

Area, regional councillors state views on main issues

This week the Free Press continues the question and answer session with Acton's three representatives on area and regional councils. The questions began last week. Pat McKenzie is regional councillor, Joe Hurst and Les Duby area councillors.

11. Have you any suggestions how Acton people could be better informed? What about councillors' writing a column in the Free Press every couple of weeks to give more details on Acton concerns?



Regional Councillor Pat McKenzie

Duby: Under the committee system of the new council, and the divided areas of responsibility it might be difficult for the councillors to write a column and still keep within the boundaries of their specific area of involvement. However, if the citizens of Acton express their desire for such a column from each councillor, I would certainly do my best to comply with their request. However, I still maintain the people would be better informed if reporters would interview the councillors on an equal basis for additional comment on local matters, which come up for discussion after full council has dealt with the matter.

Hurst: The extent and content of public information should, in my mind, be a prime concern of the editor of a paper, and I can see no useful purpose being served by councillors attempting to share in this responsibility.

McKenzie: This idea of having councillors write a weekly column for the newspaper has been mentioned many times. This cannot be handled like our member of parliament in Ottawa. There he represents everyone in Halton Hills but in Ward 1 you have three councillors representing the people of Ward 1 and we do not think alike or vote as a group. When one has strong feelings on matters that concern Ward 1, and I generally do, I refuse to have someone else speak for me. I feel confident that the other councillors for Ward 1 share this feeling.

It is impossible at times to justify a decision of council unless you have read the information provided, listened to the presentation and heard the debate prior to the vote. Very few votes are taken that just concern the people in one ward.

If this question just concerns a few people then I would invite them to attend the council meetings. If it is a general concern then I believe it is a matter for the Acton Free Press to consider and resolve.

12. What is the most important legislation or project coming up next year?

Duby: The interim planning policies that will be ratified by the Regional Council as they prepare the Official Plan for the Region which will greatly effect the future of all our communities.

Hurst: I think the most important single piece of legislation to be considered in 1975 is the Region of Halton Interim Planning Policy. The regulations contained therein will have far-reaching effects on every parcel of land in Halton Hills.

G. W. McKenzie: The past year had difficult and unusual problems to be resolved. Council hired Department Heads and Staff, developed a climate in which council could function; established committee structures; re-drafted former by-laws; produced an operating budget; found facilities for staff as well as operating the town on a day to day basis.

Considerable progress was made in many areas and yet I know that we must be more efficient and more effective in 1975. The priorities as I see them in 1975 are:

- improve our public relations
- finalize our budget in April.
- establish planning policies for our town.
- provide better police coverage for ward II.
- establish our priorities for a five-year capital works budget.
- examine our facilities and equipment for fire protection.
- make it possible for Public Works to complete its program for 1975.
- up-date our library facilities and consider ways and means of centralizing our staff and equipment.
- In ward one I see the fol-

lowing priorities:

- completion of renovations at the arena.
- re-building of Church Street.
- better co-ordination of our recreational needs.
- improve conditions at Highway seven and the R.R. crossing at Main Street North.

take positive steps to provide relief to Beardmore's problem.

- increase our water supply by developing the well in Prospect Park.
- up-date equipment at disposal plant.

The last two are under Regional control and I know that they have been accepted by Regional Council for 1975.

13. 1974 tax mill rates are all different. Acton and Esquesing increased "because of inflation." Various factors were applied to arrive at the mill rates. Assessment notices recently sent out for 1975 are basically the same as last year. When will new assessments based on market value be used throughout the region so that politically-arrrived-at equalizing factors will not be required?

Duby: The Assessment department for both Peel and Halton has had great difficulty in coping with the inflationary trends and re-assessment at market value has not been postponed to a date beyond 1975, yet to be determined.

Hurst: The assessment program based on market values is now scheduled to be applied to the 1976 assessment for the 1977 taxes.

This two-year deferral was approved by the Ontario Legislature in October of 1973. The difference in the Acton and Georgetown 1974 mill rates is based on the premise that the assessments were calculated at approximately 22.5 percent of market value for Acton and at approximately 27.5 percent for Georgetown.

McKenzie: In 1974 we were forced to use four mill rates in Halton Hills because properties are not equally assessed. The latest word from the assessment department is that these new figures will be released in 1976 and used in 1977 for taxation purposes.

To say the ACTON and ESQUESING mill rates increased because of "INFLATION" is not a true statement. All mill rates increased because of inflation in 1974 and the same will be true next year. The former town of Georgetown raised considerably more money in taxes than they spent so they were able to absorb an increase without raising the mill rate even though their 1973 surplus was applied to our new arena complex. Esquesing, although it had a surplus in 1973, show a large increase due to new costs in policing, recreation and libraries.

In Acton we had a deficit in

1973. Therefore to raise the same money without considering inflation we had to show an increase in our mill rate. Acton also had a debt to the school board from 1969 which had to be paid up by 1974. Possibly this information will help you to realize that Ward I had an increase of 2.21 mills for general and regional levy and 3.36 for educational purposes making a total of 5.57 mills.

One must also remember that sewers and water costs are on a charge back basis so anyone living in the country do not contribute to these costs.

14. Next July the telephone calling area will be extended. Have any representations been made to include Acton listings within the regional Halton directory as well as the region of Waterloo and Guelph directories?

Duby: This matter was discussed at great length during the interim months of Halton Hills Council (Oct. - Dec. 1973). No decisions were reached, as Bell indicated it could not be accommodated until extended calling areas had been approved and dealt with, then perhaps the matter could be discussed again.

Hurst: I am not aware of any official representation having been made to Bell Canada in this respect. A suggestion has been submitted that inserts of the Acton listings be included in the Georgetown directory and vice versa.



Councillor Joe Hurst

McKenzie: YES! Bell of Canada made a survey for the Regional Council and reported their findings this fall. The survey was made in Acton and Burlington as both communities are not listed in the Peel-Halton Directory.

The survey clearly indicated that Burlington residents wish to remain in the Hamilton-Wentworth directory while the Acton residents were divided about 50-50 for listing in the Guelph and Halton Directory. It was recommended that a new survey be taken in Acton after we have direct dialing to Guelph and Milton in July of 1975. In the meantime anyone requesting a Peel-Halton Directory will receive one at no cost to them.

15. The designation of urban areas for services has been commenced. Will the urban area of Acton and Georgetown remain the same or be enlarged? If enlarged will this be as difficult to accomplish as the previous annexation program?

Do you want to see Acton grow? What about the enforced low-cost houses that come with the Housing Action program?

Duby: The urban areas of Acton and Georgetown both have conceptual plans for extension as required. This will be determined to the degree it can be accommodated, based on Ministry of the Environment controls of our ability to service any proposed development beyond our present community boundaries. The elimination of the need to apply for annexation will facilitate the extension of

present boundaries, keeping in mind the preservation of prime agricultural land and the desired direction of growth. This kind of decision has yet to be made. Acton's growth should be well controlled by natural elements that will dictate our ability to accommodate it. I have no personal desire to see Acton exceed a population of 12,000 to 15,000; and that, over an extended period of time.

The Housing Action program is fine for areas where it is needed, and can be accommodated. Looking around the country, we are better off with our present quality subdivisions. Low cost today can only mean low quality construction, and future citizens of our towns would be stuck with the result.

Hurst: I am sure that, whether we like it or not, growth will continue to some degree in the Acton and Georgetown urban areas. However, I am firmly convinced that we should restrict and control rather than encourage and support any proposed growth - it would be disastrous to continue at the pace of the last five years.

We must preserve our prime agricultural land, our natural beauty spots, our parks and recreation areas. This will only be accomplished by the finalization of the official plan, and, until then, I strongly urge that "urban sprawl" be kept to a minimum.

McKenzie: In the new town of Halton Hills the former urban areas of Ward I or wards III and IV can be enlarged if the majority of council so desire. The controlling factors for growth are more likely to be water and sewers. There is a limit to the effluent that can be discharged into the Black or Silver creeks. Therefore we may see "Estate" developments in rural areas using septic tanks.

Yes, I want to see Halton Hills grow in an orderly fashion industrially, commercially and residentially.

16. Senior citizens in Acton have indicated a requirement for more apartments. What is your opinion of the rejected offer of the old Legion building to Ontario Housing Corporation for senior citizens' housing? Will Acton be able to get other units soon, with 60 planned now for Georgetown?

Duby: It is most unfortunate that reasonable consideration was not given to the old Legion properly as a site for senior citizen accommodation. I know there is a need in Acton, and I know the province is aware of it. I am also aware that the

province is inclined to want to centrally locate this kind of accommodation to serve an area, with little thought as to how it affects the individual to be uprooted from a familiar neighbourhood. Of course we should still strive to get approval for additional units here in Acton, justified by the number of applicants and the availability of a site (which we had, but which was rejected.)

Hurst: I sincerely regret that the site of the former Legion building will not be used for senior citizen accommodation. Until another central location can be finalized, it is my opinion that the true needs for this type of housing will not be determined, no matter how many surveys are taken. If the location is right, the need will arise; if the need arises, action can be taken.

McKenzie: The Legion and adjoining properties would have made an excellent location for future apartments for Senior Citizens, and I was disappointed to learn that the site was not acquired by Ontario Housing.

However 60 units that will be built in the Georgetown area will not meet the needs of 35,000 people, and steps must be taken to have additional units built in the Acton area in the near future.

17. What do you think will happen with Acton OPP? What is your opinion of their service? What will be the benefit of changing to regional police?

Duby: We know that the OPP will be phased out eventually, as indicated in Bill 151. We have always had good service from our OPP detachment, and Acton over the years has been the envy of many municipalities who did not have the same contractual arrangement.

By comparison, we had better service than most - at less cost. Proposals for Regional Policing should give us similar coverage, if it is to be justified, with a detachment located in the urban community of Acton with a central administration for our area.

Hurst: (a) I think the Acton OPP detachment will eventually be discontinued. (b) The services of this detachment have been excellent, and Acton has been fortunate in having them for so many years.

(c) The benefit of changing will be that one force will police the whole region of Halton.

You suggest under Question 19 that fire protection should be regional - so why not police?

McKenzie: The cost of operating the OPP in Acton is

included in the Regional Police budget. For people in Ward I of Halton Hills the service is excellent and Nassagaweya are paying their share of the cost for Regional police and have a right to expect the service provided to others. For this reason we may move to Regional Police sooner than we expected.

When the change comes the benefit will be to the people living in Ward II.



Councillor Les Duby

18. Are costs greater, less or the same, in areas of works - police - fire - administration - planning - engineering?

Duby: The costs are bound to be greater for a period of time, in total; but after a period of a few years the area municipality is supposed to show a reduction in cost of operation compared to what it would have been had we been left to develop and grow separately.

Hurst: With a 6.44 per cent increase in the Acton 1974 residential tax, a 7.5 per cent commercial and industrial increase, and a 10-12 per cent increase in the cost of living index, I can only conclude that the 1974 overall costs have been maintained at the previous level.

McKenzie: The Finance Committee had excellent co-operation from staff and council and consequently a fair budget was developed for each department and it has been carefully controlled by our treasurer as can be seen by his monthly reports. There were savings when you consider duplication of staff and equipment but any savings that we were able to put into effect were swallowed up by rising costs of materials, equipment and wages.

When you try to compare the 1974 budget with ex-

penditures to the four communities in 1973 one must keep in mind that two communities did not have a planning or engineering department in 1973. They used consultants. In 1973 Acton did not pay 100 per cent of the cost of policing our town and we debentured some of our public works. In 1974 Halton Hills paid for all of its public works from our current budget.

I'm not trying to evade your question but as I pour over the 1974 budget and try to relate it to expenditures from four communities in 1973 I find I have no base from

which to make true comparison. + + + Continued on page 11

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