

### Nick of time for Hillier Women's Institute's New Lease

The Hillier Women's Institute was scrambling this week to get its Trillium Grant application in before the July 1, 2005 deadline. But they needed Council's help to fast-track a lease agreement between the Hillier W.I. and the County for their regular meetings in the Hillier Town Hall in order to qualify for funding.

The Hillier Women's Institute intends to use their own funds along with the potential Trillium Grant to upgrade washrooms, improve the main entrance and install an automatic door in the hall and to improve accessibility.

Though some staff and councillors worried about the haste with which the lease was prepared, few were ready to deny the Women's Institute their request. The motion to approve the lease passed easily.

Earlier this year Mayor Leo Finnegan was among several bidders who paid more than \$50 for pies at the Hillier Women's Institute Spring Supper.

On Monday night Mayor Finnegan asked Councillor Burris what the repercussions might be if Council deferred consideration of the lease.

"You would be making a lot of ladies unhappy," said Burris. "And I can tell you the cost of coconut pies would go way up next year." 4-29-05

## Council approves Hillier WI lease

WI HAS BEEN USING THE HALL SINCE 1914, BUT NEEDED A LEASE AGREEMENT TO QUALIFY FOR A TRILLIUM GRANT

BRUCE BELL  
THE COUNTY

The Hillier Women's Institute finally has an official home.

However, they won't need moving van as council agreed to terms on a five-year lease for the use of the Hillier Community Hall which will allow the group to apply for a \$20,000 Trillium grant for upgrades to the facility.

The Women's Institute has actually used the hall since 1914, but to meet the criteria for a grant, a lease is a necessity and Monday night council agreed to the terms which will see the group hand over \$1 every year for the next five years.

"This will make Hillier Hall totally accessible said councillor and Women's Institute member Peggy Burris. "We will be redoing the washrooms, replacing the old ramp and installing an automatic door. We have a member in a wheelchair who

can't even get into the washroom so this will make it totally accessible."

Burris said approving the lease was necessary in order to allow the Institute to meet the July 1 deadline.

"This is a very ambitious project and if we fail to meet the deadline we will have to wait until November," she explained. "It takes 120 days to process a Trillium Grant application and if we don't get this looked at tonight they will not even look at application."

The lease agreement was amended to exclude a repair and maintenance clause as Burris stated "we are not interested in taking over the management of the hall."

A number of councillors expressed concern over the speed the agreement was completed but were assured by community services commissioner Barry Braun everything was in order.

The project is slated to proceed in three stages with the washrooms to be completed first. Burris said if the grant is unsuccessful, the group would move on with a fundraising campaign.

"The price of coconut crème pies is going to have to go up," quipped Burris. 06/30/05

## Breaking down barriers

Hillier WI receives \$20,000 of Trillium Fund money to improve access to Hillier Hall

For 91 years the ladies of the Hillier Women's Institute (WI) have lovingly cared for and maintained the Town Hall in Hillier. In fact, the ladies of Hillier have been meeting in the landmark building since 1914.

But like a lot of older buildings, not much allowance was made in the original design for those in wheelchairs, with strollers or those who have difficulty moving around in general.

The Hillier WI has taken it upon themselves to remedy this oversight. Last week they announced they had been successful in their application for funding a project to improve access to the community hall.

The Ontario Trillium Fund has granted the group's request for \$20,000 to convert the existing two washrooms in the hall into three family washrooms, one of which will be wheelchair accessible. A new ramp is also being installed outside and as well as an automatic door opener.

The total cost of the work is estimated to top more than \$21,000, of which the Trillium Fund will cover the bulk. The Hillier WI will cover the rest of the expense.

It's the municipality's job to ensure their buildings, including Hillier Hall, are accessible but as Peggy Burris, councillor and long time Hillier WI member, points out, "we (Council) have 80 buildings—if you multiply that by \$20,000 and you want us to do them all at once—then don't talk to me about taxes going up."

"We (County Council) have a commitment to making municipal buildings accessible, but it's not going to happen overnight."

"In Hillier, the WI just felt that we needed to do it here. We have a member who needs it. We decided to take responsibility and do it. In a way it is just a continuation of our organization's tradition of looking after this hall."

Burris believes it will be necessary for other communities to also pitch in if they expect to see improved accessibility in public buildings any time soon.

"Communities need to become involved in their buildings and take ownership," said Burris.



PHOTO: RICK CONROY

The ladies who made it happen: L-R Marylin Rennie, Brenda Dunlay, Peggy Burris, Betty Stapleton and Lee Ann Scammell

Often overlooked as a marginal issue, affecting only a small portion of the population, accessibility initiatives have been difficult to fund. But a survey conducted by BMG Group during the operational review of Community Services may be about to turn this conventional thinking on its head.

According to Burris, the poll found that "of 70 people surveyed, 40 of them indicated they didn't attend public function because of accessibility problems." It's clear from these findings that poor accessibility is a barrier to many more people in this community than is generally considered.

Burris felt it was appropriate that the funding announcement come as it did at the December meeting of the Hillier WI.

"Our December meeting we traditionally prepare cookie trays and distribute to families in need in the community," said Burris. "As well we have a quilt that we made at our November meeting. It will go to the Children's Aid Society—we do that every year. They use it as part of their Christmas exchange. This is kind of a giving meeting traditionally—that is why I think it was appropriate to announce this funding at this meeting."

The work is expected to be underway in the spring of 2006.

"It's a win-win," said Burris. "We are getting a much needed improvement to the hall, and two local contractors

will be doing the work."

After nine decades, the Hillier hall will soon be open to all members of the community, thanks to the efforts of the Hillier Women's Institute. TIMES 12-21-05