

Knechtel charges

Acton's being royally shafted

The tax mill rate is 25 per cent higher in Acton than Georgetown and Acton taxpayers are being "royally shafted" according to Councillor Ross Knechtel.

In a stunning move, a few weeks ago Halton Hills council narrowly defeated a Knechtel motion for a provincial tax study dealing with the resultant impact if Halton Hills adopted a form of market value tax assessment under Section 63 of the Ontario Assessment Act (this section was formerly numbered 86).

The study backed by Acton's three councillors wouldn't have been binding on the municipality, only provided further information.

Monday night Knechtel fought back. He presented his colleagues with graphs showing the Acton mill rate has been leaping ahead of Georgetown's mill rate steadily since 1979.

At the same time equalization factors, designed to help reduce the disparity created by different mill rates in the two urban areas of Halton Hills, have been decreasing dramatically since 1979.

"The equalization factor is the ratio of assessed value to market value expressed as a percentage. The data in this graph is calculated by the province each year for each municipality and is used to determine the amounts of grants to be made available. The data is published each year in the Ontario Gazette," his report said.

Acton's equalization factor has slumped from 10.46 to 8.19 per cent compared to a Georgetown decrease from 11.38 to 8.48.

Between 1979 and 1983 the Acton mill rate climbed from 133.13 to 203.0, while the Georgetown mill rate moved up from 105.91 to 161.6.

Knechtel noted "council in its wisdom"

rejected the tax study, adding he had no idea why.

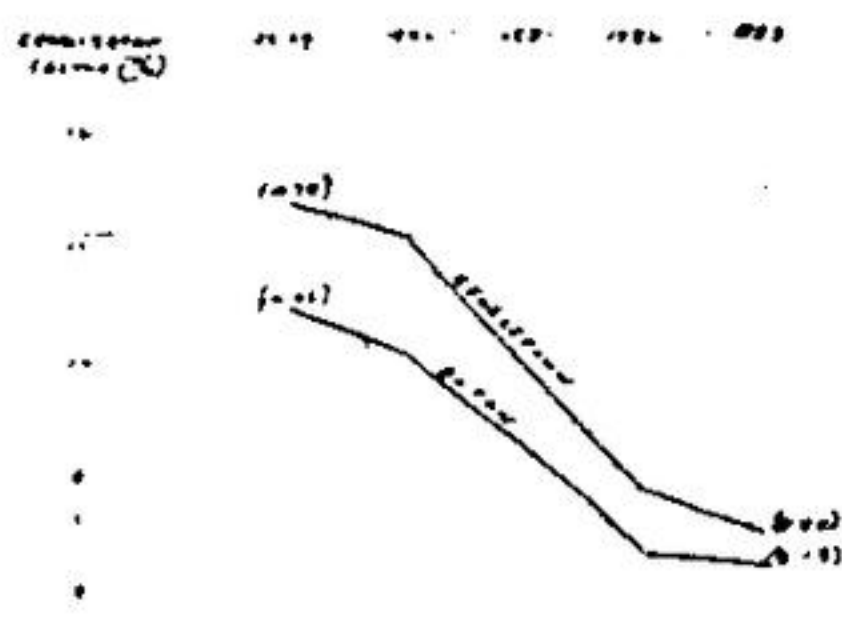
He said the tax disparity might have been reasonable 10 years ago, but not now, and that's why he wanted the tax study.

Gradually the equalization factor is moving down to zero, he observed.

"It proves Acton is getting a royal screwing."

He called on the treasurer to be authorized to prepare a report commenting if the current situation is "justified", and outlining remedies. The treasurer's report was approved unanimously.

Knechtel and a minority of councillors already feel strongly that Section 63 adoption is the only remedy available. It is optional for municipalities to adopt Section 63, over half of Ontario's municipalities already have. However, if a municipality



These graphs drawn by Councillor Ross Knechtel show Acton's getting the short end of the stick. The graph on the left shows the increase in the mill rates for Acton and Georgetown over the past five years. The graph above shows how equalization factors are going down. Knechtel is a booster of Halton Hills adopting a form of market value assessment available to the Town through Section 63 of the Assessment Act.

Acton Free Press

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...teens risk lives saving life

Disposal of smoking materials "probable" cause of killer blaze

by Helen Murray

Three Acton youths and an unknown Toronto teenager say they risked their lives early Sunday morning to help occupants of 16 Willow St. escape their flame-engulfed house. Police say the "probable cause of the fire was an "improper disposal of smoking materials." There was an estimated \$65,000 damage to the building.

Mike Pehura, 19, David Hargraves, 15, and John Nessitt, 20, were the first on the scene of the fire which claimed the lives of Gene Miller, 56, and his daughter's best friend, Kathy Wears, 14, of 159 Kingham Rd.

Wife, daughters escape

Miller's wife, Gloria, was admitted to Georgetown Hospital with broken bones in her heel and baby toe, and was released Monday, contrary to rumors that she had also died from injuries. Her daughters, Terry, 14, and Stephanie, 7, and a niece, Caroline Laver were treated and released from the hospital for smoke inhalation and cuts and bruises. The family is now staying at the Laver home in Speyside. Caroline and Kathy were staying overnight at the Miller home, as they often did.

Halton Regional Police released the name of David Hargraves of Wallace St. as being a witness, and credited him with saving the life of one of the residents.

Hargraves told The Acton Free Press John Nessitt, a Toronto youth named Wayne, and he were searching for a bicycle which had been taken, around 12.15 Sunday morning. They were at the corner of Willow and Mill St. when they saw flames coming out of a first floor window. He said he heard a loud bang shortly after, but did not feel it was explosion.

While Hargrave ran to the St. Bull, where the police were on a routine check, he said the others raced down the street to the fire.

Heard glass break

At the same time, Mike Pehura was in his bedroom on Main St., directly behind the Miller home, when he heard glass breaking. He looked out the window and saw smoke pouring out of the bottom windows. He ran from his house to Willow St., and using an outside refrigerator, he climbed to the roof of a backporch at the rear of the building, he explained.

Pehura told this newspaper he took a screen off a window of the apartment across the hall from the Millers, and entered the building. By the time he got to the Millers, the smoke was so thick he couldn't see anyone, nor could he hear anything but water running, he said. At one point, Pehura noted, flames came through the wall and he jumped back hitting his ribs on a dresser. They are still causing him discomfort, he admitted.

In the meantime, Hargraves said, Nessitt had kicked in the back door and attempted to enter the building, but the smoke forced him back. Wayne tried to get in the front door, according to Hargraves, but the flames were too much.

Hargraves said he was going around the back to help out when he saw a young girl in the downstairs window screaming. He wrapped his coat around his arm and broke the window, pulling her to safety as the room behind her was ravished. He thrust the bleeding girl into the arms of a female passerby and went back towards the house. Hargraves injured his shoulder in all the commotion, he said, but it is better now. Nessitt received cuts to his arms.

Hargraves said at one point he saw Mr. Miller outside, but lost track of him as he helped the other family members and the firefighters. Mr. Miller being outside is a point the Halton Regional and the Halton Hills Fire Department have been unable to confirm or deny.

Building engulfed

Deputy Fire Chief Bob Hyde said the call came in at 12.24 a.m. from Lonnie Lathorpe of Bower Ave. and then seconds later from the police. When firefighters arrived the flames were licking the outside of the wooden structure and pouring out the windows. Smoke was seen over 100 feet in the

sky, and hydro wires were sparking. Some firefighters speculate the fire could have started in a downstairs couch or bed. It spread up the front wall and then south through the attic. The Ontario Fire Marshal's office and the Halton police are investigating and samples have been sent to the Centre of Forensic Science for examination. Results should be back in about three weeks, giving the exact cause, police say.

Hyde noted there are four flats in the semi-detached house, but only the Miller family was home at the time of the blaze. They lived directly above where the fire is suspected to have started. The house is owned by David Johnson of Pickering.

About 29 firefighters from Acton and Georgetown worked until 6 a.m., Hyde said, but the fire was under control around 3 a.m.

Acting Staff Sergeant Keith Gregory, of the Halton Regional Police said there were two detectives and the Fire Marshal's office working on the case. There were numerous officers on the scene also.

Police are interviewing witnesses and neighbors in order to piece the sequence of events together.

Windows blown out

Other than the fact the windows were blown out, there is no indication there was an explosion, which has alarmed many of the neighbors, Gregory said. He also said

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Fire on Willow St. for over three hours which two people were killed. Fire is under control. Here a firefighter works at the window of the upper floor south side apartment.

Photos by GORD MURRAY.

plex issue

and yet if Town's new lower Stevens' land is accepted

lower, lower Estate in for a future of Monday back if the roughly 30 subject of Halton Hills

camera council meeting on July 25. In fact, Councillor Russ Miller said he was "concerned" that other than the price the Town has offered everything discussed at the meeting was in the paper. He wondered what the point was in holding in-camera sessions if everything ends up in the paper anyway? Councillor Finn Poulstrup noted this was a good point.

Miller asked why the Stevens' property purchase wasn't on Monday's agenda for public disclosure and confirmation of council's actions of July 25, as was planned. He said the straw vote held on July 25 was only taken because it would be two weeks before another council meeting.

Richardson said that he and the mayor discussed the matter Friday while preparing the agenda, and since there was no word back on acceptance or rejection of the

Town's new offer there was no point yet in bringing forward the building committee's recommendations for approval. He added that by early Monday evening there was still no word.

Miller said it was his opinion that one reason for bringing matters up at Monday's meeting would have been to get things "out in the open."

He noted that since the last municipal election in November and the old council put down the new deposit, there have been changes in some opinions and the way some councillors will vote. All nine incumbent members of the old council voted for putting down the deposit and taking out the options on the Stevens' land.

Councillor Ross Knechtel said there was nothing to bring to council until there is

(Continued on page 3)

Inside today's Free Press

The Niagara Escarpment is taking the International Peace Camp to court for building a road on their property without a development permit. Turn to News-makers.


The Halton Regional Police got an excellent report from the Ontario Police Commission. Turn to page 3.

Police beat is on page 10.

It's going to cost more to swim in Halton Hills and rink rates are going up too. Details in stories on pages 9 and 11.

The fate of the Halton Hills Hydro billing office operation in Acton won't be decided until next month at the earliest. More on page 11.

A Limehouse girl is bound for Equador. See News-makers.



What is an "Orphaned Student"... someone who can't afford a vacation while their parents can't afford to keep them at school.

Gene Miller hero
Kathy Wears "easy go lucky"
special fund for Miller family
more fire photos
all on pages 6 and 7



Kathy Wears, left, of Kingham Road was visiting her friend Terry Miller, (right), when the fire claimed her life early Sunday morning. Both attended McKenzie-Smith School.