

Police main issue at Acton candidates meeting



ACTON'S CHOICE

(Herald photo)

Terry Grubbe (left) and Dave Whiting, candidates in the upcoming by-election for one of Acton's town council seats both look pretty relaxed. The two take a break at Monday night's all-candidates meeting in Acton where they faced local voters.

Police protection in Acton was the biggest issue raised at the sparsely attended Meet the Candidates Night in Acton Monday, with both ward one candidates Terry Grubbe and Dave Whiting stating they believed the police were doing a better job in town than they were being given credit for.

"It's certainly a good force, more efficient than Peel and better than Metro," said Mr Whiting. He said a problem police have had since the invention of the car is, that it is more efficient to patrol in a car than on foot.

"The problem is the police lose touch with the community," he added.

Mrs. Grubbe commended the police for their cooperation with her in the Community Services Center. She said better communications between police and the community could help solve many of the problems which do exist.

RESPONSIBILITY

It was pointed out at the meeting that police protection in town is a regional responsibility, not a municipal one, and that any decisions that were made were out of the two candidates' hands.

Fewer than 20 people attended the meeting in the Acton High School, including press, Chamber of Commerce representatives and candidates. Chamber of Commerce president Jake Kaiken blamed insufficient advance notice for

the poor turnout.

Both candidates, in their opening remarks, said Acton needs a strong and active voice on council. Mr. Whiting told the informal gathering "We keep getting snowed under by Georgetown."

He admitted that Halton Hills is here to stay, but concluded "We've got to work hard when it's three against one."

Mrs. Grubbe said she believed that often, when the townspeople say Acton is losing its identity, it is because they are giving it away. "I can't see any Welcome to Acton signs," she pointed out.

Although she has previously denied the existence of issues

in this campaign, she did list a number of concerns which people have mentioned to her in the course of the campaign. These included "complete and total confusion about regional government," lack of a strong Acton voice on town council, the need for more shopping facilities, the loss of town's identity, higher taxes, more services for seniors and police protection.

There is a lack of communication between our councillors and this town, she said. If elected, Mrs. Grubbe plans "monthly meetings where I will be available."

She said her commitment to council would be complete. "I'm a human being who has to be involved. I'm not afraid of the extra commitment."

FLEXIBLE WORK

Mr. Whiting echoed her sentiments regarding commitment. "I'd be totally committed to council. My work is flexible."

He is concerned mainly with Acton's lack of a voice on council, mentioning the newly restructured Hydro commission, with one Acton representative against two from Georgetown and the mayor.

Higher tax assessments in the Bovis subdivision will prompt a ratepayers group from the area, he said. "They will go to the judiciary," in their fight against their higher taxes.

Taxes on the newer homes are higher than on older ones because the province has changed its assessment factors over the years.

This was the only public forum arranged for the candidates in the by-election. Voting will take place next Tuesday, October 9.

Fund-raisers sought to aid Contact Centre

The North Halton Contact Centre would like to form a group of Friends of the Contact Centre, with people who would like to assist the centre but who don't have the time to answer the phones.

Cathy Hulley, a spokesman for the centre, said this type of organization would allow people who don't have the 12 hours a month to donate to staffing the phones, to provide assistance to the contact centre in other ways. She said the Friends of the Contact Centre organization is being visualised as a fund-raising organization for the contact-

centre. The members of this group could do baking for a bake table, and get involved in similar fund-raising activities, because they would not need to remain anonymous. The organization would have no contact with the volunteers other than with a spokesman for the centre, so the confidentiality of the centre's activities will continue, Mrs. Hulley said.

The Friends of the Contact Centre would be the liaison between the public and the volunteers, she said.

Mrs. Hulley said a number of people have come forward to

volunteer their time to answer telephones following the recent publicity about the need for more volunteers. The centre has also received donations from the public, but more money is still needed to keep the centre going. Anyone wishing to donate funds to the contact centre can send their donation to the North Halton Contact Centre, P.O. Box 85, Georgetown.

Those wishing to give their time, either as volunteers answering the phones or to the Friends of the Contact Centre, can call the contact centre at 877-1211, and leave their name and address.

Acting chief confident situation will improve

By LORI TAYLOR
Herald staff writer

In a "state of the union" address to regional councillors last Thursday, Halton's acting police-chief James Harding acknowledged that while the controversial force does indeed have problems, it is beyond doubt they will improve.

The acting-chief outlined a number of problems at the meeting which was convened at the request of regional council. He said the force has difficulty embracing regionalism and the records department of the force is in a shambles.

He said transfers within the force might help alleviate this problem and added the force is also considering establishing morality and fraud squads. The force is already headed towards the establishment of a crime prevention bureau.

The meeting began with Oakville Mayor Harry Barrett, chairman of the commission, outlining the history of the force for the benefit of the councillors, from the time it was formed in 1973 to the time the force took over the policing for all the townships, and up to the day when the commission requested that the Ontario Police Commission conduct an investigation of the force in order to give the commission an overview of the management and operation of the force.

"My relationship with the commission is excellent," Deputy-Chief Harding said. "I am impressed that the commission's aim is to obtain for Halton the highest possible standard of policing. I am proud of the fact that I am able to say at this meeting that we have officers and men in this force who are capable of that."

POLICE REPORT

The deputy-chief outlined the problems which have been dogging the force, and the status of the solutions to these problems. He said he is still looking at many facets of the force's operation before making changes.

One of the concerns expressed in last year's controversial police association report was the workload of the officers, Deputy-Chief Harding said.

The answer to the heavy workload might be insufficient numbers of officers, or poor deployment or a lack of proficiency on the part of the officers, but it is probably "a combination of the three," he said.

The Deputy-Chief said he has taken the opportunity, since he had been appointed acting chief, to visit every division in each district, and talk to the officers and men, individually and in groups.

"Unfortunately, my visits to the divisions and districts were the first opportunity for many of the men to meet their chief," he said.

He touched on the recent issue of public concern about the police use of firearms, saying he wanted to be sure, before a gun is issued to a police officer, that the man is proficient with the gun and is fully aware of the laws which state the circumstances under which he may use it.

"I'm an ex-soldier and proud of it," he said. "I'm not a cowboy and I don't intend our officers to be either."

Setting up a crime prevention bureau is one of Deputy-

Chief Harding's most immediate goals. He said the force is locked into a "reactive posture" with regards to crime.

Deputy-Chief Harding said he will be appointing a regional Crime Prevention Officer in October, and hopes eventually to have a Crime Prevention Officer in each district.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Promotions, which were a bone of contention with the officers, according to the association report on morale on the force, are now being brought up to date, Deputy-Chief Harding said. During June, July and August, all 80 officers who had applied for promotions had been interviewed. Two have since been promoted from sergeant to staff sergeant, and seven from constable to sergeant.

In order to ensure that every officer is aware of what is expected from him in order to qualify for promotion, guidelines have been drawn up and distributed to each division, the deputy-chief said. He said transfers within the region will also be increasing to encourage the development of a sense of unity.

When Mayor Barrett threw the floor open for questions, the first to take advantage of the opportunity was Burlington regional councillor Walter Mukewich who requested the meeting between the commission and the council earlier this summer.

He asked whether the Halton police commission was considering the formation of a citizen review board to deal with complaints about the force.

Glenn Magnuson, vice-chairman of the commission, said the commission had discussed the matter thoroughly, and felt that it wouldn't want to see a review board solely for Halton, but would be in favor of a board on the provincial level. Mayor Barrett added that he felt the complaint procedure now open to the public would virtually guarantee that the complainant would receive satisfaction.

FRAUD SQUAD

Deputy-Chief Harding said the force would be looking in the near future at forming a fraud squad, and a morality squad, because the incidences of both types of crime justified the use of a group of investigators. The morality squad would be involved with crimes involving drugs, liquor and such offences as keeping a common bawdy house, he said. Halton Hills councillors Roy

Booth asked whether the force was considering putting sirens back in the police cruisers, particularly in Georgetown, where the cruisers had been equipped with them before the regionalization of the force. He said he has heard complaints from officers who believe the siren is an advantage, and from citizens who believe the flashing lights are inadequate.

Deputy-Chief Harding said the trend among police forces is towards removing sirens, and that studies tend to indicate sirens cause more accidents than not.

HIGHEST PAID

"I've been told this force has the highest paid officers in Ontario or Canada, I've been told they have the prettiest uniforms, and I've been told we have the lowest cost per capita of policing, none of which impresses me in the least," Oakville councillor Laurie Mannell said. He asked Deputy-Chief Harding what his priorities would be if the council were to hand him a large sum of money to do with as he wished.

Deputy-Chief Harding said he would put the money into manpower, training and equipment. He pointed out that to man one patrol zone 24 hours a day requires six officers, a portable radio, cruisers, training and equipment. The cost to man one zone is in the neighborhood of \$160,000, he said.

Some of the regional councillors expressed their concern about a lack of liaison between social agencies in the region and the police department.

Oakville councillor Terry Mannell asked if the men patrolling the streets are committed, and whether or not they feel free to make suggestions to the administration.

"By far the majority are dedicated professional police officers," Deputy-Chief Harding answered. "They feel bad when they are whipped by the press, when they are whipped by the politicians and when they are whipped by senior police officers. My officers are second to none."

"The officers have been bathed in a shower of embarrassing remarks from the Ontario Police Commission report," he added. "The officers need assurance that they have public support."

"The time must die when the chief and the senior officers are always right," Deputy-Chief Harding said. "I have a wealth of knowledge and expertise with my officers on the street and I'd be pretty stupid not to use it."

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