



**Ipsos Reid**

**HALTON STRATEGIC PLAN PUBLIC CONSULTATION:**

**TOWNHALL WORKSHOP**

**QUALITATIVE REPORT**

April 2004



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## INTRODUCTION

The following report summarizes the findings of a 3-hour “Townhall” workshop facilitated by Ipsos-Reid on behalf of the Regional Municipality of Halton. The Townhall was held from 9 A.M. until Noon on Saturday, April 24, 2004 at the Halton Auditorium in the Halton Regional Centre. The purpose of the Townhall was to gain an understanding of the public’s long-term priorities and directives for the region, and to obtain input and feedback on draft Themes and Goals of Halton’s Strategic Plan.

## METHODOLOGY

### *PRINCIPLES*

The Ipsos-Reid Townhall qualitative research tool differs from the town hall public consultation exercise typically conducted by municipal/regional governments primarily in terms of the method of invitation. By utilizing a direct, randomized recruitment methodology and offering monetary incentives, we can guarantee significantly higher levels of attendance and an assembly composition that is more representative of the range of opinions present among the general population.<sup>1</sup> And, it is these differences that provide a valuable, insightful complement to the public consultation process.

By randomly selecting residents from the overall population<sup>2</sup>, we ensure that the workshop discussions approximate the views existing in the wider community rather than the specific interest/agenda-driven views of organized groups and stakeholders that often dominate the typical “open house” public consultation. However, the purpose of the Townhall is not to subvert the value or importance of these specialized and informed views – but to augment them with a sense of the entire community’s mindset.

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<sup>1</sup> Municipal and regional governments typically issue public notices of invitation to town hall or public consultation sessions via public postings, the media, and self-distributed newsletters without providing a monetary incentive. In our observations, municipal and regional governments host – on average – 20 to 30 participants at these sessions, with meetings concerning matters of extraordinarily high public interest attracting up to 40 or 50 participants. Moreover, significant segments of these participant gatherings are often comprised of permanent or ad-hoc interest groups and individuals representing very specific personal or corporate interests.

<sup>2</sup> Residents who indicated that they, or someone in their household, were employees or consultants in the following fields were excluded from recruitment: public opinion/market research, the media, real estate or land development, and municipal or regional government.

### ***RECRUITMENT PROCESS***

Over the course of the two-three weeks preceding the event, Ipsos-Reid randomly telephoned households in Halton Region with an invitation for one household member to participate in a regional government-sponsored “important town hall-type discussion group and workshop to gather public input into the long-term plans and future of Halton Region”. Regional and demographic quotas were applied to the recruitment process, with the goal of securing sufficient and equitable representation from among key, relevant segments of the Halton population.

A representative of Halton Region was designated as a contact for those members of the public who requested additional verification of the legitimacy of the invitation. All invitees were offered a cash honorarium (\$75) to be distributed at the end of the event.

It was our stated goal to recruit 120 residents, with an expectation that approximately 100 would ultimately attend. Of the 120 residents who accepted the invitation, approximately 4 residents cancelled their attendance for personal reasons during the follow-up confirmation process (which took place during the 4-5 days immediately preceding the event). Thereafter, 2 new participants were obtained through random telephone recruitment, bringing the final total of recruited participants to 118.

### ***ATTENDANCE AND COMPOSITION***

Of the 118 confirmed recruits, a total of 99 residents attended the Townhall – an attendance figure consistent with the goal of approximately 100 participants.<sup>3</sup> The table on the following page provides an overall profile of the Townhall participants according to key regional and demographic characteristics. However, the moderated discussions also revealed a balanced mix between (a) those who “grew up” in Halton and those who moved to the region later, as well as (b) those who worked in Toronto/GTA and those who worked in Halton. Very few participants claimed to use any form of public transit.

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<sup>3</sup> The attendance figure of 99 was confirmed through visual count, attendance signsheets, and incentive payout. One participant happily declined his honorarium, the other 98 participants accepted it. Overall, the attendance (or “show”) rate was 84% – a 15 to 20-point better show rate than experienced with this research methodology in other smaller municipalities in Southern Ontario, the Maritimes, and Western Canada, *although* the monetary incentive was significantly larger in this instance. The 2004 “show” rate is 4 points higher than that recorded for the similar Halton “Townhall” conducted by Ipsos in February 2003.

<b>Profile of Townhall Participants</b>	
<b><i>Municipality</i></b>	
Oakville	29%
Milton	19%
Burlington	33%
Halton Hills	19%
<b><i>Area</i></b>	
Urban	79%
Rural	21%
<b><i>Dwelling</i></b>	
House	73%
Apartment (5%) / Hi-Rise Condo (7%)	12%
Townhouse	15%
<b><i>Gender</i></b>	
Male	48%
Female	52%
<b><i>Age Bracket</i></b>	
18-24	6%
25-34	18%
35-54	52%
55+	24%
<b><i>Gross Household Income Bracket</i></b> <i>(9% who did not answer this question are excluded from the calculation.)</i>	
Under \$30K	7%
\$30K – Under \$60K	20%
\$60K+	73%
<b><i>Tenure of Residence in Halton Region</i></b> <i>(11% who did not answer this question are excluded from the calculation.)</i>	
Less than 1 Year	6%
1 – 5 Years	10%
6 – 10 Years	9%
11 – 15 Years	9%
16 – 20 Years	10%
More than 20 Years	56%

### ***WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES***

Participants were assembled at tables in Halton Auditorium, with approximately eight people seated at each table. A member of Regional Staff was present at each table in order to observe, take notes, and answer any questions – they did not lead, comment, or influence participant discussion.

Following a brief introduction and explanation of the workshop, participants were immediately asked to complete the five questions on the first page of a two-page questionnaire (See Appendix A). These questions were designed to measure top-of-mind opinion in the following areas:

- Top Regional Issues/Priorities;
- Most Valued Regional Attribute;
- Least Desirable Regional Attribute (Confirmation/expansion upon Top Issue);
- Top Long-Term Priority (to improve quality of life over the next five years); and
- Importance (and Ranking) of the Five Overall Strategic Plan Theme Areas.

Administering this questionnaire prior to any discussion or mention of the Strategic Plan allowed the measurement of top-of-mind, unbiased opinion, and encouraged the participants to think and commit to their opinions on these matters prior to the group and workshop discussions – when it would be otherwise easy to simply agree with strongly-expressed views and submit to the patterns of “groupthink”.

Following the completion of the first page of the questionnaire, the entire assembly of participants were engaged in a facilitated discussion based upon their answers to these survey questions, particularly their primary regional concerns and priorities.

Prior to the start of the core activity of the event – the table workgroup sessions – participants were provided a brief, thorough presentation by Regional Staff representative Karen Maxwell about the purpose and draft Themes & Goals of the current incarnation of the Strategic Plan.

Thereafter, with the aid of a Workgroup Discussion Guide, a two-page reference handout summarizing the Strategic Plan’s draft Themes & Goals, a single-page handout explaining responsibilities/services of the Regional/Municipal levels of Government, their elected Table Rep, and Staff representative (when queried), each table embarked upon a lengthy, in-depth, and interactive discussion of their approval and criticisms of the objectives/recommendations included and absent from the Strategic Plan’s draft Themes and Goals. Participants were informed that the end-goal of these discussions was for each table to create a ranking of their regional priorities (and directives for each) based upon agreeable Strategic Plan objectives and other issues not addressed therein.

The election of a Table Rep discussion leader and the provision of a Workgroup Discussion Guide and end-goal were devices primarily intended to stimulate this discussion (and to provide them with a concrete output). Of course, the Guide was also an attempt to provide some focus/structure to the intentionally free discussions, and was generally quite successful in accomplishing this. However, it is important (and insightful for observers) that each table of participants would be free to ultimately approach, grapple with, and interactively discuss the complex issues and opinions at-hand in a manner that is similar to how they (would) do so in their everyday lives. Having emphasized this point, the Guide was designed along the following main lines of inquiry:

- Is the Strategic Plan on the right or wrong track?;
- Are there areas/issues absent from the Plan that should be included?;
- Are there Themes or Goals in the current Plan that should not be followed?;
- What is the main priority within each of the five overall Themes?;
- What is the best way to go about addressing each of your priorities?; and
- Create a ranking of your priorities, indicating tiers where applicable.

Following the workgroup sessions, each elected Table Rep presented and explained their table’s ranking of priorities/objectives. This was then followed by a brief, very pointed, facilitated discussion among the entire assembly about particular issues and concerns arising from the presentations. Prior to departing, participants were asked to complete the remainder of the questionnaire, which included a question measuring current satisfaction with regional government performance on the overall Theme areas, demographic questions (although most of this information was gathered during the phone recruit), and a space for additional comments.

**QUALITATIVE CONSIDERATIONS**

As stated, this report summarizes the results of the Townhall discussions, questionnaires, and presentations, with an emphasis on drawing out the dominant themes (and any interconnectivity), points of consensus, and points of divergence. It is important that readers bear in mind the qualitative nature of this research exercise. While random selection ensured that the assembly was not a skewed representation of the community-at-large, the number of participants and nature of the exercise does not allow *statistical* generalizations about the total population of Halton Region.<sup>4</sup> However, the findings are directional, and – given the methodology employed and sizeable attendance – we would not expect the views expressed at the Townhall to differ markedly from the wider population. Moreover, the findings are consistent with the other quantitative and qualitative studies we have conducted for the Region.

**YEAR-TO-YEAR COMPARISONS**

On February 8, 2003, as part of Halton’s Official Plan Review, Ipsos-Reid facilitated a very similar “Townhall” Workshop in order to obtain input and feedback on the OP Review’s *Directions Report*. As stated above, the qualitative nature of this research exercise prevents statistical measures and, therefore, statistical comparisons or tracking of the current findings with those from 2003. However, where appropriate, notable, and value-added, comparative reference is made to directional similarities or differences with the 2003 Townhall findings.

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<sup>4</sup> Thus, aggregate responses – rather than percentage responses – to the numerical questions in the participant survey are provided within this report. It should also be noted that 90 of the 99 participants completed the questionnaires, although not all of these participants provided a response for each item in these questions and too few provided an acceptable or useable ranking on the Importance question (which is not unexpected in this type of research exercise) for this element to be reported.



## KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, the current set of draft Themes and Goals of Halton Region’s Strategic Plan are moderately on the right track<sup>5</sup>. Overall, the Plan’s general structure/content was well-received by participants, as it addressed their main priorities and areas of concern and did so generally in accordance with their preferences.
- Halton’s quality of life (most valued regional attribute) is defined by the region’s “family-friendly” community lifestyle with a “small-town” or “country” “feel” and “big-city” proximity. Halton is considered the friendlier, safer, cleaner, cheaper, quieter, calmer, and greener alternative to Toronto. A rural and environmentally-based aesthetic is central to Halton’s quality of life.
- Maintaining this lifestyle – which is increasingly perceived to be eroding and under threat – is the primary driver behind participants’ priorities and decisions. Thus, the key top-of-mind regional priorities are growth management and the interwoven tandem issues of transportation – with a far greater (and perhaps increasingly higher) share-of-mind on roads than public transit – and the environment.
- The secondary top-of-mind priorities of special support services/programs and economic development (geared towards a self-sustainable region) also demand attention, and are particularly noteworthy given their rise up the top-of-mind agenda since the Ipsos-facilitated February 2003 Townhall about Halton’s Strategic Plan. Interestingly, the intentions behind both priority areas speak to the “community spirit” that many residents value.
- Consistent with these regional priorities, Managing Growth is clearly the top tier Theme in the Strategic Plan, followed by the secondary tier issues of Economic Prosperity and Services for People. The tertiary tier items focussing upon Regional Government threaten to attract criticism and distract observers from the overall purpose and contents of the Plan, as explicitly assigning two of the five draft Themes to government in this fashion is seen to be “self-indulgent” or “empire building”. These two Themes may have to be revised or re-phrased in order to avoid negative public reaction.
- The Region currently receives lukewarm positive performance ratings on all of the Theme areas, indicating a positive starting point with much room to improve – particularly on the key issue of Managing Growth.

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<sup>5</sup> Each workshop group was asked to provide an overall rating to the Themes and Goals based on the following 4-point scale: *Strongly On The Right Track*, *Somewhat On The Right Track*, *Somewhat On The Wrong Track*, and *Strongly On The Wrong Track*. Every group’s rating declared the Themes and Goals to be *Somewhat On The Right Track*. See On The Right Track on Page 16 for further explanation of this rating.

## **MOTIVE: MAINTAINING QUALITY OF LIFE (SURVEY – TOP REGIONAL ATTRIBUTE)**

Based upon the “Best Thing About Halton” open-ended question that was completed at the beginning of the Townhall and the discussions and workgroup session that followed, participants were of a proud and satisfied consensus that **the top regional attribute** was that Halton provided a “family-friendly” community with a “small-town” or “country” “feel” and “big-city” proximity. Many appreciated the relatively close access to the careers and entertainment of Toronto, but without having the perceived disadvantages of living in the Megacity. For them, Halton is the friendlier, safer, cleaner, cheaper (i.e. bigger homes for cheaper prices), quieter, calmer, and greener alternative.

This finding is consistent with previous quantitative and qualitative research in the region, but there does appear to be a greater perception and higher sense of concern that this most-cherished attribute – and the connected elements discussed below – of living in Halton are being eroded and are under an increased threat, primarily due to growth. The key motive – or “driver” – behind participants’ expressed priorities and decisions in the Townhall was maintaining their quality of life, their lifestyle, as defined above.

## **THE ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETIC AND RURAL CHARACTER**

As in the 2003 Townhall exercise, the most-often mentioned descriptors attached to the small town/big city consensus were related to the environment, as participants indicated that the greenspace, waterfront, parks, escarpment, wildlife, forests, ravines, conservation areas, “open spaces”, and “the country beauty across the region” combined to be a key analogous asset to their quality of life in the region. This aspect of life in Halton is valued because it allows a “more active, outdoor lifestyle than in T.O.” and because it has a “soothing, de-stressing effect on me after a hard day at work”.

Many participants from the Northern and Southern localities also discussed the rural and agricultural character of Halton. For them, “our beautiful farmlands” are a key element of the environmental aesthetic that must be preserved – both for their visual impact, growth-inhibiting impact, and their role as a source of food to the region (“People should buy from the local farmers more. I ‘eat local’ because I like to know who grows my food and where it comes from.”). Partly related to this, a significant portion of participants also expressed the need to maintain the “historical heritage” of Halton.

## SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Many participants mentioned their appreciation for the “strong sense of community” in the region, and the “self-awareness, local involvement, and constant string of community events that keeps us closer together than larger cities”. Indeed, a great many participants expressed a need for Halton to become “less dependent on Toronto for jobs, good shopping, restaurants, and the arts, culture, and theatre”.

Working partly counter to this viewpoint, was the expressed concern by some that they felt their localities and the region were becoming “too isolated”, insular, and “stick out like a sore thumb next to the cultural diversity that is everywhere else but here”.

## TOP-OF-MIND REGIONAL PRIORITIES (SURVEY / DISCUSSIONS)

### THE KEY, OVERARCHING PRIORITY: GROWTH MANAGEMENT

Based upon the open-ended questions that were completed at the beginning of the Townhall and the discussion that followed, growth management was clearly the dominant top-of-mind priority for participants. Certainly this is an overarching priority which is inextricably interwoven with many other secondary issues, but most advocates of this issue used this term – followed by more specific mentions such as “Stop out-of-control housing development that is eating up our countryside”, “Control population growth”, “We came here because we didn’t want to feel boxed-in and compacted – So, stop the cookie-cutters!”, and “Plan for us who are here, not to attract growth for the sake of growth”. The widespread concern over the pace of growth is primarily driven by a fear that the much-valued “small-town” community lifestyle and its greenspace character (previously described) will be eroded and that Halton will become – or is already becoming – “urbanized” like Toronto or Peel.

There remains a commonly-held belief that new population growth and associated (housing) development have occurred unchecked and without the necessary planning for facilities and infrastructure such as roads, public transit, schools, recreation centres, and retail zones. Despite their opposition to growth, many participants called upon the Region to practice integrated or proactive planning in this regard – providing the above infrastructure, especially roads, in advance or during development.

In addition to both reducing the pace of growth and accelerating the infrastructure development necessary to accommodate it, many participants expressed strong opposition to higher-density developments such as “small-lot cookie-cutters”, high-rise condos, and townhouse complexes – citing their negative impact upon the “open space” and the environment they so value. There is a strong, explicit preference for lower density development, despite opposition to sprawl and some concern (discussed later) about affordable housing.

### TANDEM TOP TIER PRIORITY: TRANSPORTATION

Integral to the top mention of growth management, is the second most-often mentioned priority of improving the transportation network. Concerns in this regard were primarily focused upon reducing “traffic congestion”, “gridlock”, and “poor transportation systems and traffic flow” that “make it difficult to get anywhere around here now”. Clearly, population growth is also looked upon derisively because of the inconveniences it is seen to be causing on the road and on travel time. However, “bad road planning” is also the subject of criticism for “making it so hard to get from one end of Halton to the other”.

Participants were noticeably far more interested in improving, expanding, and “widening” roadways than discussing public transit solutions – a form of transportation discussed mainly in terms of the elderly. Notably, few participants said they took public transit of any kind, although a significant minority considered leveraging new ideas in this area a potential solution to current traffic problems. (A few steadfastly opposed public transit because it would “probably attract high-density development”.)

As in 2003, some residents of Halton Hills and Milton expressed specific complaints within their surveys about the poor road quality and heavy truck congestion on Regional Road #25. Residents of all regions criticized the lack of both a proper roads network and public transit system connecting North and South Halton.

### TANDEM TOP TIER PRIORITY: THE ENVIRONMENT

Closely following transportation is another tandem growth management issue: the environment. As already referenced in the previous section, residents are concerned that growth is eroding the “green” aspects of Halton that are a key aspect of their quality of life in the region. However, unlike the 2003 Townhall, there were a great many participants who expressed concerns about specific environmental “problem areas we have to deal with” that venture beyond the green aesthetic discussed thus far: waste management and disposal (garbage collection systems), the safety and management of water and wastewater, and regaining planning of the escarpment from “the aggregates” and Niagara Escarpment Commission.

## **SECONDARY TIER: SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES (INCLUDING COMMUNITY CENTRES)**

In marked contrast to 2003 when such issues received little-to-no mention, many participants expressed top-of-mind concerns and demands about the lack of “social support services and programs for those who need it” – the mentally and physically challenged, new Canadians (“we have to prepare to help the new racial mix that is coming”), those requiring counseling, and – especially – the elderly/Seniors, youth, and the poor/single parents. Perhaps arising from the “community spirit” discussed before, many expressed embarrassment that “no services currently exist and these people have to go outside of the region for help”.

As part of this discussion, many emphasize the need for community centres/programs and more recreational opportunities for Youth “who currently don’t have anything to do for fun except drink and get into trouble”. Similarly, participants also feel that Seniors can benefit from community centre programs, as well as dedicated public transit and affordable housing programs for this age bracket.

## **SECONDARY TIER: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Far more participants mentioned and prioritized economic development in this Townhall session than in the 2003 installment. Driven by perceptions of “crazy-paced growth” and an increasing desire to not be Toronto-dependent, participants felt that selective strategies (such as incentives, tax breaks, and zoning) should be leveraged to attract all manner of business, including retail, corporate/professional (especially Hi-Tech), and – much less so – industry. As part of this development, there is great desire to properly develop the downtown cores of all of the localities except Oakville – which is seen as already having “a great, model downtown”.

Overall, participants wanted to provide jobs to meet the population growth and help “people work where they live”. Moreover, they are increasingly dissatisfied with having to travel outside of the region for acceptable retail (“good shopping”), restaurants, and arts/culture. Ultimately, it is hoped that achieving this goal will stem the tide of youth having to “move away to Toronto to find their careers”, reduce traffic/travel, and build a more vibrant and self-sustaining community.

### TERTIARY TIER: COST OF LIVING & TAXES

Receiving little-to-no serious mention in 2003, a significant minority criticized the rising cost of living in the region as well as rising taxes. Many among this segment stated or implied that these rising costs/taxes were making it difficult to continue to live in the region.

### TERTIARY TIER: SCHOOLS & HEALTH CARE

Regardless of governmental jurisdiction, these two issues are weighing on the public mindset. A strong minority are concerned about the lack of schools and overcrowding of classrooms in the region, and will look to any level of government to “help me with this fight”. Others, who are focused upon the lack of Community Centre space, are more concerned with utilizing school gyms/facilities to “pick up the slack”.

A strong minority are also concerned about a perceived lack of hospitals (especially in Oakville) and the doctors and nurses to staff them. Few participants expressed public health concerns, and – those who did – did so in generalities.

### NOTEWORTHY LESSER MENTIONS

- **Affordable Housing.** Those participants who express concerns about the elderly, populations requiring support services, and the rising cost of living also tend to advocate more affordable housing in the region. However, the great majority of participants voluntarily expressed opposition to high-density housing in their top-of-mind surveys. When asked to choose between affordable housing or low-density housing policies, participants felt that they should not have to choose and that the two goals are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, opposition to high density appears to be far more intense than the support for affordable housing.
- **Services in the North.** As in 2003, some North Halton residents criticized regional government decisions and services as being “south-centric”. Once again, a lack of policing was mentioned by a few Milton residents.

## ASSESSING THE STRATEGIC PLAN’S THEMES & GOALS (WORKGROUPS / SURVEY)

### ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Overall, there was consensus that the current set of draft Themes and Goals of Halton Region’s Strategic Plan are moderately on the right track<sup>6</sup>. Overall, the Plan’s general structure/content was well-received by participants, as it addressed their main priorities and areas of concern and did so generally in accordance with their preferences. The moderate nature of the support appeared to be rooted in tentativeness due to the complexity and generality of the issues discussed (in a 3-hour time span) and existing cynicism about all governments making good on promises made. (Once again, some participants provided Additional Comments on their questionnaires such as “Looks like you’re doing fine – Just do what you say.”) It was clear early into the Townhall, however, that the Report was generally “in tune” with participants’ top-of-mind priorities.

<b>Overall Objectives</b> <i>Please rate the importance of the following issues by placing an X in the appropriate box. Then rank the issues from 1 (most important) to 10 (least important). Feel free to insert other important issue areas in the 4 blank lines below.</i>	<b>VERY IMPORTANT</b>	<b>SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT</b>	<b>NOT VERY IMPORTANT</b>	<b>NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT</b>
Managing Growth	75	13	1	1
Economic Prosperity	50	35	5	0
Services to People	63	18	3	1
Responsible and Responsive Government	62	24	2	1
Strong Regional Government	42	34	6	3

### RANKING AND DISCUSSING THE THEMES

Clearly, it would not be appropriate to neatly rank the Themes based upon the workgroup presentations and questionnaire results – as participants expressed difficulty doing so due to their interconnectivity and tended to assign similar values of importance across the board. This is evident in the table above. However, it is possible from a combined analysis of the top-of-mind and numerical (above) questionnaire results, presentations, and discussions to rank the objectives in tiers. It is noteworthy that this ranking is consistent with identified regional priorities as previously discussed.

<sup>6</sup> Each workshop group was asked to provide an overall rating to the Themes and Goals based on the following 4-point scale: *Strongly On The Right Track, Somewhat On The Right Track, Somewhat On The Wrong Track, and Strongly On The Wrong Track*. Every rating declared the Themes and Goals to be *Somewhat On The Right Track*.



### ***TOP TIER: MANAGING GROWTH***

Occupying the Top Tier alone is **Managing Growth**, which sat far atop most workgroup rankings and received a clear Very Important ranking from questionnaire respondents. Discussions of **Managing Growth** were somewhat difficult, as it is an overarching and complex goal – but the concept and intention spoke to the participants’ demand for growth management. Due to the complicated nature of this objective, there was some qualification of support based on the vagueness of the summary description (as there was with the objective of **Smart Growth** last year). Ultimately, participants wanted this Theme Area to preserve the lifestyle and address the concerns mentioned earlier in this report. Green/environmental values (“Green, green, green – Keep it green!”) remained paramount, with simultaneous demands for an improved transportation network and controlling housing developers/development (especially if high-density).

### ***SECONDARY TIER: ECONOMIC PROSPERITY & SERVICES TO PEOPLE***

**Economic Prosperity** and **Services To People** occupy the Middle Tier of the ranking. **Economic Prosperity** was generally seen as a necessary cornerstone to support the region, and participants focused on the goal of creating an economy that would allow more people to “work where they live”. As mentioned, participants were supportive of government using incentives to attract businesses, but the workshops revealed that there is a demand for very selective practices in this regard – focusing on “clean” businesses that will not harm the environment and those businesses that strategically benefit the region. There is also strong support for greater assistance to small, local businesses.

When discussing **Services to People**, participants focused upon the previously-discussed social support and recreational/community services for special populations such as youth, the elderly/seniors, and the needy or challenged. There was also discussion of improving services and planning to meet the demands of growth and – less so – to provide value for the “rising taxes we pay”. North Halton residents felt that services in their area should be improved to be “equal to the services” that the South enjoys.

***TERTIARY TIER: RESPONSIBLE/RESPONSIVE & STRONG REGIONAL GOVERNMENT***

The Themes of **Responsible and Responsive Government** and **Strong Regional Government** were often presented in combination and with the caveat that they are “by far, the least important”. Many participants felt that having two of the five Themes in the Strategic Plan explicitly focused upon government was “self-indulgent” and “inward-looking” on the part of the Regional Government. Some were suspicious that this alone and/or the Theme of **Strong Regional Government** might represent designs for “bigger government” – something most opposed (especially considering the fact that most were unsure of the programs and services provided by their Regional Government). Moreover, many commented that **Responsible and Responsive Government** was a “no-brainer” and “shouldn’t be a goal, it should be what I’m already getting”.

However, when considering these two topics, participants developed a consensus that “the Regional Government should be working and cooperating with all other governments” to the benefit of the region. Moreover, many participants felt that the Strategic Plan and planning in-general should be conducted on a 10-20 year scale rather than a 5-year model. Some participants also suggested that the Regional Government establish a measurement system “with more specific and less vague goals” to hold them accountable to the contents of the Plan. With most expressing very positive comments about the Townhall experience, many participants expressed a demand for greater communication, engagement, and consultation with the citizenry on the part of the Regional Government.

These prescriptions are consistent with those suggested in other public opinion research studies we have conducted, as is the admission by most participants that they would not likely pursue such information – unless it were of direct personal interest (“The media will look at it for us.”). Regardless, this is the public opinion environment in which governments must function.

Consistent with the findings of our public policy research at all levels of government, there was a notable level of cynicism among participants when being presented with a government plan for future initiatives and policy – i.e. the Strategic Plan. Additionally, some held the view that governments in the region had been corrupted and brought under the sway of powerful real estate developers and aggregate resource/mining companies that are “allowed to run rampant” – a view not uncommon in many municipal settings. Political cynicism was also evident during the presentations and final discussion, when some participants made critical notice that only one Regional Councillor had attended the Townhall as an observer.

As with most Canadians – and especially noticeable among residents of the 905 Belt surrounding Toronto – participants were sensitive and vigilant about the possibility of tax increases. They are not likely to be supportive of initiatives that would increase their tax rates, and a strong minority expressed suspicion over the absence of fiscal foundations for the draft Themes and Goals. For most in attendance, these tax-based concerns did not dominate their discussions or comments, but it is notable that it was a firmly and oft-raised caveat in the surveys, workgroups, and the ensuing presentations: “Be fiscally responsible – only if we can afford it.”

## PERFORMANCE RATING: CURRENT SATISFACTION WITH THEME AREAS

In order to provide some direct context for the above responses and added direction for future efforts in these areas, we asked participants to provide a current satisfaction rating on the five Themes. Overall, participants provided Halton Region with a lukewarm satisfactory rating on top tier Theme **Managing Growth** (+22 Net) – representing a somewhat positive starting point for the Region given the concerns and prioritization associated with this key issue.

<b>Overall Performance</b> <i>Please rate the performance of the Region of Halton [government] thus far in each of the following policy areas. If you inserted new areas above, please insert and rate here too.</i>	<b>VERY SATISFACTORY</b>	<b>SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY</b>	<b>NOT VERY SATISFACTORY</b>	<b>NOT AT ALL SATISFACTORY</b>
Managing Growth	13	36	21	6
Economic Prosperity	11	47	13	1
Services to People	11	47	14	3
Responsible and Responsive Government	13	38	16	4
Strong Regional Government	12	35	13	4

The secondary tier issues of **Economic Prosperity** (+44) and **Services to People** (+41) receive the strongest scores, as a clear majority are satisfied in these areas. However, this satisfaction is largely moderate (47%) in nature – there is room for improvement.

The tertiary tier issues of **Responsible and Responsive Government** (+31) and **Strong Regional Government** (+30) are somewhat lukewarm, but represent a fairly strong showing in the comparative context of rating governments and the highly cynical public opinion context that they operate within.



### APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE\*

**Top Issue**  
Thinking of all of the regional issues facing Halton's Regional Leaders today, which ONE do you feel should receive their GREATEST attention?

#1.

Other Important Issue:

Other Important Issue:

**Best Thing about Halton Region**  
What I like most about the Region of Halton is....

Does anything need to be done to improve or maintain this?


**Least Best Thing about Halton Region**  
What I like least about the Region of Halton is....

How can this be improved or changed?

**Future Vision of Halton**  
Think about what you would like Halton to be in 5 years. If you had the responsibility to plan for Halton's future, what is the ONE thing that you would focus on that would do the MOST to improve your quality of life over the next 5 years?

How can this be achieved?

<b>Overall Objectives</b> Please rate the importance of the following issues by placing an X in the appropriate box. Then rank the issues from 1 (most important) to 10 (least important). Feel free to insert other important issue areas in the 4 blank lines below.	<b>VERY IMPORTANT</b>	<b>SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT</b>	<b>NOT VERY IMPORTANT</b>	<b>NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT</b>	<b>OVERALL RANKING</b>
Managing Growth	75	13	1	1	
Economic Prosperity	50	35	5	0	
Services to People	63	18	3	1	
Responsible and Responsive Government	62	24	2	1	
Strong Regional Government	42	34	6	3	

Write the overall ranking of each objective (1 to 6, or more) in this column. 

<b>Overall Performance</b> <i>Please rate the performance of the Region of Halton [government] thus far in each of the following policy areas. If you inserted new areas above, please insert and rate here too.</i>	<b>VERY SATISFACTORY</b>	<b>SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY</b>	<b>NOT VERY SATISFACTORY</b>	<b>NOT AT ALL SATISFACTORY</b>	<b>DON'T KNOW</b>
Managing Growth	13	36	21	6	
Economic Prosperity	11	47	13	1	
Services to People	11	47	14	3	
Responsible and Responsive Government	13	38	16	4	
Strong Regional Government	12	35	13	4	

**Tell Us About Yourself.** All responses are anonymous and confidential. This is only for statistical analysis.

- Are you...?
  - Female
  - Male
- Into which of the following categories does your age fall?
  - 18-24
  - 25-34
  - 35-44
  - 45-54
  - 55-64
  - 65+
- In what part of Halton do you live?
  - Burlington
  - Halton Hills
  - Milton
  - Oakville
  - Rural area in any of the above
- Do you own or rent your primary residence?
  - Own
  - Rent

- What type of dwelling do you live in?
  - House
  - Apartment / High-Rise Condo
  - Townhouse
  - Other
- How long have you lived in Halton Region?
  - Less than 1 year
  - 1 – 5 years
  - 6 – 10 years
  - 11 – 15 years
  - 16 – 20 years
  - More than 20 years

**The Regional Municipality of Halton and Ipsos-Reid thank you for taking the time to participate in today's workshop and complete this survey.**

**Do you have any other comments about the Official Plan Review or how Halton Region should develop in the coming years?**

\* This is a facsimile of the questionnaire used at the Townhall. The actual questionnaire employed larger fonts and boxes. This example has had the fonts reduced, boxes reduced/alterd, and margins increased in order to place the questionnaire into the report format. *The aggregate responses – not percentage responses – have been inserted into the Importance and Satisfaction tables.*



Ipsos Reid

Halton "Townhall"  
Public Consultation Workshop – Report