Overview of the Greater Toronto Area

Presentation to the Atlanta Leadership Delegation
Mississauga, Ontario
May 6, 2015

Enid Slack
Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance
University of Toronto
Outline of Presentation

- Canadian/Ontario context
- Description of the Greater Toronto Area and Greater Golden Horseshoe
- History of restructuring of Toronto 1954 - present
- Regional decision-making in the Toronto region
Canadian Context

- Similar to the US, Canada is a federation with 3 levels of government: federal, provincial, local.
- Constitutionally, municipalities are creatures of the province.
- Province can create or eliminate municipalities.
- Province determines municipal expenditure responsibilities and sources of revenue.
- Province sets borrowing rules for municipalities (except Toronto).
Local Governments in Ontario

- Counties and regions (upper tiers)
  - Include local municipalities within their boundaries
  - Provide services over an area that includes one or more municipalities
  - Counties mainly in rural areas
  - Regions mainly in urban areas

- Local municipalities
  - Cities, towns, townships, villages
  - Referred to as lower-tier municipalities in regions/counties
  - Referred to as single-tier municipalities where there is only one level of government in the area (e.g. Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa)
Greater Toronto Area (GTA)

- One single-tier city – Toronto (2.6 million)

- Four regional governments (two-tier):
  - Peel: 1.3 million people; 3 area municipalities
  - Halton: 502,000 people; 4 area municipalities
  - Durham: 608,000 people; 8 area municipalities
  - York: 1 million people; 9 area municipalities

- Total: 6.1 million people; 29 municipal governments
Greater Golden Horseshoe

- GTA plus Hamilton ++
- Population: 8.76 million
- 68% of the population of the Province of Ontario (12.9 million)
- 26% of the population of Canada
Restructuring of Toronto

- **1954:** Metropolitan Toronto was created by provincial legislation

- Two-tier government structure: metropolitan tier plus 13 lower-tier municipalities

- **1967:** Number of municipalities in Metropolitan Toronto was reduced from 13 to 6 through amalgamations; some more functions to metropolitan level

- **1985:** Direct election to metropolitan government
Restructuring Toronto

- Metropolitan level: borrowing, transit, police services, social assistance, traffic control and operations, licensing, conservation, waste disposal, and ambulance services.

- Lower-tier governments: fire protection, garbage collection, licensing and inspection, local distribution of hydro-electric power, public health, recreation and community services, and tax collection.

- Both tiers: parks, planning, roads and traffic control, sewage disposal, and water supply.
Restructuring Toronto

- Creation of two-tier government designed to:
  - Redistribute wealth of central city to suburbs to provide infrastructure
  - Coordinate land use planning and transportation across the region
  - Allow lower tiers to be responsive to local needs
Restructuring Toronto

- Early reviews applauded success of two-tier structure ... until 1990s

- Concerns were expressed about:
  - the ability of the Metro government to address growth issues in suburban municipalities outside of its borders
  - overlapping responsibilities, confusion, and uncertain accountability in a two-tier structure
Toronto Amalgamation

- January 1, 1998: consolidation of metropolitan level of government and lower-tier municipalities into a single-tier city

- Stated rationale: cost savings

- Restructuring imposed by provincial government; failed to win support in local referenda

- Opposition: loss of local identity and reduced access to local government
City of Toronto Act, 2006

- City granted broader permissive powers
- Some additional revenue tools (not income, sales, fuel or hotel taxes)

- Governance reforms: stronger role for the mayor (but not like US strong mayor system)
Legacy of Toronto Amalgamation

- Better services/ lower taxes in poorer parts of the city
- Stronger city on international stage
- Higher costs

- A city too big and too small
Regional Decision-Making in the Toronto Region

- 1999: Province established the Greater Toronto Services Board (GTSB):
  - comprised of elected officials from each of the municipalities in the GTA
  - no legislative authority except to oversee regional transit; not designed to be a level of government; no taxing authority

- 2001: GTSB disbanded
Provincial Role in Regional Planning and Transportation

- **Places to Grow legislation, 2005**
  - Municipal plans need to conform to the Growth Plan (GGH)

- **Greenbelt legislation, 2005**
  - Planning decisions have to conform to the Greenbelt Plan (GGH)

- **Greater Toronto Transportation Authority created, 2006 (now Metrolinx)**
  - Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area