

"Challenge to our credibility"

Actonians for Action reply to McKenzie

The Editor
The Acton Free Press
Dear Madam:

In the September 28, 1977 issue of the Acton Free Press, you published a letter written by Halton Hills Regional Councillor for Ward 1 (Acton) G. W. "Pat" McKenzie, addressed to the Honourable W. Darcy McKeough, Treasurer of Ontario, Ministry of Treasury Economics and Inter-governmental Affairs.

In this letter, Regional Councillor McKenzie outlined what he considered to be the advantages and accomplishments of Regional Government in Halton Hills since its inception on January 1, 1974. At the same time, Mr. McKenzie indicates that he feels that a change in the status quo of government in Halton Hills, with the possible creation of a fifth municipality having Acton as its urban centre, would be, in his words, both a "backward step" and "utterly unrealistic."

Mr. McKenzie makes these statements in his letter to the Honourable Mr. McKeough in respect to the activities of a group of concerned Acton citizens calling themselves "Actonians for Action", who have submitted a brief to both Halton Regional Council and the Province of Ontario pertaining to the position of Acton in the new Town of Halton Hills.

With the intention of helping to provide the citizens of Halton Hills with some meaningful background on this matter, the Committee of Actonians for Action wish to respond publicly to what appears to be an open challenge to our credibility by our Regional Councillor, G. W. McKenzie.

First of all, in an open letter to the citizens of Acton, printed in the local press on December 22, 1976, the Actonians for Action Committee stated that the aims and objectives of our group were to "promote and foster efficiency in all levels of government, but more particularly at the municipal level" and "to strive for increased influence in determining the future course of government in Acton."

To accomplish this, a detailed study of the future of Acton in Regional Government was undertaken, with the clear announcement that other alternatives to the present system of government would also be considered. As a result of this study by our Committee, a brief on what we considered to be Acton's position in Regional Government, specifically in Halton Hills, was formulated and submitted to Halton Regional Council and subsequently to the Hon. Darcy McKeough's office with the Province of Ontario.

The majority view of our group, after considerable discussion on the matter, was that we were not sufficiently convinced of the benefits of being part of Halton Hills to discontinue our investigation. Rather, we felt there was sufficient evidence to ask the provincial and regional officials to conduct and inquiry into the FEASIBILITY of creating a fifth municipality in Halton Region, with the former Town of Acton as its urban centre. We would like to stress that our Committee has not, at this point, asked for an outright division of Halton Hills into two separate communities.

The reason for Councillor McKenzie's confusion surrounding the objectives of our Committee could stem from the fact that Mr. McKenzie was absent when our brief was presented to the meeting of the Regional Bill 151 Review Committee, of which he is a member.

Perhaps the most effective method of responding to Regional Councillor McKenzie's comments would be to look at them chronologically as he raises them in his letter to the Honourable Mr. McKeough.

First of all, we question Councillor McKenzie's statement that the former Town of Acton was experiencing financial difficulties to the degree of having to sell town-owned land to bring down an "acceptable" budget in 1973. While it may be true that Acton did sell town-owned land in 1973 for various reasons, we feel that Mr. McKenzie is incorrect in claiming it was due to Acton's poor financial position.

Councillor McKenzie maintains that in the past three years, Halton Hills Council has:

1. Set responsible mill rates. Were responsible mill rates not set prior to 1974?

Could responsible mill rates not be set by an independent Acton once again? Also, how much were Halton Hills mill rates held down by public pressure not to build a million dollar Municipal Building, or by provincial transitional grants, due to expire shortly? What will future mill rates be like without these grants?

2. "Maintained a low debenture debt by paying for capital expenditures out of current operating budgets." Actonians for Action maintain that Acton's debenture debt was in good shape prior to Regional Government, and according to Regional debenturing practices, could still be maintained on a reasonable level under an Acton centred municipality within Halton Region.

3. "Worked toward an Official Plan for Halton Hills which should be approved in 1978". The three former municipalities we believe, all had Official Plans prior to Regional Government in Halton Hills. Why will it take almost five years to implement one uniform Official Plan for Halton Hills? Especially when considering the large full-time Planning department acquired since 1974?

4. "Spent many meetings reviewing by-laws, agreements, etc., of the three former municipalities". The hours spent in reviewing these by-laws etc., were necessitated by the forced amalgamation of the three former municipalities, and would not have been required if a Regional Government had not been initiated. Besides, what rule decrees that the same regulations should apply in all three former areas, or that these uniform regulations will be just and equitable?

5. "Developed a plan for updating urban and rural roads." Acton had a five year capital works project, which included roads maintenance and upgrading prior to Regional Government. Also, why is it that most of the reports Actonians for Action hear from our rural neighbours indicate that services have deteriorated since road responsibilities were taken over by Halton Hills from the former Township of Esquesing?

6. "United the Volunteer Fire Departments and updated their facilities". Recent developments between Acton's Fire Department and Halton Hills Council concerning expansion of Acton's Fire Hall and parking facilities for firemen would indicate that relations between the Town and firemen are anything but harmonious. The firefighters' wishes would appear to have been ignored, or at least, completely misinterpreted by Council.

7. "United the Public Works Department under one roof in Esquesing, enlarging the property and buildings to accommodate them." Actonians for Action challenge the wisdom of this move. When Regional Government amalgamated the former Town of Milton with its rural hinterland in Nassagaweya, the Brookville works yard in Nassagaweya was kept open, and still functions as before. Apparently, Milton area councillors felt centralization of services in one location was impractical. Actonians for Action believe that centralization does not necessarily make public works service more efficient.

8. "Spent considerable funds in Recreation to provide two new swimming pools, refurbish two old arenas and build many tennis courts etc." Is Councillor McKenzie's memory so bad that he doesn't recall that Acton's Lion's Centennial Pools was approved and initiated under the former Town Council of Acton, with funds generated by the sale of town-owned land, as well as public donations? Acton's pool would have been built regardless of Regional Government. Revenue from the sale of town-owned land also went towards arena roof repairs and the construction of tennis courts; both allocations being approved PRIOR to Halton Hills being created!

9. "Acquired excellent department heads to plan and control our growth and operate Halton Hills in a business-like manner." The citizens of Acton, through their experiences with these various departments, could certainly provide some critical opinions on just how efficiently these departments are being operated.

Councillor McKenzie in his letter in-

dicates that he feels Halton Hills' most urgent need at the present time is an Administrative Building. His position on this rather expensive matter seems now to be totally contrary to his election campaign statements in 1976, where he stated emphatically that he would not support further consideration for expansion of the municipal Administrative Building.

According to his letter, the three local councillors spent "many hours" with Actonians for Action to explain the many advantages of being part of Halton Hills. The facts are that Councillors McKenzie, Doby and Marks attended one meeting of our committee early in 1977 for approximately two hours and answered general questions. Councillor Marks also provided statistical documentation to one of our Sub-committees. We feel this hardly constitutes "many hours".

Strangely, the Regional Councillor claims that our brief refers to the poor condition of Acton's Town Hall. Is he reading the same brief we presented? At no time have we ever referred to Acton's Town Hall in our presentation. He seems to be confusing us with another group of Acton citizens attempting to save our Town Hall building. His comment here seems totally irrelevant.

Finally, we believe Councillor McKenzie's perspective on the activities of Actonians for Action should be viewed with

a strong degree of skepticism. In an article in the Toronto Star, January 5, 1977, Mr. McKenzie is quoted as saying "One of the great rivalries between Acton and Georgetown." The article reads that Councillor McKenzie said he believes the review by the Actonians for Action group is worthwhile.

The article goes on to say "McKenzie said he thinks the province made a mistake in putting Acton and Georgetown into the new Town of Halton Hills. It might have been better, he said, to have created a fifth municipality in Halton so that Acton and Georgetown could have continued as separate municipalities."

Was our Regional Councillor quoted accurately in that Toronto Star article? If so, what has caused him to abandon those earlier views which were in line with the objectives of Actonians for Action?

In conclusion, we hope that we have clarified our position to the citizens of Acton and Halton Hills generally, while responding to the statements made by our Regional Councillor, G. W. McKenzie.

Respectfully,
Peter J. Papillon,
Chairman.

Norman R. Elliott
Vice-Chairman
Actonians for Action

Council chairs \$1,033

If plans go as scheduled Halton Regional Councillors will find themselves perched on chairs valued at more than \$1,000 when they move into the new regional headquarters.

Chairs under consideration now are valued at \$1,033 each but the actual cost to the region will be between \$500 and \$600. The choice of the chairs has yet to be ratified by council but has been approved by the region's building committee.

While the committee has opted to recommend new

furniture for the council chambers furnishings for the chairman's office and the staff offices are to stay the same.

The committee recommended purchase of the chairs during a recent meeting. According to consultant Paul Alms the chair is the same chair that famous chess player Bobbie Fisher insists on using.

The chair was initially designed for use in the Times-Life Building in New York City. Alms describes it as a classical leather chair.

Alms conceded that it might seem like a lot of money but he claims it is an economic way to go in the long run.

"As the region becomes the focal point for other governmental agencies the chambers will be used more and more. The chambers and the chair will get heavy use and the councillors are concerned about creating a suitable atmosphere."

The chairs now in use in the current chambers will be allocated for use in the largest of the new committee rooms.

"Board falling apart"

"Planning board procedures are falling apart at the seams" commented Board Chairman Roy Booth Tuesday night, as he asked guidance from members on the public's participation in meetings when they are not on the agenda, and it is not a public hearing on a planning amendment.

He explained he felt he was in a dilemma when people in the audience put up their hands to speak, but were not on the agenda. He contended the meetings were getting out of hand, with people talking for long times, and trying to debate with planning board rather than asking questions.

He emphasized he was all in favor of people making submissions to the board, but wanted them to be on the agenda. "When it's an advertised public meeting to discuss a planning amend-

ment that's a different thing, then of course the point of it is to hear the public's views."

Mayor Tom Hill said planning board is becoming bogged down and urged faster answers. "We have to stop keeping people hanging and say we approve or don't. Delays only add to the costs in the long run."

Councillor Pat McKenzie said there are no hard and fast rules for this type meeting, and said it would be hard to enforce.

Councillor Mike Armstrong admitted he had been concerned for a long time about procedure at planning board, and contended councillors want to appease residents of their ward who are sitting in the audience. "It's got so far out of line no one can conduct a proper meeting."

Councillor Les Doby argued councillors are

elected to do a job and think for themselves, even if it means "political suicide." He recalled he had open space all around his house for years, but the land was zoned for residential buildings and is now all built up. "There's too much telling people what they can do with their land when it's zoned properly."

Councillor Marilyn Serjeantson suggested the easiest method may be to have no one speak unless they are listed on the agenda, but written submissions could always be sent to planning board.

A 15 or 30 minute time slot at the beginning of the meeting for the public to put forward their views, without having to be on the agenda was suggested by Councillor Walter Biehn. "This would be for anyone who happens to be in the audience and might solve some of our problems in the long run."

Finally planning board decided to ask Planner Mario Venditti to prepare a report on the provisions of the Planning Act and recommend procedures for planning board meetings.

Skerrett checks vandals

Halton Regional Police Chief Ken Skerrett is taking a first hand look at vandalism in the north. So far he's found little.

Tours of Georgetown and Acton last week turned up few people on the streets, Chief Skerrett told police commission Thursday in Oakville. The chief said he'll make additional inspections on weekends.

There was not a person on the streets for 45 minutes in Georgetown, chief Skerrett said. Last Wednesday night in Acton he said he saw four people on the streets. He said the same findings were made in two separate trips during weekdays.

The inspections will help to decide if police are going to put additional men on the street.

Further reports are also being waited on, before a decision is made, the chief said.

If the results remain the same, I can't justify putting a man on the street, Chief Skerrett said.

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