



**Presentation to the Hamilton City Council (check against delivery)  
Monday February 28, 2011**

**Delivered by**

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**On behalf of**

**The Flamborough, Hamilton and Stoney Creek Chambers of Commerce.**

**ATTACHMENT:**

**Letter from the Boards of the Flamborough, Hamilton and Stoney Creek  
Chambers**

**The three Chambers in Hamilton have been working together for several years using the HMCOE Principle that stands for "Hamilton - Many Communities, One Economy". This Principle has brought our Chambers closer together and has proven to be very effective in developing joint policies on very contentious issues. We have also found this Principle to be very helpful in healing the wounds of amalgamation and in developing policies that benefit the City as a Whole as well as the individual communities that make up our great city. We have used this principle as a key element in developing our joint recommendations on area rating.**

**The purposes of this presentation are to highlight several important elements that should be considered when discussing the area rating debate, to identify key problems with the Citizen's Forum proposal and to provide specific recommendations for developing a new area rating policy.**

**Each of these observations / recommendations in this presentation was presented to the Citizen's Forum but for whatever reason, these observations / recommendations were not incorporated into the recommendations that have come from the Forum. We believe that this information is critical if we are to introduce a new area rating policy that contributes to City Building rather a new policy that further divides our city.**

## **KEY AREA RATING ISSUES**

- 1. The area rating debate is much bigger than area rating. One of the most important objectives of any change in area rating policy is the introduction of changes that start to “heal the wounds of amalgamation” and that help citizens to work collaboratively towards building economic wealth and a compassionate society. In our opinion, the proposed Citizen’s Forum changes ignore this important reality and will do little to achieve this very important objective. We believe that the current recommendations of the Citizen’s Forum will likely further divide our city.**
- 2. The introduction of a Citizen’s Forum was a good start but only the first step towards comprehensive and effective public consultation. Broad based consultation across the city with the goal of public buy-in is the logical next step in developing a new area rating policy and must include the willingness to make changes to any proposed new area rating policy that are reflective of the feedback received from the consultation process.**
- 3. We encourage Council to investigate the feasibility / desirability of moving towards a “Geographic Service Zone” Model where residents and businesses pay area rated services based on the services they receive and use. We believe this approach will be much more acceptable to residents and businesses across the city, will reduce the tensions between communities and minimize inequities.**
- 4. The three Chambers in Hamilton recommended the following to the Citizen’s Forum: benchmarking to neighbouring communities and keeping track of access and usage of services. These strategies would encourage minimizing costs.**
- 5. Other major services should be considered for service rating where the differences in cost and usage across the city are significant. Added benefits of this approach will likely be a balancing out of tax increases / decreases associated with changes to area rating and the introduction of a fairer and more equitable “service oriented approach” to area rating. A full analysis of service costs and usage of all major city services would need to be done before deciding on which services should be area rated.**

## **CONCERNS WITH THE CITIZEN'S FORUM RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are some of the key concerns that we have with the Citizen's Forum Recommendations.

1. The current recommendations by staff and the Citizen's Council will do little to reduce the negative feelings towards area rated services and the tensions that exist across the city. In fact, they will likely add fuel to the de-amalgamation debate. For example, the recommendation of the Citizen's Forum to remove the snowplowing option for Ancaster in our opinion will not be received well by the residents of Ancaster and will only serve to further inflame the de-amalgamation debate.
2. Cost / benefits to each of the former municipalities in the City is not included as part of the Citizen's Forum report. Without this information and the implications of this information to the taxpayers, we believe that it would be very unwise to accept and / or implement the recommendations of the Citizen's Forum.
3. The current recommendations of the staff or Citizen's Forum do little to find ways to encourage taxpayers to help minimize costs and to keep costs in line with surrounding communities.
4. When considering street lighting and sidewalks for area rating, we would ask the Council to keep in mind that many suburbs do not have sidewalks and therefore some consideration should be given to service rating street lighting and sidewalks differently than inner city, more densely populated areas.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE THREE HAMILTON CHAMBERS**

The Flamborough, Hamilton and Stoney Creek Chambers recommend that City Council and Staff:

1. Assess impact of any proposed changes on all former municipalities and revise plans in such a way that any proposed changes becomes a catalyst for "healing the wounds of amalgamation" rather than serving to further inflame the de-amalgamation debate.
2. Complete a Cost / Usage / Benefit analysis of all major services in all former municipalities and reflect the findings in any future area rating policy before any decisions are made on area rating changes. Service (area) rating should be considered where significant differences in service levels / usage exist.

- 3. Assess the feasibility / desirability of introducing a Geographic Service Zone Model before any decisions are made on future area rating policy.**
- 4. Consider benchmarking area rated services to surrounding communities and area rating strategies that encourage taxpayers and city staff to minimize costs of area rated services.**
- 5. Incorporate further public consultation and “buy-in” before decisions on changes to area rating are approved. The consultation process should include a willingness of staff and Council to make changes to proposed new policies that are reflective of the feedback received from the consultation process.**

**We respectfully submit these observations and recommendations to the Council for consideration. We stand ready to discuss this information with staff and Council and to assist the Council and staff in any way we can in assessing the merits of these observations / recommendations.**