

Council takes tough stand on rural land severances

Where is the line between a government policy that defends the best interests of its constituents and one that handcuffs them?

That was a question regional council had to wrestle with at its last 1983 meeting, December 21, when it faced the touchy issue of protecting farmland versus the desire of two Nassagaweya farmers to put residential plots on rural land they owned.

Coincidentally, only a week before the planning committee received a bulky staff report on the adverse effects of increasing urbanization of rural lands in Halton on the agricultural community. It concluded that such development was harmful to the farming community and should be strictly limited to hamlets, rural clusters and rural subdivisions.

A survey of Halton farmers indicated they were dissatisfied with the region's attempts to stem the tide of urbanization and by a 3 to 1 margin said that further non-farm lot severances would hurt the farm community.

But that general overview came under tough scrutiny when council was faced with two members of the farming community, each asking for a severance on land they properly owned.

William Paterson and John McNiven are both Nassagaweya farmers who had their applications for severances approved by the Land Division Committee. Both approvals were under appeal by the region on the grounds they did not conform to Halton land use policies.

Paterson is a part-time farmer who purchased a 100 acre plot 10 years ago and now wants to sever 5 acres on which to retire.

After buying the land Paterson and his wife cleared it and tried to grow crops. Due to insufficient topsoil this failed and they have been limited to cultivating hay and managing a flock of 20 sheep.

"The land as it stands now I don't think will support further agricultural development," Paterson told council and he explained the venture was too small to make a living.

Regional policy allows farmers to sever land for retirement lots, but despite his 10 year farming efforts regional policy does not consider him a bonafide farmer because his primary occupation is as an employee of Ford in Oakville.

McNiven lives on a 5 acre plot that was part of a 100 acre parcel farmed by his family, beginning with his great grandfather, from 1903 to 1982. The remaining 95 acres was sold to a neighboring farmer and McNiven now wants to split the remaining 5 acres in half to allow his sister-in-law to build a home.

The region in this case objected to the severance because it increased the building and population density on 5 rural acres which Director of Planning and Development Rash Mohammed reported "is contrary to good rural area planning principles."

However, some members of council saw it as an injustice that men who had both worked their land could now be denied the right to build a home on it.

A week before the council meeting the planning and public works committee saw the situation in that light when after listening to Paterson state his case, it decided to recommend that council end its appeal of the LDC approvals.

Shortly after taking that stand the committee was presented the lengthy report that said such decisions run contrary to the best interests of the agricultural community in Halton.

It's findings were that lot by lot residential non-farm development hurt farming because it:

- created an incentive to sell off farmland by creating higher land values for non-farm uses,

- increased taxes,
- removed valuable farmland from service and created inefficient farm sizes and shapes on the remaining land,

- diluted the political voice of the farm community and increased conflict between farmers and rural homeowners who don't farm.

That report was enough to create a strong split on council when it was asked to decide on the severance appeals.

"The policies that are there now (restricting development) are supported by the farm community," said Burlington Councillor Joan Little who added that these policies are being stripped of force because exceptions are made.

"Somewhere we have to establish some consistency on these things," she said.

Burlington Mayor Roly Bird concurred saying that to support a halting of the region's appeal would be to give a clear message that such severances will always be approved by council.

"I think we have to establish a record on council that we support the regional official plan," he said.

Milton Councillor Bill Johnson came out strongly on the side of the farmers saying they had put a great deal of time and money into farming their land and were entitled to benefit from their property, especially since surrounding farmers had not voiced objections to the severances.

He pointed out that the Paterson farm was shown to be non-viable for farming and would not clash with land use in the vicinity where there already existed a number of homes and businesses (the land is still designated rural).

Burlington Councillor Rob Forbes agreed saying that guidelines are always meant to allow legitimate exceptions. He said the provincial Ministry of Agriculture and Food had looked at the Paterson case and concluded the severance would have no effect on local farming.

In the end council split 10-10 on the Paterson case with Regional Chairman Pete Pomeroy breaking the tie by casting a vote in favor of halting the appeal.

McNiven was not so lucky. Council appeared to be swayed by arguments that intensifying the residential use would be a mistake in a viable farming area and they voted to continue the appeal.

Where is Norval?

"Where the heck is Norval anyway?" Oakville Mayor Harry Barrett must have asked himself at the regional council meeting of December 21.

One thing is for sure, it is a heck of a long way from Nassagaweya as he discovered during the debate over land severances for two farmers in that area of Milton.

Barrett was objecting to Regional Chairman Pete Pomeroy speaking in favour of ending the region's


appeal of a severance granted to William Paterson by the Land Division Committee.

"Considering where you come from I think it is highly improper," admonished Barrett.

Responded Pomeroy sternly, "I come from Norval which is an urban area."

Pomeroy could well have pointed out that Norval is over 13 miles, as the crow flies, from the nearest Milton farm under discussion.

Household Hints
From Prudence McNally



It's easier to sprinkle grated cheese on a casserole if you mix it with a tablespoon of cornstarch first to keep it from clumping.

Here's how to keep Christmas all year round before you throw away the tree, shake it hard over an opened sheet until the needles drop. Use the fragrant needles to fill sachets to scent drawers and closets.

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