

Free Press Editorial Page

Essential ingredients

The coming move to establish a Business Improvement District along the main arteries in Acton is a step in the right direction.

It is to be encouraged because it provides the area with a mechanism for self-help. The dollars for the improvement program and promotion, will come from those in business in the area. True there is some provincial encouragement in the form of grants, but that is simply an indication that the province sees the importance of downtown areas in smaller centres.

The structure for collection of the self-help dollars is related to business assessment. That means that residential property that happens to be in the business improvement district will not be penalized, but if the property is converted to a commercial use it will then be a contributor.

We acknowledge the request to municipal council for the establishment of the area as an important and significant one, but it is not all that is required. It will not provide a magic wand to wave away the problems that have beset Acton's downtown or those of any of the other countless downtowns in Ontario.

There will be several other successful ingredients required beyond the establishment of the machinery. A key factor will be leadership. Without the kind of strong leadership from the area, that is required to engender co-operation, stimulate vision, and

encourage participation, things can bog down very quickly. Positions on the management board of the BID will have hours of frustration attached as well as moments of glory.

The kind of co-operation and sharing that goes beyond the payment of some annual fee to the BID program will be essential. Not everyone will agree every step of the way, but to withdraw interest or diminish support at the first obstacle will be to sound a retreat from the all-out effort required.

There will need to be a point of focus. What kind of downtown is envisioned? What unique features can be emphasized? In what way will Acton's downtown differ from the dozens of others that may be simultaneously embarking on a BID program?

And while Acton may be part of Halton Hills as is Georgetown that is no reason why the two downtown core areas should be similar. In fact we suggest it is important that they be different if the enhanced downtowns are to provide that unique focus that will contribute to the identity of the still socially separate communities.

We hope the establishment of a BID in Acton is successful through the legislation which requires the approval of Halton Hills Council, but we further hope that the leadership, co-operation and focus will also emerge to round out the program that could provide for Acton a stimulant to community identity.

Input more difficult

Citizen reaction to government action becomes more and more difficult as is evidenced by the haste to impose new arena rental fees before the local groups could gather their numbers to make a collective presentation to Halton Hills Council.

Councillors Les Duby and Pat McKenzie, representing the views of their fellow citizens, fought a valiant but losing battle when they asked the council to delay the imposition of the increased rates until the groups could meet with council.

There was something of arrogance in the suggestion that the groups could indeed meet with council when they chose, but in the meantime the higher rates would be approved. To those groups it must appear more like "Our mind is made up but if you can change it go ahead and try". That kind of

attitude suggests one of confrontation rather than one of any willingness to listen.

The new rates may indeed be the right rates, but getting people to understand that the facilities their taxes provide are going to cost more, is surely worth some opportunity for further discussion.

There is validity too in the suggestion that some consideration should be given to the difference in the size of area from which teams can draw. Acton teams obviously have a smaller population base on which to draw than Georgetown. If it becomes impractical for teams to survive in Acton, the arenas, the town and the full municipality will suffer. The municipality will suffer in less revenue and the town in losing another of the attractions that come from competitive sports.

It is regrettable that opportunity for citizen input gets more difficult.

Too late for many

The recent announcement of planned changes in the Ontario school system, that would place more emphasis on some core subjects, may not have come soon enough.

Interestingly enough a press release from the University of Waterloo arrived almost at the same time we were considering the new educational proposals.

The release told us that "Almost half the first year Faculty of Arts students at the University of Waterloo this fall have inadequate basic writing skills. This was the finding from a test given to 800 of them; 47 per cent were found to need help."

Further frustration must come to the average parent when Dr. Ken Ledbetter, a professor of English, emphasizes that the results came as no surprise. "A similar test, given first year students at the University of Alberta indicated 46 per cent needed help; the University of British Columbia also came up with a 46 per cent figure."

So the difficulty with basic writing skills stretches across the country. Small consolation.

"Now these students who didn't do well are not what you'd call illiterate by any means," Dr. Ledbetter says. "Many of them may be very bright and may be doing very well in their courses. They may be able to read like demons. It's just that they need extra help with basic writing skills."

He says some of the students who did badly were surprised. Some told him they had no previous indication of writing problems; others said they had had indications but that no remedial work had ever been done.

It would be simple to attribute the problem to the school system. We think it goes beyond that. Are young people encouraged to read the printed word in the home or are they more likely to be entertained in front of the television set? How much time is involved in writing a letter to a favorite aunt simply for the fun of it, rather than picking up a telephone and calling? And we get upset quite often when even the spoken work of younger people is so mumbled and jumbled that we can't interpret it.

The need to communicate in writing is being minimized because it requires a certain discipline that is unpopular. And all of the problem was not created in the school room. It is true that in the age of freedom the importance of disciplined, written communication may not have been emphasized. Neither was there any encouragement in many homes for disciplined, clear, writing or speaking.

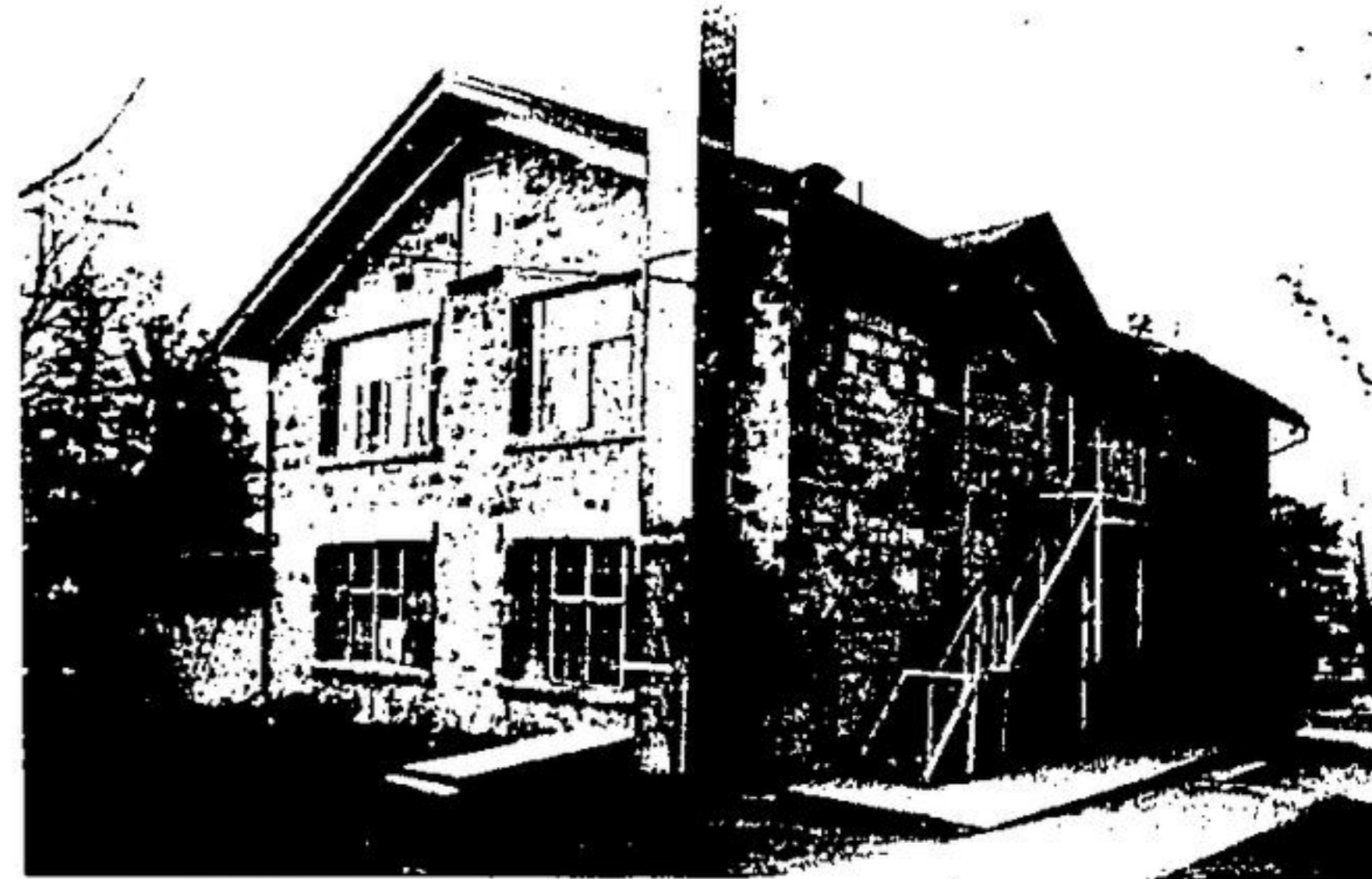
Leaning as we do on the school system for so much these days, it is encouraging to find there may be new emphasis on core subjects. But that doesn't diminish the need for some home emphasis too.



PERHAPS the lights on the Y building suggest some theme development for a new Acton image.



FEW PARKS still have a band stand. Acton's Prospect Park has.



THE OLD STONE school, a building of many pasts. A private home, continuation and later high school, an elementary school and possibly soon a separate school, and still a fascinating building.



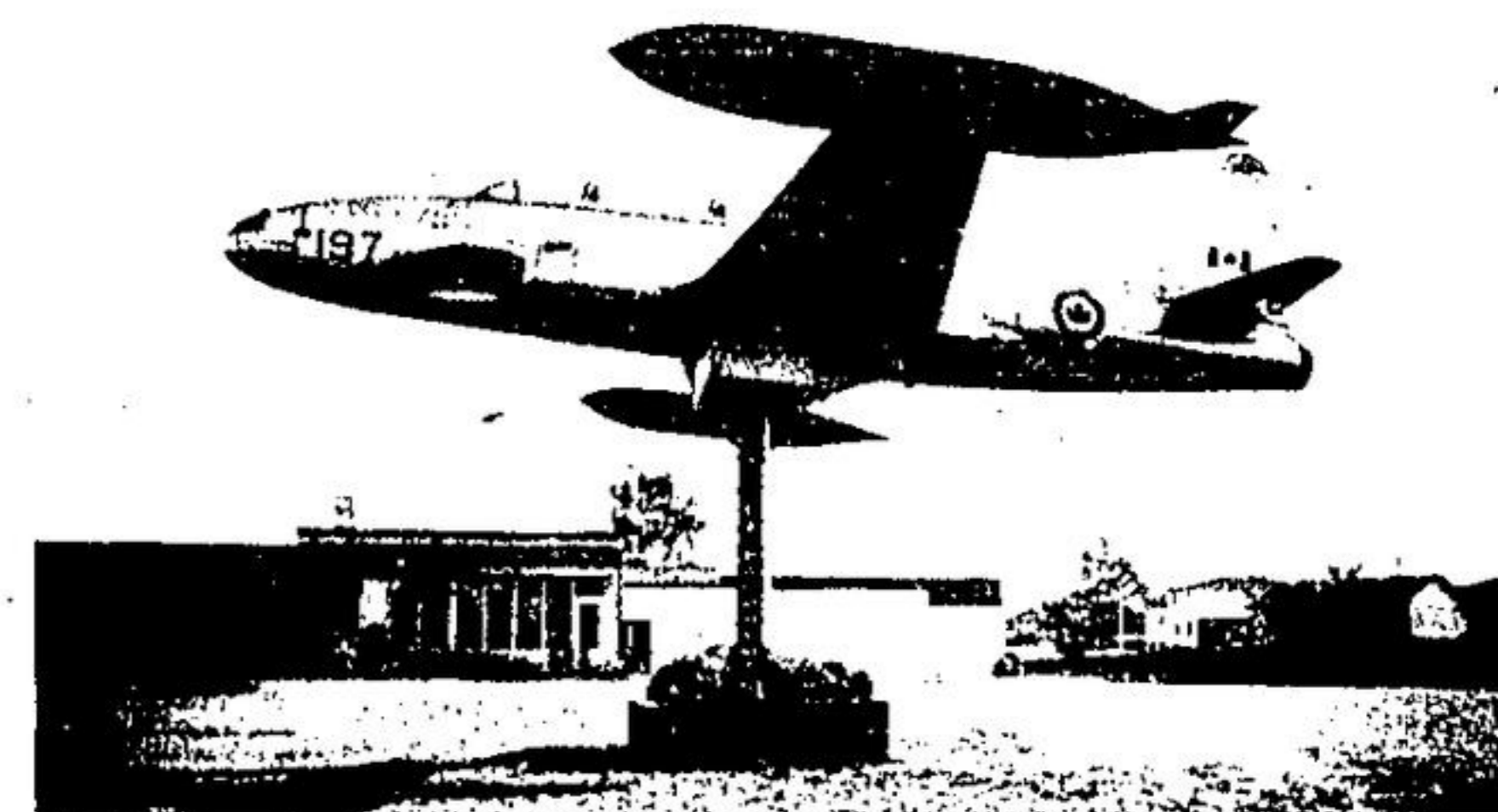
ACTON CITIZENS' Band Music Centre in a superb setting is an important community focus.



THE WATERFALL from Fairy Lake, largely hidden but worth looking for.



ACTON'S TOWN HALL, stripped of authority but still a proud building with many unique architectural features.



THE NEW Legion Hall is a proud example of local initiative.



ACTON PROUDLY boasted the Y building, a gift from the Murray Estate. An important link with the town's administration.