

Gamut of concerns at first Ward 1 all-candidates meeting

By **Melanie Hennessey**
Special to The IFP

Acton's traffic woes, the Hidden Quarry proposal and whether councillors are under or overpaid were up for debate amongst Ward 1 council hopefuls at an all-candidates meeting Tuesday evening.

The session, hosted by Heritage Acton at the Acton Town Hall, brought together six of the seven by-election candidates: former town councillor Terry Jackson, real estate agent Norm Paget, retired school board manager Mike Albano and social media strategist Sue Walker, along with consultant Robert Bedard and local farmer Geoff Maltby, who both ran in last year's municipal election. Waldo Paquete—a former Ward 4 candidate and Georgetown resident who's running in Ward 1 this time around—was not in attendance.

About three dozen local residents turned out to hear from the candidates and ask questions, with each having one minute to reply. While the candidates generally agreed on some topics, such as the community's strength being its people, they also presented varying opinions on hot-button issues, like the Hidden Quarry proposed for nearby Rockwood in Guelph/Eramosa Township.

"I'm against the quarry for a number of reasons," said Paget, citing concerns about the impact the extra trucks could have on local road maintenance and the safety of children travelling to and from school.

He noted the Town may be able to manage the truck traffic in the community through similar haul route arrangements that have been made for Dufferin Aggregates' Acton quarry.

Albano also spoke out against the quarry proposal for similar reasons, raising an additional concern about a nearby mushroom farm that may be negatively impacted by dust from the aggregate operations.

"I have a big concern if this quarry comes into place," he said.

Walker echoed her fellow candidates' worries on the traffic front. "The trucks might not necessarily come through the downtown, but they will be going down Hwy. 25," she said. "The impact on Acton is going to be huge."

Meanwhile, Bedard said he's ambivalent on the topic.

"They have a legitimate right to pursue this opportunity. But as a town, it's our responsibility to mitigate the negative impact it may have," he said, pointing out there could be hidden costs to Halton Hills' residents for road maintenance, dust control, etc.

Maltby said he's not standing for or against the proposal, but he's definitely against the Town fighting it.

"It's not our town, not our mandate," he said, questioning why Acton would want to hold a neigh-

crease all at once, instead of using a phased-in approach presented by a consultant on the topic. "It was too much, too fast."

This statement spawned a follow-up question: what would Maltby do with the salary funds he's currently deeming as excess?

He said if elected, he would challenge each member of council to take \$5,000 of their salary that year and donate it to a minimum of five local charities. He proposed reducing this amount by \$1,000 each year thereafter to ultimately take council back to its full salary.

The other candidates at the table disagreed with

sometimes used to collect funds above and beyond the traditional property taxes for urgent needs, like the hospital.

"Is this an avenue I want to see us going all the time? I don't think so. I see special levies as a last, desperate approach," he said.

On the traffic front, the candidates were asked how they would alleviate the congestion that plagues the corner of Wallace and Mill streets—an intersection that's expected to become even busier if further housing is built in the area.

Paget suggested channelling traffic down McDonald Boulevard as an alternative—a notion that was also supported by Jackson, Bedard and Walker.

"It's definitely a nightmare (at that intersection) right now," said Walker.

Albano recommended that council, local business people and even the Province work together to find a solution, while Maltby said the only answer is to implement a no left turn policy at the intersection.

Maltby went on to say that council, "for the lack of a better word, would be retarded" to continue directing truck traffic down Wallace St. to turn left onto Mill St.—an expression that has since drawn criticism via social media.

Yesterday, Maltby released a statement apologizing for his "poor choice of words."

"I did not use it to be inflammatory or derogatory in manner. I could have easily used ridiculous, foolish or even short-sightedness," he said. "This was the manner of my use, not to insult or enrage anyone."

Other topics covered throughout the evening included public transit, Acton's potential for future growth, the need for a nursery school in the community and ways to attract new businesses to town.

A second meet-the-candidates night will be hosted by Heritage Acton on Thursday, Sept. 10 at the Acton Town Hall. Doors will open at 6:45 p.m. and the meeting will commence at 7 p.m. Freewill donation of canned tuna/salmon or cash for Acton Food Share is greatly appreciated.

The by-election is needed to fill the council seat left empty after Councillor Mike O'Leary passed away in May. Election Day is set for Sept. 21.



Ward 1 by-election candidates (from left) Mike Albano, Geoff Maltby, Terry Jackson, Sue Walker, Robert Bedard and Norm Paget were on hand to field questions from the audience of about three dozen residents at a meeting Tuesday evening at the Acton Town Hall.

Photo by Sean Ryan

bouring municipality back from a business opportunity.

And Jackson said she supports Wellington-Halton Hills MPP Ted Arnott's efforts on the topic, which includes calling on the Minister of Natural Resources to update the approvals process for new pits and quarries.

She pointed out the current Aggregate Resources Act doesn't take things like property values, impact of dust, etc. into account when considering new locations.

The candidates were also asked to state whether they think councillors are overpaid or underpaid.

Walker, Paget, Bedard and Jackson concurred the current remuneration of almost \$30,000 is fair, given the amount of work council members do, while Albano said he hopes people don't get into politics for the money.

But Maltby begged to differ.

"They are overpaid currently," he asserted, noting council opted to approve a \$5,000 salary in-

Maltby, with most once again stating that councillors' current salary of \$29,995 is fair.

"We're not in this for the money folks, but if you want to attract educated people, you have to pay them," said Paget. "You really do get what you pay for."

When it comes to the current tax base and special tax levies, Albano and Paget said they want to keep taxes at a reasonable and affordable level, while Walker said growing the industrial/commercial tax base would help offset the residential tax burden.

Paget and Jackson said they think the Town has been doing a good job on the tax front, with Jackson adding she would keep a close eye on taxpayers' money if elected.

"I believe the most important role of a town councillor is to be the watchdog of the tax dollar," she said.

Maltby said he would also keep a close watch to ensure Town funds are being used appropriately.

Bedard addressed special tax levies, which are

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