

# Orangeville Citizen

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The humblest Citizen of all the land, when clad in armour of a righteous cause, is stronger than all the hosts of Error. - WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

## The real scandal lies in eHealth's very existence

AS WE SEE IT, the real scandal in connection with eHealth Ontario has little to do with the \$1 billion the Auditor General says has been wasted by it and its predecessor over the past decade. Rather, it concerns their very existence.

Without a doubt, the agencies were involved in a terribly important area, trying to bring health records into the age of the Internet.

But the task is one that should be undertaken nationally or internationally, not provincially.

The importance of electronics as a communications tool has long since been established, with real property offering an excellent example of what can be accomplished.

For many years, Ontario lawyers haven't had to go to land registry offices and pore over huge books full of handwritten entries in an effort to determine whether a property can be bought or sold without risk of someone asserting a lien.

And newspapers have come a long way from the days when reporters hand-wrote their stories, editors hand-wrote the editing and typesetters set the type by hand or on a linotype.

In fact, a 1,000-word story that once would have taken an hour to write and more hours to set into type can today be written in minutes, placed on an electronic page in an instant and the page itself sent to the printer in very few minutes. A community newspaper that once required a staff of 10 to put out an eight-page weekly will today expect half that many to produce a paper the size of this week's issue.

Yet the sad truth of the matter is that at least some doctors still make handwritten entries in their patients' files, and while some local doctors and modern hospitals like the Headwaters

Health Care Centre have electronic filing, we still have a long way to go before a Dufferin resident who falls ill in the Maritimes or Florida will be able to go to a local doctor and have him or her call up their vital health information from a website containing the files of all Ontario residents, let alone of all 300-million-plus North Americans.

Wikipedia defines the electronic health record as "an evolving concept defined as a longitudinal collection of electronic health information about individual patients or populations. It is a record in digital format that is capable of being shared across different health care settings, by being embedded in a network-connected, enterprise-wide information system. Such records may include a whole range of data in comprehensive or summary form, including demographics, medical history, medication and allergies, immunization status, laboratory test results, radiology images, billing information."

The purpose is to establish a complete record of patient encounters that automates and streamlines workflow in health care settings and increases safety through evidence-based decision-making, quality management, and legible reporting of outcomes.

U.S. President Barack Obama has made electronic health records a major element of his proposals for health care reform, and it's about the only proposal he has made that has not yet been assailed by his conservative critics.

However, we haven't yet seen how the President hopes to accomplish the feat of having all U.S. doctors and hospitals keep records (past, present and future) in a compatible format that can be made instantly accessible during a health emergency.

As for Canada, Alberta appears to be the only province that's close to having

comprehensive electronic health records, and after a decade of two Ontario agencies looking at the challenge there's considerable doubt the province will have the e-records by 2015. All we've seen done to date is a pilot project in which Collingwood is one of two communities where all health records are being made electronic. As for progress elsewhere in the province, our suspicion is that the recent scandal about wasteful spending of taxpayers' dollars and the widespread use of untendered contracts has done little more than eliminate what little progress was being made.

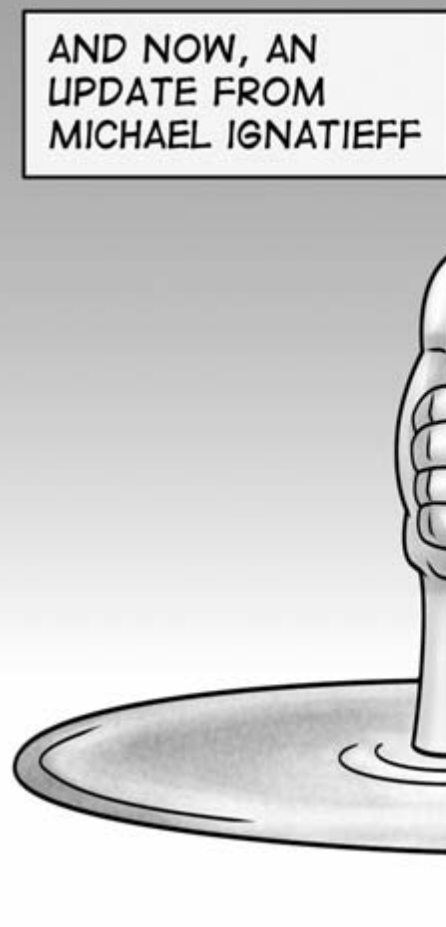
Clearly, the need now is to have the federal government take a leading role, in the context of its responsibilities in the area of interprovincial trade and commerce, in developing a single system for electronic collection and storage of all Canadians' health records.

Our preference would be to see the Harper government form a task force containing representatives of the provinces, medical professions and hospitals with a mandate to recommend creation of a federal-provincial agency responsible for collecting and storing electronic health records, all of which would be compiled using compatible forms of software.

Ideally, the Canadian task force would work closely with the Obama administration to ensure full compatibility between the two countries' health-care databases.

The objective would be to have all current patient assessments and treatments done electronically by 2012, with historic records being converted to electronic formats within the next three years, whatever the cost.

With the proper commitment, the savings in both costs and lives would be enormous.



## Dump question poses an anomaly

HOWEVER REFRESHING IT MAY BE that municipalities owning old-style dumps in Dufferin are being asked, once again, to consider terms for ceding waste management authority and/or the dumps to the county, we feel safe in predicting the concept will go where it has always gone before: nowhere.

Going back to the beginning of discussions about waste management in Dufferin almost a quarter century ago, only Orangeville, East Garafraxa and the then-village of Grand Valley were without a dump.

Subsequently, two of the six dumps were forced to close. First, it was Shelburne's, as the town had expanded beyond its approved limits. Then it was the East Luther dump near Luther Lake, as the Grand River Conservation Authority would not renew the township's lease on the site.

Of the four remaining dumps, Mulmur's is on permeable soil, Mono's has a leachate problem, but Amaranth's and Melancthon's appear to be in good condition.

In reality, though, how safe are they? We can only say the certificates of approval predate cur-

rent requirements for landfill sites. Either the current regulations are an unneeded nuisance or the dumps approved under old regulations and subject to "grandfathering" are unsafe.

If the latter is the case, eventual enforced closure is inevitable. Is there a valid reason why a municipal council owning a dump that's bound to be closed should not consider its options before it has been ordered to close the dump?

We are bemused by the recorded 16-2 vote at county council on the innocuous topic of finding out what terms would apply for the county to take over waste management. The only councillors opposed were from Amaranth, and one of those is a professional environmentalist.

It is a fair assessment that environmental concerns on waste management in Dufferin have always taken a back seat to political expedience. We don't see that changing as municipal elections loom.

Even if most of the responses to the county's inquiry are favourable, a county takeover would require a triple majority, giving Amaranth and Melancthon an effective veto and preserving the current waste management hodge-podge.

## CITIZEN MAILBOX

### HST said to threaten home affordability

Starting July 1, 2010 Ontarians can expect to pay a harmonized sales tax (HST) rate of 13% on a long list of goods and services that were previously exempt from the 8% Provincial Sales Tax (PST). While the impact of the tax will be felt by all Ontarians, the province's 3 million homeowners and the thousands who buy and sell a home every year will be hit particularly hard by this latest tax grab.

As real estate professionals, REALTORS(r) know how important the dream of homeownership is to Ontario families. Unfortunately, thanks to the forthcoming HST, that dream is going to become much more expensive. After July 1, 2010, every residential real

estate transaction in Ontario will face a significant tax increase.

Specifically, home buyers and sellers can expect to pay 8% more on legal fees, appraisals, real estate commissions, condo fees, home inspection fees, moving costs and the provincial government's recently introduced system of mandatory home energy audits. According to the Ontario Real Estate Association (OREA) Ontarians will pay, on average, an additional \$1,449 in new taxes on their next residential real estate transaction.

If the new taxes on real estate transactions are not bad enough, a HST will add 8% more tax on a series of home related costs. Specifically, a

HST will add hundreds, potentially thousands of dollars in additional tax on utility bills, such as gas, electricity and home heating fuel, on home renovation labour, the cost of lawn upkeep or landscaping and the cost of snow removal. Moreover, a HST will increase the cost of living with 8% more tax on gasoline, personal and professional services, meals under \$4, dry cleaning, cab fares, magazine subscriptions, plane tickets, vitamins and cell phone charges.

When added together, the impact of a HST on Ontario family's disposable income will be considerable. In short, a HST will reduce the people of Ontario's quality of life by taking more of their hard earned

money to fund government initiatives.

While the Government of Ontario plans to compensate homeowners by offering sales tax transition cheques and modest income tax reductions, these measures will in no way offset this new tax. A one-time payment of \$1000 (for a family of four) and a modest \$368 reduction in income taxes will do very little to offset the burden of an 8% tax increase on a litany of items in perpetuity.

Help our profession oppose this latest tax grab. Write to your MPP and tell them that Ontarians do not need higher taxes on homeownership.

Brenda Koley, President  
Orangeville and District  
Real Estate Board

### Readers give opinions on Melancthon meeting

On Monday I attended the first ever public meeting hosted by Melancthon council about the proposed Highland's mine project.

As someone who grew up in Toronto, lives in Oakville, and spends weekends at my farm in Melancthon, I was troubled and shocked by the attitude of Mayor Deb Fawcett.

I am fully aware that Melancthon is a small rural farming community. But for anyone who is accustomed to city politics, the mayor's treatment of the public process was most disconcerting.

Mayor Fawcett officiated the meeting. She told us at the meeting's commencement that there would be one half hour

devoted to questions, questions could be about process only, and that the meeting would end promptly at 9PM. She was doing her best to control things.

When 9PM rolled around, there were still several citizens standing and waiting to ask questions. Mayor Fawcett looked at the clock and announced that the person speaking would be the last speaker of the evening. She was greeted by a resounding echo of boos and shouts from the audience.

Clearly, we the citizens wanted more information.

Mayor Fawcett kept saying that the panel of government officials needed to get home as it was late. Maybe she needs to

remember that the citizens in the audience pay her salary and those of all the government employees who "needed to get home".

One wonders what her priority is. Don't put the interests of government employees over your citizens. Who will listen to your scared and worried voters and taxpayers, about what is taking place in their town with respect to a potential mine that could destroy farmland and empty everyone's well dry?

In my opinion, the mayor's attitude toward the public in this situation was not appropriate. She needs to take a course called Mayorship 101 which involves understanding why she was elected — to listen and represent her constituents, not to shut them up and hope they will go away.

Why would council finally decide to hold a public meeting and then limit the questions and the time?

Three years ago in Oakville there was a major concern from residents about tree cutting of an old Oak Tree. To some this may seem insignificant but to resident concerns became council's top priority. The mayor at the time, a very savvy woman who understood the public process, entertained delegations on this subject for several nights in a row. Many of the delegations went until midnight. Now that is public process in action!

Elected officials in Melancthon need to understand that citizens will have opinions whether you want to hear them or not. Isn't better to tune in and listen, than turn a blind eye

to public concern?

Margaret Mercer  
Melancthon Township  
—o—

There were some interesting revelations at the Honeywood public meeting last week. It was arranged by the Melancthon Council to layout the processes that will be followed once the impending quarry application from The Highland Companies is received by the township.

The Highland Companies promises to rehabilitate the quarry, they will blast into the rock below the soil, back into "agricultural uses". This seems to be a central idea of their proposal, and since most people know or expect that "pits" will be restored somehow, the inclusion of this concept in their plan is somewhat mollifying. The timeline for the quarry operation and this rehabilitation has yet to be revealed, but we might expect each cycle of "dig/repair" to take 6-10 years.

Needless to say, there will be a lot of years behind us before we can see any positive results if there are any.

Besides the fact that the 200 foot plus hole in the ground will forever have to be emptied of the water that will try to fill it up, we have the issue of the viability and sustainability of farming down in the hole. Since there are no successful examples of rehabilitation of this type and scale to look toward for reassurance, the Melancthon quarry would be a massive experiment. One

- Please turn to page

### 'Romance of the rails' still lives on

The weather was typical of this October — cool and wet, albeit not as cold as we're finding it this week — and the fall colours were barely discernible. But all aboard the Credit Valley Explorer were clearly enjoying the experimental two-hour run down to Inglewood.

Normally, the local tour train travels all the way to the north end of Brampton, at what used to be Snelgrove village, and that Saturday, it had already made such a run between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

But that day, the train headed out again with what appeared to be a full load for what was billed as a fall afternoon colour tour. We boarded shortly after 3:20 and returned to Orangeville at 5:30. (And a check on the website [creditvalleyexplorer.com](http://creditvalleyexplorer.com) yesterday showed that a similar run will take place this Saturday, with a few tickets still available.)

The "premium" tour was worth every penny, including "high tea" (a selection of beverages and tasty small sandwiches) when we were southbound and dessert on the return trip.

Anyone taking the Explorer will have to be impressed by at least three things: the quality of service, the information gleaned from a colourful brochure and the voice announcements, and the incredible scenery on what is appropriately promoted as "Southern Ontario's most scenic rail tour."

Equally impressive is the excellent condition of the rolling stock — three freshly painted coaches that were built for Canadian National Railways in the 1950s at about the same time Canadian Pacific was introducing the stainless steel Canadian for transcontinental trips and replacing its steam trains with Dayliners, self-propelled diesel coaches capable of doing 70 miles an hour on straight-aways and rounding curves a lot faster than traditional trains.

The three Explorer coaches all once ran between Montreal and Vancouver on the CNR's Super Continental. After the two national railways abandoned passenger service and Via Rail opted to use the CP equipment on CN lines for the sole surviving transcontinental, it sold many of the coaches to the British Columbia Railway, which briefly used them for its Royal Hudson steam train excursions between North Vancouver and Squamish, B.C.

The Explorer's operator, Cando Contracting Ltd., has bought or leased the equipment and kept the coaches in truly marvellous condition. The same can be said of the roadbed, which seems to be in excellent condition — probably much better than it was in the final years the line between Orangeville and Streetsville was owned by CP Rail.

In fact, the trip and the popularity of the Explorer tours should be enough to make our politicians at least consider the possibility of using the local railway as a demonstration of the potential of restoring passenger rail service on Southern Ontario's few surviving branch lines.

Insurance stands as the main reason short-line operators haven't tried to operate anything more than occasional tour trains, and the same barrier stands in the way of the Explorer making any trips into Toronto.

However, the incremental cost of insurance for daily trips between Orangeville and Toronto's Union Station would be minimal for either Via Rail or GO Transit, and one has to wonder what the response would be to a suggestion by Orangeville Council that the two agencies participate in a pilot project that would see the Explorer make weekday runs into Toronto.

Granted, such a project would likely require some track improvements to permit speeds above the current 30 m.p.h. limit for the Explorer. But even the existing parking lot and train station would suffice for such an experiment, which would offer commuters a transfer to and from the Georgetown GO train service and have the potential of an express run between Streetsville and the Kipling station on GO's Milton line.

Assuming that the 28-km trip to Brampton would take about 50 minutes, a connection with the 7:23 a.m. express GO train would mean that passengers who left Orangeville at 6:30 would make it to Union Station before 8 a.m.

Although that's already possible using the existing GO bus service, the trip by rail would be more attractive, particularly during the winter, without the congestion now found on Hurontario Street south of Mayfield Road and the delays involved in picking up and dispatching Brampton passengers.

If nothing else, such a pilot project would demonstrate whether Via and/or GO Transit ought to invest in modern versions of the Dayliner that would make such trips in far less time operating to and from Toronto from places like Collingwood, Alliston, Guelph and replace GO's double-decker trains in off-peak hours.

Who knows? Southern Ontario's commuters might find what's meant by the phrase, "romance of the rails."

