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No to town hall restoration . . .

(Continued from page 1)

Acton does get its fair share of maintenance services like roads and water-sewer works, but in other areas the community was lacking and it was time for Georgetown and Esqueping councillors to come to the aid of ward one, Tyler declared. By saving the town hall councillors could be leaders in the drive to revitalize downtown.

The councillors who had always been opposed to the town hall shouldn't feel guilty about changing their position, all they'd have to do was eat a little crow which would be easy since "fowl is in season now."

Just as it was 100 years ago when it was built, the hall is a controversial issue today and it was a good deal to build it then and it's a good deal to save it now.

Acton wants to be part of Halton Hills and was asking for its aboriginal rights, Tyler said, urging councillors hear the voices and feel the pulse of the community.

Council shouldn't allow the hall to create a Mason-Dixon line through Halton Hills on the Escarpment, Tyler said. He asked council help Acton maintain its identity and get a pearl instead of a pea in the deal.

Betty Oakes questioned how the hall's maintenance and upkeep would be financed while Nan Hurst suggested nobody has natted down exactly what will be done with the hall once it's restored. Pomeroy said both questions would be answered during the council debate.

Grubbe and Knechtel moved and seconded the mayor's notice of motion of two weeks ago which stated:

"Whereas the former Town of Acton Town Hall was constructed in 1882-83;

"And whereas in 1874 the former Town of Acton became a part of the Town of Halton Hills and the former Town Hall became surplus for municipal administrative offices;

"And whereas in 1977 the Council of the Corporation of the Town of Halton Hills received a petition to have the former Town of Acton Town Hall saved; and

"Whereas the Town of Halton Hills in 1977 designated the building as a historical site by By-law 77-94; and

"Whereas the community have continued to express their support for the possible restoration of the building by various fund raising activities; and

"Whereas the Town of Halton Hills have received confirmation of "Eligibility for Wintario Capital Grant Program", and which confirmation has been extended by the Ministry of Culture and Recreation to facilitate the undertaking of a feasibility study which has not been completed; and

"Whereas the feasibility study and B.I.A. Study have identified the need, the historical significance, the costs, based on alternative scenarios;

"Now, therefore, the council of the Corporation of the Town of Halton Hills enacts as follows:

"That the Council indicate their endorsement of the retention and restoration of the former Town of Acton Town Hall;

"That the aforesaid commitment to this project be on the basis that the municipality is eligible to receive Wintario, Heritage and Community Recreation Centres grants from the Province of Ontario;

"That the municipality make application to the various agencies for confirmation of all eligible grants prior to proceeding with the project once firm tendered costs for the works are received;

"That Scenario number 4 at an estimated cost of \$440,000.00, plus fees, plus furniture, finishes and equipment as outlined in the Feasibility Study dated December, 1981, by Kleinfeldt Consultants Ltd. be the approved scenario;

"That the municipal portion of the funding for the project be included in the 1982 Capital Budget for consideration."

Booth surprised many by backing the town hall after long opposing the project. The cultural centre will always be the Georgetown library and hamlets have community centres so Acton should have one too, he said. Each area of Halton Hills is different and each should have a focus for maintaining its identity.

He said the mayor's backing of the hall had swayed his vote, because with Pomeroy working for the town hall it meant the project would be a success.

Councillors shouldn't be "bigots" and stick to old stands and commitments they made before all the facts about the town hall were known.

A new building would be put to better use by the community than the town hall will be, Miller predicted, and moving the police station to the town hall would be a mistake because it would take the regional force off the main street. Meeting rooms aren't needed in Acton and there are places for the seniors to meet.

Backing the town hall would put saving the Stone School on thin ice because the municipality couldn't do both. Saving of the town hall would also force moving of the fire hall, something which can't be afforded, Miller said. The hall would also create new parking problems in the downtown area.

Saving the town hall for heritage reasons had some merit, Serjeantson said, but it would create tremendous budget problems in a year when running the finances of the town will be very difficult. The only way to handle the project would be to take funds out of reserves set aside for a municipal complex, she warned.

There were too many questions still not answered on town hall funding and an example of restraint must be set at the Halton Hills level because it isn't happening at the region, Queen's Park or in Ottawa. Also need for the town hall hadn't been established strongly enough.

Whiting countered the municipal complex and Stone School worries were red herrings since they would be financed by different methods. If Acton is to grow, a new fire hall, more centrally located, will be needed anyway he added.

The BIA study shows there will be parking in the downtown so that was no problem, Whiting said, and council couldn't wait another year to save the town hall when financing might be easier because the project won't be there. If restraint was needed now why wasn't it needed with the library-cultural centre, he wondered.

The region wants to expand its services in Acton but can't without offices so the hall would give not just Halton Hills a presence in Acton but also the region. Hall maintenance will be less than renting municipal quarters and consolidation of town offices was desirable in Acton, the same as it is in Georgetown.

He predicted the building will cost less than \$400,000 to restore but the only way to get all the answers was to call tenders.

Need for the hall hadn't been established, making grants questionable, Levy said, adding the new Salvation Army building planned in Acton will add more meeting space to the community. He branded the hall a "pink elephant" and a project pushed by just a handful of people who only wanted to save the outside of the building at the start of their campaign.

The location isn't suitable for things like the Acton Social Services and Information Centre and many potential users won't be able to pay much in rent.

The fire hall and needed changes to the building will mean compromise on the integrity of the hall appearance and will mean council is creating a monument, Levy said.

The 1977 petition contained names of school children and non-residents and was taken over a long period of time while a recent petition had been gathered on one weekend and contained names of

people of "significant standing" in the community.

To save the building to preserve Acton's identity would go against the whole idea behind Halton Hills and Levy painted a gloomy economic picture for not just the town but the entire nation to back up his claim the hall wasn't affordable.

There were many "ifs" surrounding restoration costs and cost to the taxpayers and he suggested the final cost would be about \$600,000 or \$84 a square foot. The hall would add between \$16 and \$23 to the average tax bill for just one project, Levy warned.

Despite hard work and strong efforts the fund raising for the hall hasn't gone well, showing a weak interest in Acton in the project.

He asked how Acton councillors could back Section 88 to make the tax system fairer and then turn around and want to "aggravate" the financial situation by adding the town hall to the long list of projects the municipality must fund this year.

Budget cuts would be needed to pay for the hall and Levy asked if council wanted to put Acton, downtown revitalization, road work and a new fire pumper for Acton, in jeopardy. "Is it any wonder that I am displaying such concern?" he said after reviewing the town's financial position.

He said if the town hall was saved he couldn't continue the tough job as budget committee chairman.

Blehn said the consultant's report shows there is no need for the town hall and while he appreciated sentiment for the hall he couldn't back a project which isn't needed. The hall has never been a "thing of beauty" and wasn't "physically worth saving."

Acton's identity is its people and not tied to the town hall Sheldon suggested, and need wasn't established in the study. Money should be spent on downtown revitalization not the town hall, she said, noting tourism won't focus on the town hall either.

She said she shared Levy's concerns about town finances and there were too many "ifs" surrounding restoration costs and grants. It's a "funding nightmare". She couldn't support an unnecessary project when roads are needed in Esqueping and the town shouldn't go out and spend thousands just to get grants.

Halton Hills should take advantage of grants, McDonald said, and the town hall was the first time Acton has put its "act together" and supported a project since regional government.

Council didn't need to decide now to go for either total restoration or tear the building down. It would be wrong to tear the building down now because remedial work could be done on the exterior with existing funds.

Pomeroy said he didn't become a town hall backer without first studying the plan carefully and suggested facts and figures were twisted by some members of council.

Total restoration cost will be closer to \$500,000 than \$600,000, the mayor said, and council could be flexible in working out the financing just as it was with the \$1.7 million cultural centre.

Both the BIA and hall studies "lean towards restoration" and the hall will give the town a presence in ward one at less cost than a new building. The study also said there is a need for a community resource and government information centre in Acton.

Wintario and other grants are committed and will go to another town if the hall isn't saved by the municipality. If the grants weren't as high as the town expected then the project could be killed then. Halton Hills would never know how much it could get in grants if it didn't commit to the project and calls for tenders or architect's estimates.

There was no question in the mayor's mind the town hall would help the tourism movement in Acton and there would be spin-off benefits for the community and municipality from the hall.

The identity aspect to the town hall was legitimate and it is important the community's identity is preserved, Pomeroy said.

The public must raise \$53,666 and Pomeroy said the project could be killed if the money wasn't raised, though he was sure a commitment would bring the almost \$40,000 additional funds needed.

The project will cost about \$225,000 in tax dollars and he promised to work hard to bring it in on budget, about \$56 a square foot. Reserves will never build a municipal complex and that facility won't be built until there is either a lot more growth or the project is debentured. He felt the reserves would be well spent on the hall.

After the vote, a move to have the staff look at price, restrictions and methods of selling the hall was discussed.

Booth said nothing should be done with the hall until next year to allow time for the "dust to settle."

Council shouldn't vote not to have the building and then turn around and sell it to a community group, Armstrong said. Such a move would be a "slap in the face" to Acton. He said council was just "prolonging the agony."

Whiting asked the matter be shelved for a while to give Acton groups time to put together proposals.

Clerk-administrator Ken Richardson said the town can rent or sell the building and Pomeroy added the municipality can't give a community group the \$40,000 set aside for demolition.

Levy agreed the matter should be deferred while the community considers its options and staff examines how the building could be sold.

Restoration chairman George Elliott said if the hall isn't saved then donations will be returned with interest.

Leathertown's Chip Petrillo said without the town's \$40,000 and if the building is sold at market value it will be tough for groups to save it.

Ted Tyler concluded all interested groups will have to get together and consider the options. Acton will continue for the rest of this year and if there isn't a town hall to fund, the money will be used for other community projects.

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