

# Halton Regional Chair Gary Carr will seek re-election

■ By Tim Foran  
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

Halton regional chair and former minor pro hockey player Gary Carr passed on something this week he was told by George Armstrong in 1975, when Carr was a teenage goalie being coached by the former Maple Leafs captain on the Memorial Cup-winning Marlboros.

"He said, 'You're only as good as your last game'," recalled the long-time politician.

Carr is now hoping his last game, Wednesday's council session, during which he and the council he leads, approved a 2010 budget with a tax and water rate freeze, as well as an update to the municipality's official plan, is good enough to take to the campaign trail next year.

"I will be running in the next municipal election for regional chair," Carr confirmed in an exclusive interview with the *Oakville Beaver*.

After years of serving in provincial and federal politics, which are the subject of a book he is in the midst of writing, Carr said he has thus far enjoyed immensely the three years he has completed in his first term as a municipal politician and hopes to be



**Halton Regional Chair Gary Carr**

able to continue in his role following next November's election.

Carr said he believes there have also been other successes during his term besides budgetary matters.

"Two years in a row *Maclean's* magazine has named us one of the two safest communities in Canada," he said.

He also pointed to the success of Halton's recycling initiatives — the introduction of the GreenCart program has improved landfill diversion to 60 per cent from 40 per cent.

And he said the introduction of a new Natural Heritage System designation in the Regional official plan will protect the environment and agriculture.

However, he didn't deny fiscal responsibility would be one of the things he'll voice as a success to voters.

"I think it's very important," Carr said. "It's really a team effort," he added, crediting staff and council for supporting what he feels is part of his mandate.

Over the past four budgets including 2010, that team has effectively cut in half the tax and water rate hikes seen in the previous three-year term under former chair Joyce Savoline. But that doesn't mean Carr and his team have been tightwads. In fact, it's the opposite.

The Region's overall budget has jumped to \$1.1 billion in 2010 from \$759 million in 2006, Savoline's last year, with the municipality buoyed by more property tax dollars coming in from the industries, businesses and residents locating in Halton over the past few years.

However, the percentage of the budget coming from property taxes and money paid by residents and

businesses on water bills has dropped to 42 per cent from 50 per cent over the same time period.

So who's picking up the slack, if not local taxpayers? The two groups Carr has harangued for money since arriving at Regional headquarters — developers and the upper levels of government are major contributors to the Region's coffers.

Ironically, Carr, who was a sometimes less than loyal member of the Mike Harris-led Conservative government in the late 1990s, has spent much of his first term pushing for the undoing of two of that government's major initiatives — the Province's Development Charges Act of 1997 and the downloading of some social assistance services to the municipalities.

On the latter point, the current provincial government has partially reversed direction — to which Carr was quick to provide credit — by phasing in the uploading of welfare and disability costs from communities and getting rid of the requirement for 905 municipalities to provide financial assistance to the social services sector in Toronto.

With developers, Carr has also been successful in his view.

Following an often bitter battle the past year, major residential developers in Milton and north Oakville agreed recently to give Halton Region an extra \$8,000 per house, which might be recouped, but without interest from future developers. The Region managed to wring the money out of the homebuilders by requiring the payment before the municipality would agree to provide water and sewer pipes to their new homes.

To many developers, the charge was unfair because the majority of the money is going to cover development charge exemptions given by the Province and Halton to other sectors such as farms, places of worship, and school boards. To Carr, growth is growth and somebody's got to pay for it besides taxpayers.

"We have finally got it to where growth is paying for itself," he said.

That attitude isn't shared by all his colleagues however.

Burlington Mayor Cam Jackson, and Milton Mayor Gord Krantz have both questioned whether development-related charges in Halton are getting too high to keep new homes affordable or to attract industry, the taxes which help keep property taxes for residents low.

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