

Region or not: water costs up

Armed with sheafs of papers, clippings, reports and a huge map, regional councillor Pat McKenzie met Monday with councillors Les Duby, Peter Marks and the Free Press to defend the region's facts and figures on water rates in Acton.

Halton Regional treasurer Donald Farmer is recommending increases of 60 per cent in the water rates for people in the Acton urban area. And there will still be a deficit, even after the increases are applied to Acton billing, perhaps in July.

The water rates here have not been increased since 1964, a period of 13 years, and Mr. McKenzie recognizes now that Acton council should indeed have increased the rates in 1972 or 1973. In the meantime, other municipalities have increased their rates two or three times since 1964.

None of the Halton rates have been adjusted since regional government took over. Council agreed each municipality would assume the costs of its own water and sewer system. Equalized rates right across the region were turned down by Halton council in 1975. However, Mr. McKenzie says he now would support equalized rates.

Mr. McKenzie rebutted Councillor Les Duby's comments in last week's Free Press that the region has "grandiose, high-cost ways of operating." In actual fact, Mr. McKenzie declared, all the work to the system now urgently required was recommended to Acton council before it dissolved. The five-year forecast prepared for the Acton council in June, 1973 by R.V. Anderson Associates consulting engineers, laid out the work that is now underway and planned for the next couple of years.

This is the report being followed by the region, he said.

Councillor Marks agreed with councillor McKenzie that the costs listed by the region works department are justified. "We're going to have to bite the bullet," he philosophized. "We're going to have to build confidence in the public that the regional

government is not a big monster out to gobble us up."

The comment by regional treasurer Don Farmer that Acton's sewer and water system was done "on the cheap" annoyed the three Acton councillors, all former members of Acton town council. However, after reviewing our former method of operation councillor McKenzie felt there were things left undone.

They agreed the town was forced to operate within its financial limits.

Mr. McKenzie states forcefully that things would not be better financially if Acton went back to its old system of government. "If we went back to the old system we'd get clobbered," he insisted.

Acton had a small financial base and limited staff. Some of the problems in the system here can be attributed to lack of staff and supervisors.

The three former councillors gave full credit to town superintendent Alf Duby and his men, who did a good job under difficult circumstances with limited funds.

Acton council was constantly faced with a need to cut costs, the men recalled wryly.

"Things buried in the ground were hard to see," and sometimes were neglected, Mr. McKenzie said.

When municipalities operated on their own, they figured, Mr. Duby recalled, "you don't put a Cadillac system in a Chevrolet town." He commented that more is being done under regional government than the old local level would have done.

By the time the R.V. Anderson five-year report was accepted in June 1973, it was too late for the old Acton council to act on it. Regional government was at our doorstep.

But the report is still valid. Before reaching the conclusion that the region's figures are justified, councillor McKenzie spent half a day with regional staff from the engineering and treasury departments in Burlington, Saturday morning driving

through Acton pinpointing problems; he talked to numerous staff members

from the former town; re-read R.V. Anderson Associates 35-page report from June 1973 and checked the five year capital forecast and budget statements.

He learned that the town water system was installed in 1922 to serve a town of 4,000. Sewers were installed in 1949 to accommodate 250,000 imperial gallons a day, and in 1968 increased to accommodate 625,000 gallons a day. The pumping station at Main and Agnes was rebuilt in 1968. In 1958 another pumping station was added at Lakeview.

In 1972 the flow was 517,000 imperial gallons a day for a population of 5100. It became obvious there was excessive infiltration into the system.

The water rates at present are the same as those set in 1964. In the 1960s the town council subsidized them from the general rates rather than approve increased rates. This was a concern for the auditor and council was aware of it. Staff recommended an increase in rates so the budget would be more self-sufficient.

A minimum of improvements and preventive maintenance has been done over the past 15 years, Mr. McKenzie continued.

More houses have been added in vacant lots, Glenlea and Lakeview subdivisions added without any financial assistance to update the system.

Councils worked to add more wells, a new reservoir, extended services, and operation of the sewer plant but lacked the money, men and equipment so preventive maintenance could not be done. They did not remove dead ends and create looping as the system extended. They did not add sufficient valves to make repairs without disrupting large areas. In 1960 the Public Utilities Commission dissolved, leaving water and sewers to the town office. The town superintendent Alf Duby was then in charge of roads, water, sewers, storm sewers, sidewalks, the cemetery—and what have you.

The industrial park was added, Mr. McKenzie related. No subdivision agreements were made with council until developments on Churchill North and South, Cobblehill and Bovis.

Bower Ave. was rebuilt in 1972 without attention to the water mains and sewers beneath. Bower Ave. now must be flushed weekly to maintain the flow in the sewers. This is normally done twice a year.

In 1973 council engaged R.V. Anderson for a study and report on water, water storage, sewers and the plant, roads and sidewalks and storm sewers.

From this came the five year forecast.

Had we not gone regional, Mr. McKenzie declared, the engineer's recommendation would have been accepted and acted upon by Acton council. Water rates would be drastically increased and more money used from general revenue.

But Acton could not operate as a town under present-day costs, Mr. McKenzie concluded bluntly.

The public works department has detailed lists of work planned for this year and next.

Some of the necessary jobs are an 18-inch sanitary sewer from Mill to Church; sewer on Willow; main on Churchill Rd. from Cedar Road (to the new high school).

In one case, sewers are laid on planks which have since disintegrated; the site is on quicksand.

Several of the jobs connect with other mains to provide looping. Some are planned to extend further in the future.

The work should certainly be done at the same time as the road above is being reconstructed. Main St. will be rebuilt this summer.

Water line work is being done on Churchill while the road is being rebuilt.

The region staff now has a program of preventive maintenance. They make improvements as they go along, if they have the time and manpower.

There are nine men in the regional works department for all of north Halton, Acton, Milton and Georgetown. Their equipment includes one backhoe and one dump truck. They have had an exceptionally busy winter due to the bad weather. When extra equipment is needed it must be contracted or they borrow from Halton Hills or Milton area works departments.

Well needed

Studies show that the well at the end of the park is very much needed. The work has been held up because of the concerns of Beardmore and Co. that the well might result in lower lake levels. (The company owns the lake and uses its water in its production processes.) The Ministry of the Environment has become closely involved and the water levels will be carefully monitored when the well goes into operation. Pipe could be laid as soon as next week.

Although the maximum capacity of the well is two million gallons a day, only a million gallons a day will be pumped. The new line will come down Knox Ave. A new water 12 inch main will

eventually go up Main St. N. to Wallace Ave. to better serve the entire town.

Tour

Mr. McKenzie toured the whole town with an Acton region employee, and saw for himself many places where the system is deficient. In some cases, a few hours and a few hundred dollars work would greatly improve the system.

Mr. McKenzie stresses the importance of work which will limit the number of streets cut off in the event of an emergency.

For instance H.K. Porter's would be shut off in the event of a waterbreak on McDonald or Wallace unless a small loop is added. Until new valves are added a water break on Queen or Acton Blvd. would require all of Glenlea subdivision to be without water.

When new valves were installed on Main last fall, Kingham, Brock, Church, Cobblehill and Victoria were all without water.

And being without water means being without fire protection, too.

After his search for facts, Mr. McKenzie backs up his public works committee's decision fully. And, he insists, we would have been obligated to implement R.V. Anderson's recommendations whether we had regional government or not.

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Bowlers' children need new quarters

The women of the GWG bowling league are concerned that 15 to 20 members of their league may have to give up the game next year, if a suitable spot for baby-sitting cannot be found. The extra cost of renting a hall is putting the cost of bowling up a bit too much for some of the young mothers.

is no longer available to them.

Suggestions?

Mrs. Donna Staves, who contacted the Free Press, says the women were very happy with the arrangement there and were upset at the news. After finding a private home much too cramped, they ended this season renting the scout hall. However, it's \$15 a week and the group would like to find something even more reasonable.

Mrs. Staves would like to hear from anyone with a good suggestion; she's at 853-3965. The league has been underway eight years and the participants would hate to see it fold. About 20 children are minded each session, which lasts from 12.30 to 3.30 each Thursday afternoon from September to the end of May.

Four hurt

Four Acton residents were injured in an accident Monday on Halton Road 3 near Fifth Line. Joseph Kentner, R.R. 3, Acton, and Gordon Chafe, 63 Churchill Road, Acton, suffered major injuries in the accident, and were taken to Georgetown Hospital and later transferred to Brampton Hospital.

Mr. Kentner was driving on Halton Road 3 when his car skidded off the road to the right and struck a tree, rebounding across the road and striking another tree there. \$3,000 damage was done to the vehicle.

Robin Speaker, 122 Mill Street and John Hansen, 70 Young Street, received minimal injuries and were also taken to Georgetown Hospital and released.



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Now is a good time for you to become personally acquainted with your local school.

During Education Week, stop in for a visit and discover what your children are learning. Get to know the principal and teacher. Find out more about the activities.

While you're there, ask about the new "community school" concept which invites participation by parents in making the local school something of a community centre for neighbourhood activities and programs. "Community school" is an idea developed by your Ontario Ministry of Education and is a partnership of school and community—people working together for everybody's sake.

If you would like a free copy of our book about

community schools, "Open Doors: A Community School Handbook"—in English or French—write to:

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