

McHale would use courts to help county

by Bill Jackson - The Regional

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Ward three candidate Gary Mchale believes that county council should use the justice system to give developers assurance and make up for millions of dollars in lost property taxes.

Before fielding a question at a candidates meeting last week pertaining to the future development of another vehicular bridge crossing over the Grand River, Mchale referred to the elephant in the room.

"We can't avoid talking about the fact that we have an economic problem because of Douglas Creek Estates," he said. "We have an economic problem because of how the OPP and McGuinty handled the situation."

Mattamy Homes proposed to build thousands of houses and a \$20 million dollar bridge at McClung Road, but pulled out due to native protests, he charged.

After mayoral candidate and Coun. Buck Sloat told the audience that county staff was working to bring developers back to the area, Mchale asked the obvious rhetorical question: Why haven't they?

"We all know the answer to that," he said.

"We have to convince developers that if you come here, it's safe to do business here."

Mayor Marie Trainer spoke of 0% tax increases when the area was growing steadily, years ago.

Mchale said that he'd like to get back to the days when spending increases were offset by growth, but that instead people are currently paying more taxes through no fault of their own.

The well-known local activist said that the county must sue the Ontario Government to recoup lost property taxes.

If another illegal protest or road blockade were to occur, he'd give police an ultimatum.

Signs posted in the Caledonia area forecasted a Haudenosaunee toll road in 2011. If an illegal toll booth were established, the first step for a mayor or councillor would be to contact various levels of governments to try to work behind the scenes to get the natives to remove it, Mchale said.

"I would give the OPP 24 hours to lay charges and remove the natives or I would be in the courthouse the very next day. If within 28 hours the OPP had not removed the toll booth, then the local inspector would be informed that he will be facing criminal charges unless he does his duty in this area. It is an illegal act for the OPP not to do their duty."

Mchale pointed out that a new book soon to be released by Globe and Mail reporter Christie Blatchford reveals what senior law enforcement officials have been saying behind the scenes about Douglas Creek Estates.

"OPP officers are telling us, finally admitting that what happened was illegal," McHale said, holding up a copy of Blatchford's *Helpless*, Caledonia's nightmare of fear and anarchy, and how the law failed all of us.

"We as residents who pay our taxes for police services, we cannot allow the OPP not to do their job. Within our democracy, within our system of law, the mayor is a peace officer... So we have to make sure that the council maintains peace within this community."

However, the candidates running against McHale disagree with his stance.

"This has nothing to do with the OPP," according to incumbent Ward Three Coun. Craig Grice.

"The OPP, they cannot know when someone will be radical enough to do what they do. I wish it was not true, I wish that someone would not go out of their way to go after a community to try and push themselves on someone, but that is absolutely no different than we have in regular day life, every single day. We meet adversity, we deal with it."

Grice spoke of several community initiatives he's been a part of, such as plans for streetscape upgrades and the Caledonia Marketing Collective's Get It Card that gives shoppers discounts at area businesses to spur commerce.

Candidate Rob Duncan said he's staying optimistic. He said the toll road signs were likely a ploy by aboriginals to put pressure on upper levels of government to expedite land claims.

"We don't have control over what other people are going to do," he said.

"I don't really think they're going to do it, but if they do, we'll cross that bridge when we get to it."

Bryan Barker, a retired police officer of 31 years, said he'd be lying if he made any promises pertaining to Douglas Creek Estates.

At the council level, when it comes to toll roads, smoke shacks and land occupations, "there's nothing we can do about that," he said.

Barker admitted to watching Caledonia go from one of the fastest growing communities in the country to a community with little or no development, but he believes the community has come through it.

"We've turned our adversity into strength and we're a better community. Now we need to turn our strength into opportunity..."

Barker said council needs to think outside the box to increase the tax base.

However, since his election campaign began, McHale said he's been trying not to make blanket statements about improving the local economy and has tried to come up with meaningful solutions instead.

"Where have the other people been for the last four-and-a-half-years?" he asked. "When it comes time for an election, people stand up and say an awful lot of things, but what have they actually done? I've worked behind the scenes daily. Since this election (campaign) started, I've been in court ten days. I don't tell everybody that. With the commitment I have made to this

community, without receiving a pay cheque, without having people pat me on the back on a regular basis, and certainly there are an awful lot of people who hate my guts, I am committed to you. There's no question about the fact that whatever I'm telling you, I'm going to do."

According to McHale, the upcoming election on Oct. 25 is about hope for economic development and the future.

He said council has done little to bring about meaningful change and has been working on banning household pets in the meantime. A new bylaw bans canaries and goldfish, in effect hindering local pet businesses.

"I started this election with the idea that Haldimand is open for business," McHale said. "I'd thank Mr. Sloat for repeating that phrase open for business several times in his message. He must be reading my lawn signs."

Other candidates pledged their commitment to bring the voice of residents forward.

"I don't have an axe to grind, I have a community to help find its way," said Grice.

"I know this community, I live this community. I've been part of this community for 41 years and a councillor for ten years of my 41."

Grice said that he has stood with residents at the barricades and has lived next to the Douglas Creek Estates occupation, reiterating his ongoing attempts to communicate with upper levels of government that, he conceded, have done little "of any substance" to help.

"If you do your job properly, you will make the connection to ensure that these things don't happen," he said.

McHale concluded, therefore, that Douglas Creek Estates should have never happened if Grice was doing his job in the first place. In his 2006 election literature, Grice was of the opinion that the OPP contract needed to be reviewed and amended.

"Moreover, for the residents of the Sixth Line and beyond Stirling St., our County, Provincial, Federal Governments, including the OPP must step up and protect them," Grice wrote. "Perhaps, this means major compensation, as currently rhetoric is getting old and they are being forgotten."

In Helpless, "People like Jason Clark and Ralph Luimes are quoted in the book with an interesting point of view," McHale noted.

"With all the talks that they did with the government, and the party lines, they came to the conclusion that until you play hardball with the province, you will get nothing. That's their own quote in the book..."

"You can change the provincial minds, you can change the federal minds, because in politics the squeaky wheel gets the grease, and I promise to be the squeaky wheel."