

BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH

Monthly



Letter

137 WELLINGTON STREET WEST, TORONTO

OCTOBER, 1946

Men and Women:-

During the summer months many Toronto families were at the mountain, the lake or the sea shore. Many more stayed in Toronto. To them the City Parks were particularly important.

RECREATION During July and August multitudes used the parks and playgrounds. At 122 play centres there were in July 681,046 attendances and in August 435,271.

The Parks Committee of the City Council announces a comprehensive programme of recreational activities that will give citizens of all ages increased opportunity to engage their leisure hours in a broad variety of interesting events.

This enlarged co-operative programme is based on Community Centres, Swimming Pools, Playground Centres and Field Recreation. The 22 Community Centres and 7 Swimming Pools will be open on designated afternoons and evenings in elementary and secondary schools. The Community Centres will continue the work heretofore carried on by the Board of Education but on an enlarged scale.

The work will be directed by school Principals, teachers and other competent leaders, along with Councils or Committees of citizens organized in each district. The Programmes at these Community Centres will vary with the expressed desires of the various communities and will include crafts, hobbies, art, music, dramatics, cooking, sewing, organized games and various forms of dancing.

Swimming classes will be conducted in 6 secondary schools and one public school.

It would be impossible in the space available to outline all the many sided recreation programme. It is sufficient to say that the regular activities of the Department will be continued on a more extensive basis than in recent years.

It is of interest to note that the budget for recreation per person in Toronto was \$3.10 in 1930 and \$2.56 in 1946. The total in 1930 was almost 2 million dollars and in 1946 slightly over 1½ million. In 1943 the appropriations for recreation were at a low ebb, but there has

been some increase since. It is to be hoped that in planning for the "Greater Toronto" community, adequate provision will be made for recreational facilities not only in the summer months but throughout the year and not only for children but their parents. Recreation has a very direct relation to traffic safety, delinquency and public morale.

During recent months, a new department of the United Welfare Chest - Youth Service - has been set up. This aims to deal with the problems of juvenile delinquency in a thorough manner and on a City-wide basis. It plans to arouse and encourage each neighbourhood in the City JUVENILE DELINQUENCY to attack its own problems. The emphasis is not to be on "welfare", but on "service", not on the distribution of funds, but on the supplying of the services of skilled social workers. It aims to work in the closest possible co-operation with municipal and school authorities. This is one of the most encouraging of recent developments and deserves the support of all public spirited citizens.

The most important document issued by the city each year is probably the civic budget or estimates of revenue and expenditure. This affects at once the well-being of every man, woman and child in Toronto whether a direct taxpayer or not. It is supposed to control expenditure; THE CURRENT BUDGET but whether it actually does so or not depends on when and how it is made. If it is not completed until one quarter of the year is over, it plainly falls short of complete control. If a scale of expenditures is incurred toward the end of the preceding year which carries over into the current and possibly into all future years, the Council for the year clearly has no real control in this respect of the budget for the current year. Use of this device in the past has been expensive for the citizens, but is apt to continue as long as the one year term for council members remains a distinguishing feature of Toronto's Civic life. It is clear, for example, that salary and wage scales should not be increased during November or December, but should not be decided until budget making time comes around. The current budget for the year should be controlled so far as humanly possible, by the Council of that year.

Again if the estimates are not sufficiently itemized and supported by information as to the causes of increases and decreases, Council and the Board of Control, the elected representatives of the people, are handicapped in their study of and decisions made in fixing appropriations.

If allotments are not made for three months periods, revisable at the end of these periods, budget control falls short of what is possible. Simply because an appropriation is made at the beginning of the year, is no reason why it should not be reduced later if circumstances warrant or conditions change.

Finally, if electors are not told before election what are the probable results of the years operation, what the assets and liabilities of the City will probably be at the beginning of the next year and what additions to or subtractions from the budget are proposed for the next year, the electors can exercise no real control but must be satisfied with generalities and promises which often are "more honoured in the breach than in the observance".

The cost of servicing the general and school debt, i.e. interest charges and annual repayments of principal, decreased \$4,141,095 between 1939 and 1946. Salaries, wages and other payments for personal services increased \$4,959,477 in the same period. That is, the decrease TAX in debt service was exceeded by increase in personal service. During RATE the next ten years - if the civic investment in public services is not only to restore civic assets to the 1939 level and reach the level that a great city should attain in 1946 and succeeding years - the cost of debt service i.e. interest charges and repayment of principal, is bound to increase. The cost of personal services will not probably decrease. Then unless there is a substantial increase in property and business assessment the tax-rate is bound to climb.

If by 1952 the annual cost of carrying its debentures debt reaches the level of those of 1939 - assuming no other increases and no significant decreases - the net tax levy will be about \$35,000,000.

On the present taxable assessment this means a tax rate of about 39.00 mills compared with the present rate of 34.15 mills. Fortunately the assessment is giving signs of increasing. Unless there is a significant increase in total assessment and unless all undertakings and buildings, public or private, are taxed on the same basis, the citizens of Toronto are in for a period of sharply rising local tax rates.

For many years the Bureau has advocated a two or three year term, one half or one third of Council or Board coming up for election PROPOSED each year. The Bureau has always maintained that what is TWO YEAR important is not continuity of membership, but assured TERM continuity of membership. Even if all members were reelected each year it would not have the same effect on the continuity of policy as the two year "staggered" term, as under present conditions thinking on civic problems for periods of more than one year is extremely difficult if not impossible. The life of the community resembles not a string of beads, but an ever widening stream.

The two year term, all retiring at once, would be an improvement on the present system as it would set more time free for Council or Board members for consideration of civic problems.

It has been obvious to many disinterested observers that, at present, thoughts of reelection obsess many members of council from Jan. 2nd on and that for the last three or four months of the year this obsession is intensified. With a two year term, new members could spend the first three months on "learning the ropes", the last three months on "mending their fences" and still have eighteen months for unworried service to the community.

An occasional member might stay in a year too long - although this possibility might be reduced if electors were more careful in their choices - but his influences would be negligible in a Council or Board made up mostly of men and women instant in the Community's business.

A two year term would cut, by at least, 50% passing of unwise measures in November or December calculated to influence sectional votes. It would also tend to foster continuity of policy which often has been conspicuous by its absence.

It is becoming most obvious as time passes, that parking difficulties are only a symptom, and that these difficulties will not disappear, until thorough going measures are taken to expedite traffic in and out of the central area. This can-
PARKING AND TRAFFIC CONTROL not be done by widening streets, but involves an expensive plan of traffic arteries and grade separation. This would be a prominent feature of any master plan for the metropolitan area.

At least the first step in planning the whole Greater Toronto economic area has been taken and a Board of nine has been appointed, five representing Toronto and four representing suburban municipalities. Citizens of all municipalities in the area will await with much interest the practical steps which will follow this auspicious beginning. To quote from a recent letter: "Separation of Toronto's interests from those of its suburbs is altogether artificial and certainly not in the best interests of Greater Toronto".

Yours very truly,

J. G. Rogers
President

J. L. Brewster
Managing Director

October 21st, 1946
as of October 8th, 1946.