

Citizens' group head comments on handling of municipal complex issue

Council's actions called a 'farce, comical'

Council's plans to examine its present facilities and see if they can be fixed up, after spending \$600,000 to buy the Stevens estate, has been described as a "farce", "laughable" and "comical" by the head of a group of Halton Hills ratepayers.

Commenting on the package of 11 recommendations approved by council recently setting out the work to be done by the new municipal property committee, Norm Elliott said a lot of it sounds like council is "trying to close the barn door after the horse has bolted."

Laughable

Elliott said council's current actions on the issue are "laughable", especially since three of the 13 councillors voted opposed to the land purchase and two others weren't on council to make their thoughts known.

Negligent?

If council doesn't already have the answers to some of the questions it now appears to be asking it "looks negligent."

Group still active

Elliott is chairman of the citizens' group which has been looking at the controversial

land acquisition and municipal complex issues since last fall and said the group certainly hasn't quit keeping a close eye on council's actions. He predicted they'll be pressing on with further action in the future, besides commenting on council's moves.

Farce to study buildings

The council committee is to review the current staff facilities, detail the health, fire and building code infractions and then look into the "merits" of fixing up the Town offices so they can continue being used. Elliott said such a step is a "farce" since all this kind of study was supposed to be done long before the Stevens' property was purchased. Besides, Elliott said, part of the justification for buying the land offered by then mayor Peter Pomeroy was that the present offices are in bad shape and could legally be closed.

Need offices if reduce size?

Elliott also thinks it's odd that council has been debating reducing its size since reasons a complex is needed expressed by some councillors favoring buying the land included the need for space for an office to

be used by councillors and the need for bigger council chambers. Why do they need more space for these facilities if some want to reduce council's size?

Comical actions now

Elliott said he knows the Town has problems with its current buildings, but the way the issue is being handled now is "comical."

If, as councillors have said, the offices don't meet standards, then council's first priority should be complying with regulations by making repairs, not buying land.

Land but no \$ to build

Mayor Russ Miller said it well recently, Elliott observed, when the mayor noted the Town now owns a \$600,000 piece of land and has no money to spend on a building.

He said doing things like looking at immediate space needs, considering repairs to the existing facilities and examining the idea of leasing space, "confirms" that councillors "didn't absolutely know" what they were doing when they started this whole thing back in the summer of 1982.

Elliott said you'd think there was enough

work to keep 13 members of council busy, and there would be if they spent more time and effort doing their homework on big matters like the municipal complex. He said if councillors were doing that, instead of leaving the job to four councillors and a mayor, as was done with this issue in the past, then they could "justify" having 13 members easily.

Incomplete, unsatisfactory study

Council's decision to have the committee do studies the citizens' group feels should have been done long before the Stevens' site was even examined, shows they did "an incomplete, unsatisfactory" job before.

There shouldn't be any question the Town will sell the excess Stevens' land since making money on the property sale is supposed to pay a big chunk of the cost of a complex, Elliott observed. One recommendation asks the committee when and whether the excess land should be sold. The citizens' group believes the only real question should be when.

How the council disposes of the excess land will be the big question in the future in

the minds of the ratepayers group.

Elliott said they won't be arguing if council just sells the land, even if some money was lost, because it then would only be a bad business deal.

How be objective?

One recommendation deals with the committee looking at joint development of the Stevens' land and some property owned by the hospital board.

Elliott questioned how council could do something like that when the same council must sit as a planning board and "objectively" assess the merits of development proposals for the hospital, Stevens and other lands in that area of Georgetown.

Don't negotiate with hospital

The Town shouldn't negotiate with the hospital board at all, though he emphasized the citizens aren't against development of the hospital property. However, they believe the involvement of the hospital lands and building of an access road to the hospital from Maple Ave. has been used as a "smoke screen" by councillors in dealing with this issue.

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It is time again for anglers to dabble their lines into the water in search of elusive trout. The season opens this Saturday and Outdoors writers George Hoare and Lorne Fletcher are two of the many looking for a secluded spot to land their prize catch. The Credit River is a favorite spot for anglers but several other out of the way fishing holes are there to nab that 'big one'.

Armstrong says Local councillors worth more than region councillors

Who earns their money the most, local or regional councillors?

Well, according to one man who has done both jobs, Councillor Mike Armstrong, it's local or area councillors (there are two area councillors per ward, one regional councillor per ward) hands down.

During last week's debate about cutting council's size to nine members, Armstrong told his colleagues he thinks area councillors are worth what they make a lot more than regional representatives.

An area councillor makes \$6,992 a year while a regional councillor is paid \$8,992 by the Town and gets \$13,564 (including benefits) a year from the region.

"A regional councillor, dollar for dollar, doesn't deserve the dough he gets compared to a local councillor," Armstrong declared.

There's no comparison of work done in relation to pay received between the two jobs, he added.

Besides Armstrong, the other regional councillors for Halton Hills are John McDonald, Jake Kulkien and Dave Whiting. Mayor Russ Miller also sits at the region.

Assessors finish field work but report on Section 63 months away

The assessment department has completed its field work, but it will be several more months before they are ready to submit a Section 63 tax impact study to Halton Hills.

Field inspections in Acton and Georgetown were just wrapped up recently, Assessment office spokesman Gary DeJong revealed in an interview this week.

He explained because they are concentrated in urban areas, the field inspections in Acton and Georgetown took only about three weeks. Work in Esqueving was begun

last summer and then the assessors went back and finished the rural area early this year.

DeJong said the assessors were able to field inspect about 98 per cent of the properties in Halton Hills.

However, he doesn't expect it will be until late summer or fall before they are able to submit the tax impact study to the Town. DeJong explained they have weeks of updated assessment records to plow through and then a "lot of figuring" which must be completed.

The last concentrated assessment in Halton Hills was in 1972-73, though they found properties had last been assessed at various times in Halton Hills. The assessors, were gathering data on changes to property, or improvements. The assessments records for property in this municipality had been kept "reasonably" up to date, so they were mostly "clarifying" what they had on file.

The assessors will give new values to properties based on 1980 market values and then determine new assessments depending on what type of category the property falls under, residential, farm, commercial, etc.

Then new assessment factors for property categories will be developed for Halton Hills.

Initially because of the updating the assessments on all property would skyrocket in Halton Hills. But, after the assessment factors are figured in, assessments for the bulk of properties here will be dropped back down to levels quite close to what they are now, DeJong explained. At the same time there will be some "extreme" assessment changes for some properties, some will be drastically up from what they are now while others will be drastically down.

4,000 more voters

Halton Hills is 10 years old this year and except for the existing population getting older, not much has changed.

Councillor Mike Armstrong revealed last week that while the voting population of Halton Hills has gone up by about 4,000 people the population growth hasn't kept pace by a long shot.

In fact, the most growth has taken place in

Acton, a population boost of 1,538 since the birth of Halton Hills on January 1, 1974.

The total growth in Halton Hills in 10 years has been less than 1,700 people. The population of Esqueving went up a mere .86 per cent and in Georgetown about 70 people have been added in the past decade, an increase of .39 per cent.

So, why more voters?

Simple, there are more of those existing citizens of 1974 over 18 and of voting age today than there were in 1974.

In fact the number of voters went up 20 per cent in the past decade, Armstrong noted.

Acton may have led the way in terms of growth in the first 10 years of the Town's life, but that won't be the case in the second, Armstrong forecast.

He predicted Acton would grow to 8,000 citizens by 1985 from the present total of 7,044.

Armstrong also saw little growth coming to Esqueving, it'll be up to around 10,000 he figures, in '85.

However, he does see a lot of expansion coming for Georgetown. Now the population is pegged at 17,899. But in a little over 10 years he expects that figure to have climbed to around 25,000.

Armstrong admitted those figures were based on personal observations and while they aren't the same as those forecast by some planners, they were in the same ballpark.

Halton Hills council has rejected Section 63 (formerly 86) a couple of times in the past.

Councillor Ross Knechtel, who wanted this tax impact study, has championed Section 63's adoption here after doing considerable study into market value or equalized assessment.

Council approved the study after Knechtel and Treasurer Ray King reported to council that the only way Halton Hills could solve numerous assessment and tax "disparities" throughout all areas of the Town is through section 63. The province will only do a reassessment of an area if the municipality is adopting Section 63, otherwise a community must just live with the disparities.

Knechtel says the disparities particularly hurt Acton with its higher mill rates but dropping equalization factors, and believes Acton collectively is paying about \$250,000 in taxes more than it should be, or would pay under Section 63.

Over \$3,000 raised to aid the Hargraves

Various fundraising efforts resulted in over \$3,600 being collected to help George and Marie Hargrave who lost most of their possessions in a March fire at their Wallace St. home.

A benefit dance held earlier this month along with donations to Eastern Star

chapters raised \$2,948. Of that total, \$1,500 was presented to the couple at the dance.

Another \$674.10 was donated by citizens making deposits in a special account at the Bank of Nova Scotia. The account has now been closed out.



Marie and George Hargrave receive \$1,448 in cash from Gail Manuel, one of the organizers of a fund raising dance in aid of the couple whose home was badly damaged in a fire last month.

Turn clocks ahead an hour

Don't forget we return to daylight savings time Sunday morning, April 29, so turn your clocks forward one hour before going to bed Saturday night.

Halton Hills deputy-clerk Delmar French said naturally the time change goes ahead despite the fact council won't pass the motion making daylight savings time official next Monday, April 30. Council passes motions making it official annually, but it isn't really necessary. There was no council or general committee meeting this past Monday, April 23, since there are five Mondays in April and council meets four times a month and it was Easter Monday.

The **Standard** has a special section on page 2.

Read it now!

RRR

The **Standard** should be our best friend. It certainly has been here.