

A new way of doing business

As a new school year approaches, children, parents, teachers and education workers alike begin to prepare for a new beginning—an opportunity to learn and grow. For us at the Region of Peel, this is a time to follow in our strong tradition of leadership and strategic planning; a time to focus on how we will continue to deliver on our commitment to meet future demands on our programs and services.

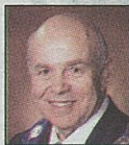
Regional council and staff have spent the past 18 months taking stock of our 34 years as the Region of Peel and looking at how we serve our community. As part of the process, we identified a number of long and short-term priorities to help us remain sustainable and to ensure a more liveable Peel into the future. You will hear more in the coming months.

One of the priorities I shared in my last column was the development of the region's fifth Strategic Plan, subsequently adopted by council in May. Guiding both council and the organization, the Strategic Plan will continue to help Peel achieve its vision of being a healthy, vibrant and safe community that values its diversity and quality of life.

The goals of the Strategic Plan reach far and wide: deliver citizen-focused services; protect, enhance and restore the environment; provide human services that meet current and changing needs; manage the impacts of growth on the community and regional services; and, strive for excellence as a municipal government.

I can tell you we are well under way to making enhancements that will help us achieve these goals and provide programs and services that are more accessible and re-

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sponsive to you.

For example, we recently amalgamated the region's call centres into one—so whether you are calling about a TransHelp ride, your water bill or child care, our customer service representatives are ready to answer your questions and address your concerns with just one call. We are also making our services more accessible through the expansion of Peel Regional headquarters.

You may have noticed major construction at 10 Peel Centre Dr. The new joint facility will save the region money in the long term and will bring together essential services to offer you a “one-stop shop” for services.

Meeting your needs in the most cost-efficient manner is the region's top priority. As we know from Census 2006 results, Peel has the youngest population in the GTA, with the lowest median age at 35.6 years, Peel's senior population increased by nearly double the growth rate of the total population and Peel was among the top three fastest growing GTA municipalities.

We anticipate these trends to continue and as a result, demands across the service spectrum to increase proportionately.

The impact of growth on the community and regional services presents some interesting challenges with respect to the 2008 budget. For example, considering popula-

tion and age trends in Peel, we must strive to find the best way to accommodate such services as child care and long-term care needs without dramatic tax impacts—and those are only two of the essential services provided to residents.

Some other services under budget review include roads, GO transit, paramedics, energy, social housing and public health. The region has also undertaken a review of the Development Charges bylaw in order to ensure the funds are available to pay for growth.

Development charges help finance capital projects related to growth for services such as water, wastewater, roads and policing. The charges come from new developments and are one way Peel manages the impact of growth on the taxpayer. It is expected that Peel's development charge rates will rise, but even with an increase, Peel's rates will remain very competitive with other GTA regions.

Our fiscal responsibility is a point of pride. We are debt-free, have a Triple-A credit rating, and are always working hard to provide high-quality services for your tax dollar. Our standing as an award-winning municipal government is also a point of pride. We have been recognized by the National Quality Institute with the Canada Awards for Excellence Gold Trophy for our commitment to organizational excellence, quality, and continuous improvement.

We look forward to working with our community partners and you to continue caring for this community, while earning your trust and confidence in the way we do business.

Emil Kolb is Chair of the Region of Peel.