

Sandwich South

The battle over land

WHEN FORMER WINDSOR councillor Mike Ray accused Sandwich South Township of wantonly promoting environmentally dangerous "industrial slums" last year, the allegations more than rankled a few county politicians.

Ray's words were interpreted by many as a blatant attempt by "big city" folks to prevent their country kin from luring investment and industry to their land — and instead keep it within Windsor's borders.

So when Sandwich South Township found the city opposed to its proposal to add about 200 hectares of industrially zoned land through official plan amendments, the stage seemed set for a bitter showdown before the Ontario Municipal Board.

City Council, however, has decided to re-evaluate Windsor's opposition to Sandwich South's development plans — largely based on the lack of sanitary sewers in the township — and pursue co-operation instead of confrontation. Based on the rather forceful and pragmatic presentation made to council Monday by Sandwich South officials, there are good reasons to avoid an OMB hearing.

Reeve Ray Robinet pointed out to council that with the Ontario Environment and Municipal Affairs ministries backing the official plan changes, the only real justification for the city's opposition is "competition" for industry.

The reeve pointed out that the businesses expected to set up shop in Sandwich South would be storage companies and small tool and die operations — marginal businesses that might ignore the area completely without the lower industrial taxes offered in the township.

Robinet gave strong promises that the environment would not be abused because of the lack of sanitary sewers. He noted that Windsor allows some industries to operate using septic tanks.

Sandwich South lawyer Leon Paroian also had some compelling reasons why Windsor should tread carefully in its dealings with neighboring communities. Inevitably, he said, an OMB hearing would lead to the "diminution" of the relationship between the county and Windsor at a time when the area should consider itself to be one community.

As long as environmental concerns are met, there is every reason to believe development within Windsor's borders, or in nearby communities, will be mutually beneficial. Many people who will work in Sandwich South will live in Windsor and spend money in the city. For its part, Sandwich South will increase its industrial tax base and provide badly needed employment, even if it is on a small scale.

Hopefully, the mindset that dictates what is good for the city is bad for the county — and vice versa — will change. If this particular disagreement over Sandwich South's official plan can be ironed out without the need of an OMB hearing, important progress will be made toward achieving a new harmony.

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Sandwich South has identity crisis as it hits 100

By David Morelli
Star County Reporter

Sandwich South is having an identity crisis.

Is it a historically rural township, successfully tapping into the exodus of suburbanites and industry searching for a cheaper home?

Or is it just a backwater with no identity, happily leeching off the services of its neighbors without taking the responsibility to provide its own?

If you live in Sandwich South, which celebrates its 100th birthday this year with a re-enactment of its inaugural

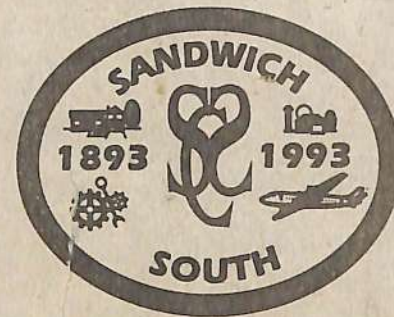
council meeting tonight at 7:30 at St. Mary's Hall in Maidstone, you probably think the former.

More new homes are being built than ever before.

MUNICIPAL taxes are among the lowest in Essex County. The cost of a lot in an industrial park in the township is about two-thirds less than in Windsor.

It is 10th of 21 county municipalities in population, but is fourth in contributing taxes toward county government and school boards.

Critics see a less rosy picture. The township's services, or lack of them, has



helped fuel recent speculation involving annexation by Windsor.

Sandwich South has no police department. It gets free coverage from the

Essex OPP. Its only recreational facilities, three parks with seven baseball diamonds, are run by volunteer groups.

Sandwich South has no arena, and recently balked at joining neighboring municipalities in a collaborative effort because it said the cost was prohibitive.

Fresh water supply is a mishmash of systems. Residents receive water from three different sources, yet one-third of the township still uses well water.

Only one hamlet of homes, near Tecumseh, is connected to sanitary sewers. The rest of the township, including the industrial park, is hooked up to less envi-

ronmentally friendly septic tanks. Town fathers say building its own sewage treatment plant would cost too much, though septic tanks have been deemed long-term health hazards.

REEVE AL PARR has a simple answer for critics: The residents don't want Sandwich South to shell out big bucks for more services.

"They're happy with the services they're getting," said Parr, a 14-year veteran of council.

"You should supply only what the citizens who pay the bills want.

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AL PARR: Reeve

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"If you went to the taxpayers and asked them if they wanted all these services, except it's going to cost you 10 times as much, what do you think they'd say?"

Township clerk Gerry Sykes said residents seem to be happy with "the services that are necessary."

"We don't have people beating down the door asking for flower gardens or municipal fountains. . . . We don't provide the frills, if you will. We provide the services they basically need like roads, snow removal, things like that."

Asked if the municipality has an obligation to provide more than essential services, Sykes said residents are happy using Windsor services such as arenas, swimming pools and libraries.

"The system works," he said. "The city has every right to charge user fees. We have no objections to that and neither it seems do the residents."

It's not difficult making a case that Sandwich South is a municipality in name only, a concept not lost on former reeve Bob Pulleyblank.

Although an ardent defender of the township, he can't help but recognize its odd sense of identity.

"THERE'S NOTHING to put your foot down on," said Pulleyblank, a reeve for 10 years and 15-year council member until 1978.

"There's no centre of town. There was never really any meeting place in the township until the Ciocaro Club was built. The township hall is a former school."

Most of all, as a township oldtimer, he laments the slow death of the rural tradition in the face of suburban encroachment.

"You're getting so many new people buying up farmland. A neighbor used to buy up those farms for sale."

"You'd have a tough time finding any roots in the township. You'd be hard pressed to find those old family farms now."

The Tecumseh hamlet surrounding Lesperance Road has provided the bulk of Sandwich South's development boom over the past few years.

At 5,500 people, the municipality has grown a solid 10 per cent in four years. Most of the new residents are relatively affluent professionals building large homes with large tax bills.

But Sandwich South's bread and butter has been its burgeoning industrial park in the Oldcastle hamlet.

Created as a quick-fix solution to the 1966 annexation by Windsor that sapped \$1 million in tax assessment, the Walker Road industrial park has grown steadily.

The number of industries has jumped more than 50 per cent in 15 years, helping make Sandwich South the fourth richest municipality in Essex County behind Learnington, Maidstone and LaSalle.

"There's no special secret for this development," Parr said. "This is a natural corridor near the 401."

WINDSOR HAS CERTAINLY been no big fan, since it considers Sandwich South a thief, stealing industry and its prized tax base. Sandwich South offers industries cheaper taxes, essentially because it doesn't need to pay for a costly sewage system.

Parr said he couldn't hook a sewage system to Windsor anyway because the city's treatment plants couldn't handle the additional capacity. And the cost to build a township treatment plant is prohibitive, he said.

Parr argues that development with septic tanks has always met the approval of the Environment Ministry — "Everything's legal" — but admits the province is getting stickier about allowing future development with septic tanks.

Pulleyblank, who has locked horns with Parr in the past, opposes further septic tank development and said council should rethink its policy.

"It's not good," Pulleyblank said. "You ask people in the industrial park in the summer time, they can smell sewage coming out of the ditches."

"You can't have 1,500 acres of development and not expect to get some sewage flow."

The township is looking into forcing new industries to build private sewage package plants, a kind of self-contained small treatment facility similar to the one approved for St. Thomas of Villanova high school in LaSalle.

Servicing in Sandwich South is hitting the headlines again because of recent annexation rumblings.

PARR DEFIANTLY shakes his fist at the prospect of annexation by Windsor, arguing it would do nothing but drive up local taxes.

But a new blitz of buzzwords from the provincial government — harmonization, disentanglement, eliminating duplication of services — may make annexation a greater possibility.

Sandwich South celebrates its first 100 years in 1993. Whether anyone will be partying at the township's bicentennial in 2093 may be decided in the next few years.

The welcome mat's out for industry

By Brad Honywill
Star Essex Bureau

OLDCASTLE — Located just south of Windsor on the old Talbot Trail, Oldcastle has always played the role of a country neighbor to its urban friends further north.

While the line between city and country has grown increasingly thin, the area still fol-

lows its traditional role. No where is this more obvious than in the development of the Sandwich South Industrial Park where businesses, often unsuitable to the inner city, have found a home.

The park's 263 hectares (650 acres) are roughly contained within the borders of the Eighth Concession road and the North Talbot

Road to the east, Highway 401 and the City of Windsor to the north and west, and to the south, its border runs along a line parallel to Highway 3 about 762 metres (2,500 feet) north of the highway. More generally, the park is just north of the hamlet of Oldcastle.

MOST OF the approximately 170 businesses in the park manufacture goods related to the auto

industry. But the businesses also manufacture something else that creates a very advantageous situation for Sandwich South residents: Taxes.

Approximately 27 per cent of the township's tax levy, or about \$942,000, comes from businesses in the industrial park, contributing to a desirable ratio of industrial/commercial assess-

ment to residential assessment of 40/60.

And it just keeps getting better, explains the township's administrative assistant, Elizabeth Neuert. Although industry began moving to the area in the mid-'60s, the park wasn't officially designated as such until 1970. For the first 10 years about 17 new firms per year were established but this pace slowed to about two or three during the recession, Neuert says.

HOWEVER, now the pace appears to be quickening again with about 10 or 12 new businesses moving in per year.

Obviously, the business owners feel the park atmosphere is contributing something to their efforts as well. A random survey of six firms provides some insight into what the park offers and the reasons behind its apparent success.

Common to many of the explanations given by owners and managers is the relative cheapness of land in the township compared to the city. Mentioned also is the tax rate and the general atmosphere in the area.

Take Dor-Co Sales and Service, for example. Originally, the company was in Windsor but when it came time to expand it chose the Sandwich South Industrial Park. The company, which manufactures and installs doors and accessories and has 11 employees, just expanded again to a larger building in the park in May.

Murray MacDonald, Dor-Co sales manager, says the main reason the move was made to the township was because of taxes. Land values were also a factor.

"IT'S ALSO a good location for deliveries," he says. "Freight companies always seem to have a truck in the area. It's very accessible."

"We do a lot of trade with the homeowner and I was afraid they'd say 'Oldcastle — I'm not going all the way out there.' But that hasn't happened."

"Even for me getting to work, it's been convenient. I live in Forest Glade and it takes me 10 minutes."

The fact the park doesn't have sanitary sewers and uses septic tanks instead, has never been a factor, he says.

Cherill Hogue, supervisor of the Waterville Cellular Products Windsor Warehouse, says her company moved to the township for somewhat different reasons. The main factor in the

move of the automobile weatherstripping warehouse from its Prince Road, Windsor location was the lack of suitable facilities in the city, Hogue says.

WHEN THE decision was made to expand the warehouse, management had difficulty finding a building modern enough downtown.

Now that the three-person operation is in the park, and in its second new building, she says she likes the spaciousness of the location.

"I enjoy it out here. There's places for trucks to back up and wait, if they have to, which you wouldn't want in a residential area."

Bruce Lane, owner of Southern Wire Products Ltd., which manufactures wire products for the automotive industry, is also pleased with the progress of his company in the Sandwich South Industrial Park. Unlike the others, Southern Wire started in the township in 1977 because of the lower price of the land and has stayed. During that time, it has undergone two expansions and now employs about 35 full-time workers.

Although he complains that the taxes are still too high, he admits they are lower than in the city. He says he likes the atmosphere of the area where employees can use nearby picnic tables for lunches during the summer in a park-like setting.

"CLOSENESS of the

401 has been an advantage — easy for shipments to come right in from the highway," he adds.

"It's so close to the city, for all intents and purposes it's considered Windsor anyways," he says. "You still draw primarily from a Windsor workforce."

Another business which liked the lower initial capital outlay and operating costs of the township is Rapid Tool and Mold Ltd. That firm, a manufacturer of injection moulds and die casting for the automobile industry, was initially located on Meighan Road in the city but moved to the township in April because "the property and taxes are too expensive in Windsor," says part-owner Nick Onya.

Ivo Oppio, president of Classic Tool and Die Inc., also says his company, manufacturers of stamping dies for the auto industry, initially located in the park in 1977 because of comparatively-low taxes and land prices.

Besides lower taxes, accessibility, and cheaper land, Gary St. Denis, vice-president of International Controls, says he likes the services of the area, despite the fact there's no sanitary sewers. His company moved to the park from Provincial Road in Windsor almost four years ago.

"We have storm sewers and at least we have room for weeping bed," he says. "It's just fine out here."