

# Expansionist Parsons gambles on

Peel County, Ont. D1

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M. Jones Jan. 9/74 Pg. 3 Peel County Bldg.

By FRANK TOUBY

By provincial appointment, Peel Region Chairman Lou Parsons won a three-year reprieve on his career as a local politician.

The 39-year-old Parsons entered Mississauga politics as a "reformer", winning a Ward 2 council seat in 1968.

The issue he won on was the need to provide more recreational facilities.

"There was also a lot of suspicion of people in office. I was one of six against the four members of the old council," he says.

Parsons was appointed by council to be reeve of Mississauga, following the death in April 1972 of former Mayor Robert Speck.

In that same year, Mississauga residents and ratepayer groups stepped up their activism against the development explosion which spattered more high-rise apartments and high-density developments across the town.

Their activism brought today's "reform" majority to the new city's 10-member council.

Parsons didn't run for office in that election and he concedes his chances of

winning election would have been slight.

A real estate man, Parsons was a strong pro-developer voice on town council. The image would have been an anathema to a political candidate on Oct. 1, 1973.

Appointment to the regional government chair saved Parsons a possible three-year wait in the therelands of local politics.

While his political star was rising in the eyes of the provincial government, Mississauga voters angry with town developments policies would probably have doused it.

Parsons is a power politician with strong connections in the provincial government which rules municipalities with an iron fist.

His strength is in back-room wheeling and dealing; he is a master negotiator and a hard compromiser. He does his home work, has privy to information from higher-up connections, and speaks with the confident haughtiness of a mathematics professor who has analysed all possibilities and discovered the single right answer.

Parsons sees his chairmanship as "the coach of the regional team whose job it is to make sure we have a winning team."

His "team is a mixed assemblage of 21 elected councillors from Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon. Not all of them care to define Parsons role as that of coach.

For one thing, "coach" is too dictatorial a term to come tripping off the tongues of the present seven-member "reform" block on Mississauga council.

Parsons is expansionist at a time when many members are seeking to constrict development.

Parsons has been blocked on several issues where he pushed, though he wins more than he loses.

An important issue still in the air is whether Parsons is to be given a vote on each of the region's five committees. The issue comes up tomorrow at regional council.

If Parsons wins that issue, he will have — as an appointee — more voting power than any single elected member of the regional council. He wants that

power.

Whether he gets it may depend upon some of the members from Brampton, where sentiments to slow development are emerging. The areas of Chinguacousy which have recently been changed in rapid order from farmlands to high-density housing now are part of the new City of Brampton and will form a core of ratepayer resistance to development.

(In Brampton proper, ratepayers recently beat down a high-rise apartment project.)

Parsons is no longer affiliated with his former real estate firm of Parsons-Taylor. He says he has sold all of his stock in the firm and has turned in his real estate license.

"It was a hard decision to make," he says. "Who knows where I'll be after three years?" In financial terms, he has given up a lot for the \$27,000 a year job which keeps him in the local

political scene.

But government is Parsons' major interest, and he is hoping the gamble will pay off in later years.

Parsons says Peel Region must act quickly to provide more housing. Its an issue that runs head-on against much of the reform sentiment.

"Half of Mississauga's population is under 19," he says. "So you can see we're going to have a need for one awful pile of housing in the foreseeable future, even if just half of them decide to stay here.

"It's a horrendous task to make accommodation available to kids at a price they can afford," he says.

Peel Region unemployment is at zero, he adds. "We have got to make sure there is a labour pool available to attract industry so we can get adequate assessment."

More labour means more children, means more taxes

## political future

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for schools. Does it also mean more industry again in a vicious cycle?

"I don't know," says Parsons. "Under the Toronto-Centred Region Plan, Mississauga is to have a population of 675,000."

But he acknowledges the figure is inconclusive — that 675,000 need not be the ultimate maximum population but merely a figure which could in the future be augmented again because of a need for more housing in the province, or more assessment for the region.

"I don't think the province has planned that far ahead," he says.

He sees the biggest job ahead for the region as that of getting organized.

Although some politicians are already quietly predicting property taxes may increase as much as one-third because of a regional government, Parsons says it is too early to

tell whether there will be any increases.

But he does strike out at the system of property taxes which confine government to old assessment figures in times of inflation.

"The costs of government rise to meet the cost of living," he says, adding that regional government deserves a bigger slice of provincial — "and hopefully federal" — monies.

He is aware that his stint as regional chairman will colour his political chances — for better or worse — in the future.

His hardest task will be to find a common ground with the reformer elements on council.

If the mood in Brampton swings a weight toward the slow-growth advocates, Parsons may have to bend in a direction where he is a bit brittle.

However, if a near-future recession does hit the area

hard, Parsons' expansionist leanings could bring him glory by attracting more jobs and industry to the region.

Parsons has a firm hand on the regional reins, but it remains to be seen whether it means anything when he pulls them.