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Infrastructure plan gets go-ahead

By BOB MITCHELL

Special to The IFP

A \$1.44 billion infrastructure program, most of which is being financed by developers, will ensure funding is in place for Halton Region's future growth and its necessary transportation, water and wastewater projects.

Under the program, new schools should also be constructed sooner in subdivisions, regional council heard.

The largest infrastructure program ever undertaken by Halton will ensure future growth "without impacting taxpayers," Halton CAO Jane MacCaskill said at last week's meeting, where the massive allocation program was approved.

"This is truly unique..." MacCaskill said, indicating no other region or municipality has a similar plan in place. "Everybody else uses this to fund one storm water pond. Nobody else uses it to fund an entire program. Protecting the taxpayer has been No.1 in importance for this council along with building complete communities and helping school boards get their schools."

The approval fulfills council's mandate of ensuring the entire cost of infrastructure to support residential development is paid for by the development industry.

"Halton has a long history of requiring financing to support infrastructure growth not put at risk or impact taxpayers," Mac-Caskill said.

Developers have agreed to pay \$961.7 million of the \$1.44 billion of allocation funding, which involves 185 projects, including 14,000 units, 700 of which involve high-density apartments. The Region is financing \$481.8 million of non-residential development.

The funding allocation will accelerate school construction by allowing school boards to purchase sites directly from developers after the sites are acquired by the Region, said Mark G. Meneray, Halton's commissioner, legislative and planning services and corporate counsel.

Historically, school boards haven't been able to buy sites from developers until subdivision plans have been registered, often resulting in schools falling behind residential development.

Now the Region can acquire school sites upon the request of the school board with compensation coming directing from the school boards to the developer. This will allow school boards to acquire sites so construction is on pace with residential devel-

"Getting schools on time will improve the livability of our residents because without this we were facing amazing crowding in existing schools as they were used as holding schools," Oakville Mayor Rob Burton said. "In terms of its impact on the every day life of people, this is huge."

Among transportation projects being funded is the widening of Trafalgar Road in Halton Hills.

Developers are also required to ensure all water and sewer services are in place within 12 months of sales.

Several developers initially balked at participating in the plan and launched legal challenges but most have since abandoned their actions, council heard. But staff doesn't believe any of the outstanding appeals would pose a significant financial risk to the Region and or impact the allocation program.

Halton Hills Councillor Jane Fogal said Halton's plan will be a model for all others.

"I'm starting to view the development industry as more of a partner than in the past," Fogal said. "They are starting to help us build complete communities, which has always been Halton's goal. I know they came kicking and screaming and it's been a tough slog but they have agreed to do these things."

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