

Unchecked development putting environment at risk

'Report card' finds Halton losing ground in more ways than one

By Angela Blackburn
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

Unchecked development is a major threat to the local environment, according to Conservation Halton authorities.

The warning was issued when Conservation Halton (formerly the Halton Region Conservation Authority) presented its first report card to Town Council recently.

"The trends and threats are very real and they need to be monitored very closely," Conservation Halton's Oakville representative Glen Powell told councillors.

The report card is the first review of Conservation Halton's strategic plan, Inspired By Nature, since the plan was adopted in 1998.

It's hoped the report card will set benchmarks in numerous areas — water quality, forest health, wildlife habitat and development pressures — against which future progress can be measured.

The report card gives high marks for protecting forests and promoting land stewardship.

However, it also identifies threats to the watershed's general health and indicates where remedial work is needed — mostly in coping with growth.

The watershed is the natural water drainage basin and its health is tied closely to the health of drinking water, explained Powell.

"Even with good progress that's demonstrated in our strategic plan, watershed creeks and natural lands are more threatened than ever before," warned Conservation Halton's CAO Theresa Maguire-Garber.

"Rapid urban expansion will have a negative effect on creeks, forests and groundwater if smart growth planning and conservation efforts are neglected," said Maguire-Garber.

In Halton, the watershed covers 948 square kms. through Oakville, Burlington and Milton, as well as parts of Halton

Hills, Mississauga, Hamilton and Puslinch.

The local watershed includes 17 creeks that flow into Lake Ontario and 80 km of Ontario's Niagara Escarpment, wetlands, and forests that cover an impressive 25% of Halton.

Conservation Halton also owns, and manages, more than 3,600 hectares of conservation land.

In addition, another 400 hectares of natural land and 30 km of waterways are now protected through agreements with private landowners.

Conservation Halton scored an "A" for land stewardship, achieved a status quo "B" for its work of protecting forests but slipped, earning a "C" in its acquisition of natural areas.

"The trend here is, literally, losing ground," he said.

Halton Conservation received top marks for its watershed planning efforts and financial stability.

It scored "Bs" for its integration of environmental planning, maintaining healthy creeks, providing a flood control and warning program, managing parks in sustainable ways, educating people about the natural heritage and developing long-term funding principles.

The report card indicated good co-operation exists between Conservation Halton and local municipalities, but that provincial funding has all, but slipped away.

Powell said Conservation Halton's primary revenue comes from user fees with another significant percentage coming from local municipalities. Only 3% is from the province.

"We share your concern about the lack of provincial funding. As you say, the watershed and the region don't really have boundaries, and this is another way the provincial government has off-loaded," said Mayor Ann Mulvale.

The report card states that, "The cumulative impacts of habitat loss and isolation will ultimately change the natural landscape and reduce its biological diversity and health. These changes will also reduce the quality of our drinking water."

For more information or a copy of the report card call Conservation Halton at 905-336-1158, ext. 233.

Numbering rural properties would cost \$12,000

By Angela Blackburn
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

The Town of Oakville is looking at spending roughly \$12,000 to put numbers on rural properties.

It would help the police, fire and ambulance find the address in case of emergency.

Most rural properties use a lot, concession or rural route postal address, but the 911 system requires that every property have a street name and number.

"There is no mandatory requirement for these signs, but most municipalities have provided the (signs) as a best practices approach," stated a report from Oakville Fire Chief Chris Powers to the Town's Administrative Services Committee Tuesday.

The plan was recommended for approval the committee.

Now it's headed back to staff for more work before it comes back to the committee with tangible recommendations in the hope of heading to council for final approval.

What's being suggested is a reflective metal sign that would be installed on Town property on the roadway near the entrance to a property.

"Because of introducing a new standard, and to ensure uniformity, many municipalities have installed these signs at no cost to the property owners as a one-time capital project," said Powers' report.

Asking rural residents to foot the bill for the signs hasn't historically been welcome.

While the town could invoice the rural residents for the estimated \$30-\$40 cost of their sign, or add it to their tax bill, Powers recommended against it.

"Rural residents already pay higher insurance premiums for fire protection as they are further from fire stations and not protected by hydrants," stated his report.

Ant replacement or repair would be, however, billed to the property owner.

It's estimated that some 300 rural properties in Oakville would need a sign.

At roughly \$30-\$40 per sign, that puts the cost at some \$12,000.

"The funding for this would have to be identified," advised Powers' report.

To get the sign program in place, the Town would also need a rule on its books that demands property identification.

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My name is Timothy Grubb.
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Council chambers sounding better

You should be able to hear town council meetings better these days — whether you go in person or watch on Cable 10.

Once again, the Town of Oakville has tweaked and toned its acoustics system.

It's been discussed, studied and adjusted to no end, and no good result.

However, recently as Cogeco, Cable 10, began flashing across the television screen "The audio problem is not the fault of the station, it originates at the Town Hall," Ward 2 Councillor Fred Oliver saw red.

"This, to me, is embarrassing," said Oliver as he called for a review of the council sound system more than a month ago.

Many hope the current retrofitting of the town hall, which calls for the lowering of the ceiling in the council chamber and improvement of the new brick walls, will go a long way to help acoustics.

"Councillors and members of the public have mentioned that an improvement is clearly evident during re-broadcasts of meetings," stated a report co-authored by the Town's purchasing and office services director Roger Cournoyer and acting town clerk Phil Bouillon.

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