number of electors in each ward.

P.A.G.G. recommends municipal representation on a ward basis with wards not exceeding 20,000 people. However, the number of regional representatives could be in the order of 2, 3 and 4 full-time, well-paid councillors for the North, Central and South Areas, respectively.

FULL-TIME REPRESENTATIVES

An unfortunate inheritance from a bygone era in Ontario is the assumption that municipal decision-making warrants no more than the part-time attention of municipal councillors who are, accordingly, paid part-time salaries. Presumably the rationalization used by most taxpayers is: if elected officials can be hired cheaply, why pay more?

P.A.G.G. takes the position that there is a hidden cost in asking—and paying for—only part-time service from elected officials. The hidden cost—a potential mortgage on our future—is that community planning cannot receive the attention it deserves from representatives who must deal with a formidable array of complex issues while having to earn incomes to supplement their token salaries.

Not only must councillors earn supplementary incomes, their occupations must be such that they can arrange to take time off work for municipal affairs. It follows that, with few exceptions, those employed by companies and other organizations have little or no freedom to accept public office. In short, token salaries to councillors automatically exclude from public office a majority of residents.

It also follows that the job of councillor tends to gravitate largely to local businessmen who, however well qualified, must struggle with two realities: the time demands of their businesses which will inevitably clash, on occasion, with the time demands of their official duties; secondly, their natural desire to see their businesses thrive, which represents a potential bias for them to favour rapid growth for their community.

In justice, one cannot generalize that businessmen tend to push for growth to the detriment of their community. In logic, one cannot argue that local businessmen are the ideally neutral and objective group to decide on the questions of when and how much growth is warranted.

P.A.G.G. therefore recommends that serious consideration be given to a plebiscite whereby residents be asked to vote on the question of paying full-time salaries to councillors who, as a requirement of taking office, are prepared to divest themselves of active participation in businesses or organizations which represent demands on their time.

In summary, the foregoing proposal would open public office to a much broader spectrum of residents; it would remove suspicions that a councillor's position may represent a potential conflict of interest; it would offer assurances that councillors' energies are not diluted by private business interests and would permit them

to devote more time to the vital task of planning a community of the future.

Should it prove to be politically or otherwise unacceptable to expect both municipal and regional representatives to serve on a full-time basis, an alternative would be to consider the election of two categories of councillors; one to be elected to serve on the municipal council only—if need be on a part-time basis; the second category to serve on both the municipal and regional Councils, on a full-time basis, at a salary of perhaps \$20,000 annually.

A last innovation possibly warranting consideration would be to pay full-time regional representatives for a period of three months before they assume office. During this time they would be required to undergo such training as might be arranged under the auspices of the

province's Regional development Branch or other provincial agency.

CITIZEN INPUT

Various proposals have been made for the creation of "citizen sounding boards," "committees of 100" and "citizen advisory groups." Chinguacousy township has introduced such groups. The municipal reorganization committee of Peel County Council in September 1972 adopted the recommendation by the Warden that "the province be requested to include in any new act respecting reorganization of Peel County a provision for the establishment of citizen advisory committees at the option of the local municipalities."

P.A.G.G. recognizes the danger that such committees may become obstructive pressure groups if controlled by a dedicated few with a particular point to

make, or conversely that they may become the vehicle for a closed circle of endorsement for an unscrupulous councillor.

In spite of these objections, P.A.G.G. believes that the democratic process will falter unless a mechanism is found to change the confrontation attitudes of aroused residents into cooperative awareness and a positive interest in civic affairs.

P.A.G.G. acknowledges, too, that while individual councillors may be more than willing to listen to residents' views, they are handicapped by having to rely largely on one-way communication—namely, from the relatively few who, besides knowing who their councillor is, have the confidence to contact him with a problem, or the grace to let him know when they

approve of his efforts on their behalf.

At the risk of over-simplification, the problem appears to be to convert the limited one-way communication into two-way communication, hopefully on a significantly larger scale than exists now.

A possible avenue for encouraging two-way communication would be to ask local newspapers to cooperate by publishing a bi-weekly or monthly report prepared in rotation by council members who would informally summarize council proceedings and council plans for the future.

By attaching the councillor's "by-line" to each report and by inviting written comment from readers, residents might be given a somewhat more comprehensive picture of civic activities than is available through the necessarily piecemeal coverage of local affairs given by the press; additionally, residents might be encouraged to respond with their comments.

This whole matter of communication requires expert knowledge and probably some trial and error experiments to devise the appropriate mechanisms.

CONTROL OF REGION

The province and Peel County have agreed that no single municipality should be permitted to control the region.

At the same time representation by population is desirable because population relates to assessment and financial responsibility. As proposed by the province the limitation of Mississauga's representation to 49 per cent voting control is not compatible with the concept of representation by population.

South Peel, with presently 66 per cent of the population is forced to disenfranchise its citizens in order not to acquire more than 49 per cent control (or 10 regional councillors out of a total of 21 councillors plus a chairman for the region).

The disproportionate representation for South Peel could lead to two possible results, either of which will create basic problems for the Peel Region.

Either South Peel with its 49 per cent voting power will for most purposes effectively control the Region thus defeating the basic concept of no domination by one area, or, public and political pressures will eventually insist on increasing the representation for South Peel in order to equal the financial responsibility—again defeating the no domination concept.

P.A.G.G. therefore proposes that the number of municipalities be increased to four by dividing South Peel into two units which will permit equitable representation by population without the domination of the region by any one municipality.

It is no secret that Streetsville has no appetite for a shotgun marriage with Mississauga. This is accordingly suggested as a good place to center a municipality west of the Credit River and including Streetsville, Erin Mills, Meadowvale and Clarkson for a projected population in year 2001 in the order of 250,000 to 300,000.

The three heavily urbanized centres in Central and Southeast and Southwest Peel would then have about 30 per cent of the population each with sufficient diversity of interest to ensure that no measures could be approved by the region that did not have a wide measure of support in the region.

CONCLUSION

This brief will be open to discussion tomorrow night (Thursday) at the meeting on regional government sponsored by P.A.G.G. at Cawthra Park Secondary School. The Speakers will include Phil Givens, M.P.P., Mike Cassidy, M.P.P., and Bob Williams, Reeve of Chinguacousy. The meeting will be chaired by Herb Breithaupt. It begins at 7:30 p.m.

All interested residents of Peel County are cordially invited.



PAGG members suggest that Streetsville (above) join with Meadowvale, Erin Mills and Clarkson as a fourth regional municipality. The citizen's group is also lobbying for full time regional councillors. (Times photo by Ron Pozzer).

'Three borough region has whole county in mind'

Mississauga Reeve Lou Parsons has been a leading proponent of regionalism for Peel since his first tenure as County warden in 1971. As warden for a second consecutive year in 1972 he guided county council through a series of proposals on regional government.

BY LOU PARSONS

PAGG has expressed its fundamental agreement with the concept of regional government. It has stated the classic arguments for regionalism and added: PAGG endorses and subscribes to the soundness of these claims." Its brief, however, raises certain fundamental philosophical points of disagreement with the actual "Proposal for Local Government Reform in the Area West of Metropolitan Toronto."

"These questions centre on the concept of "representation," and deal with basic ideas or proposals which I should like to comment on separately. They are the concept of the "full time" regional councillor and the payment of a full salary for such a councillor, size of wards (people—representative ratio), "representation by population" at the region level and role of citizens' groups.

The ideal of the full-time councillor cutting all business ties and conflicts of interest and devoting full time to the concerns of the electorate is not new. It is constantly debated in all government circles, not just local government, because it applies equally to MP's and MPP's.

The argument that a vast majority of working and professional people are automatically excluded from public office applies equally to members elected to Ottawa, Queen's Park or Brampton. But the idea of the man who resigns his job to become an elected representative founders on the immovable obstacle of practical economic reality.

In our present society the person who steps aside from his job for two years, may not have one when he tries to return. In many areas of work the problems of loss of

seniority, pension plan, and assorted fringe benefits are involved, written into union—agreements and provincial legislation.

In other businesses or occupations, the sheer pace of economic growth or the development of a farm or business make a three, or four or six year hiatus untenable. PAGG's statement that the full-time councillors should be obliged to "divest themselves of active participation in businesses or organizations which represent demands on their time" would surely disqualify more people than those "disqualified" under the present system.



Lou Parsons

What organizations do we demand our ideal, Simon-pure representative to give up? The Federation of Agriculture? hospital board?, church organization?, service club?, lodge?, or credit union? Certainly all of these may represent considerable demands on their time.

Such a provision would effectively disqualify working farmers, (a crucial factor in North Peel), for example; it would be impossible for such a person to withdraw from his business. It would also legislate against younger people who have

heavy family financial responsibilities and who are in the early stages of establishing their careers.

It is, of course, much easier for a man of 60 with his financial base secure and his children all through university and self-supporting, to "renounce the world" and accept \$20,000 a year to be a full-time representative, than it is for one with four kids still in elementary school and one starting high school. It is much easier for a Mel Lastman to "cut his ties" and accept \$20,000.00 a year, than for Joe Smith, young teacher or lawyer or salesman.

Surely, there is a deeper philosophical question at stake here. The entire representative system of democratic government as evolved in the British tradition especially, centres on the concept of the amateur in politics. "Amateur" in the precise and best meaning of that word being the man or woman who participates in government as a non-professional solely because of his own sense of interest in and responsibility for society.

It is based on a clear-cut line between the legislative and administrative function—the elected representative and the civil servant. It is a concept deeply imbedded in our tradition—in the jury system, for instance, where as G.K. Chesterton pointed out in his famous essay, 12 very ordinary, seemingly non-competent, non-professional, non-legal people picked at random from the populace, nevertheless are a better guarantee of justice than a more professional group would be.

No one has ever argued that a democratic system of representative or responsible government is totally inefficient—precisely because of this "amateur" concept it may be slow and inefficient at times (but it is free) it is the best system for guaranteeing the fundamental rights of the citizenry.

Surely the man who has resigned his job and "cut his bridges" is more dependent, not less, on political expediency. He has to be re-elected in order to keep his paycheck. Like the American Sheriff or

District Attorney who has to be elected to office, he may compromise on short-term issues and delay hard decisions because of the sword of Damocles poised over his neck—the next election. If a person has his business or farm or job waiting for him, he is not in reality more free, rather than less free?

One further argument on this point—surely the person removed from the business or professional world is not an ideal politician. How can he be truly sensitive to the needs and problems of his constituents, or to the economic and social realities around him? Think of the criticism leveled against "career politicians" who went from the university or the civil service to elected office. Some of it is unfair but some of it is valid—there is an "ivory-tower" problem—the problem of the intellectual dilettante or "professional do-gooder," without roots in the real working life of the community.

I feel that most municipal voters would not accept the principle of paying salaries to full-time councillors and that any plebiscite on such an issue would be defeated.

The question of size of wards—one representative serving 20,000 people—is not contentious, and I would agree that this figure is reasonable. But a developing area such as Peel County, the size of the wards

must of necessity be kept somewhat flexible as population densities vary and the question of neighbourhood identity in ward boundaries during a transitional period is obviously important and certainly open to negotiation.

The most difficult issue raised by PAGG draft is, of course, that of representation by population in the Peel Region—the draft states flatly that "South Peel, with presently 66 per cent of the population is forced to disenfranchise its citizens in order not to acquire more than 40 per cent control."

This is an issue as old as Peel County, and it has been wrestled with by many generations of Peel County politicians both north and south. Over the past (dozen?) years, the proportion of votes at the County for the urban south has been increased from 14.8 per cent of 27 votes to 25 per cent of 58 votes; Regional Government will provide 45.5 per cent of 22 votes, but it has never gone over the 25 per cent. Several years ago, Bob Speck stood up in County Council and vowed that he would never accept for Mississauga more than 50 per cent of the votes.

There are many sound reasons for this. At the local level, true rep by pop is crucial—but in any "federation" or "area" government there must be what we might

call "minority rights" guaranteed. In the western democracies generally this has evolved as a basic principle. In the U.S. Senate, the two Senators from Alaska and Rhode Island have as much voting power as the two senators from New York or California. In Canada, the rights of P.E. Island and Yukon M.P.'s are guarded in any redistribution system, against the clamorous claims of urbanized Ontario. In Ontario, the north must have its voice in spite of a sparse population.

Peel County is a region—a 2nd tier government. The rural north does have something to say to the urban south. Many a Mississauga or Port Credit councillor has gone storming up to Brampton to County Council for the first time, vowing to show these farmers from Caledon and Albion and Chinguacousy a thing or two. It has been a universal experience of these people that they have altered their opinion. They have also been forced, simply because they did not "have the votes" to bulldoze their own ideas through, to re-examine and restructure their ideas with the whole County in mind. In many more cases than not, this has resulted in better decisions, better legislation.

If, as PAGG suggests, South Peel has two local governments with 30 per cent votes each in the region, that means that in the Peel Region whatever the people south of Highway 407 want, they'll get it with their automatic 60 per cent. But with one municipality holding 40 per cent at least one person in the two other municipalities will have to agree that a concept or plan is good for the region.

Conversely, either North or Central Peel will have to have some support from the South for any project they propose. In most cases, this guarantees a regional appeal—that a proposal makes sense for the whole region, not just one part of it. In terms of the region's sphere of legislation—planning, health, roads, finance, social services, police, this kind of broad north-south consensus is crucial.

Streetsville will appeal

STREETSVILLE—Labelling a Friday hearing by the OMB a "farce", Streetsville town council has decided to appeal the decision to the provincial cabinet.

The municipal board has turned down the town's request for a referendum on the regional government issue.

Reeve Robert Weyle told council that the OMB had made up its mind before the town's case was heard. He called the exercise a farce and said the OMB had wasted everyone's time in its day-long deliberation.

Streetsville wants the cabinet to repeal the decision by March 21. This would allow other courses of action if the cabinet upholds the decision. Peel's municipalities must make their response to the three-unit region plan by March 31.

Reeve Weyle was pessimistic about the town's chances of getting the decision reversed. The province opposed the referendum at Friday's meeting.