

'Poor vehicle for tax reform?'

No decision on Section 86

Town council will wait two weeks before deciding whether or not to adopt Section 86, the controversial part of the province's Assessment Act by which property in both older and newer areas of town would be more evenly assessed for taxes.

Expressing pleasure at Monday night's general committee meeting over a special report drafted by a subcommittee studying Section 86, councillors were still

concerned that the cure for inequities in the present assessment method may be worse than the problem itself.

"I think that (Section 86) is a very poor vehicle for tax reform," Halton Hills Mayor Pete Pomeroy said. "I'm really leary about going into a new system that isn't any fairer than the old."

But Acton Coun. Ross Knechtel, who has chaired the subcommittee since it was struck last July, warned

council that some people "feel they are paying more taxes than they should" and thus think they are being treated unfairly. Coun. Knechtel added that if the town is prepared to reject Section 86 and stay with the status quo, it has to give those residents a reason for the decision.

Under the present method, Wards 1, 2, 3 and 4 are each assessed under different criteria, some of which are 20 years old.

During a public meeting last

June, councillors were confronted by angry Bovis subdivision (Acton) residents complaining that their properties were assessed at a much higher rate than neighbors living in older homes.

Shortly afterwards, council struck a committee composed of councillors Walter Blehn, Harry Levy, and Russ Miller as well as local residents Lorne Youngblut, Paul Campbell, Gerald Wilcox and Lawrie Duggan, with Coun.

Knechtel as their head. The committee began studying Section 86 as a possible solution to balance out property assessments in town.

While the total assessment remains the same under either method, residents living in newer homes could experience a slight decrease in their property assessment under Section 86. But as assessments balance out, older homes would be taxed at a substantially higher rate.

Councillors Roy Booth and Russ Miller pointed out that Section 86 could affect senior citizens living on fixed incomes in older homes.

However, the subcommittee's report says that seniors are eligible for grants under the Ontario Pensioner's Property Tax Assistance Act, which could offset much of the higher tax rates. Under the Act, seniors living in their own homes can receive grants equal to their property taxes or \$500 (whichever is less). The town also provides an additional grant of \$150 towards property taxes.

Over 50 per cent of all municipalities in Ontario have switched over to Section 86 assessment, the report notes, and some communities such as Milton and Hamilton have had mixed results.

While there was some hostility toward the move, the reports say former Mayor Don Gordon and the town's treasurer maintained that ratepayers are satisfied they are being more evenly assessed.

But Hamilton has netted tax losses of up to \$2,300,000 paying ratepayers for successful appeals launched against tax hikes due to Section 86.

While Halton Hills' own assessment study maintains that Section 86 wouldn't necessarily result in equal assessment across the board, it says it would greatly narrow the assessment variations among homeowners living in Georgetown, Esqueping and Acton.



REGION THANKS GREG

Greg Lawrence of St. Francis of Assisi School in Georgetown was one of the runner-ups in a region-wide fire prevention poster contest. Awarded a small plaque on behalf of the region by Halton Hills Mayor Pete Pomeroy, Greg is pictured above being congratulated by deputy fire chief Bob Hyde following a short ceremony during last Wednesday's regional council meeting in Oakville.

(Herald photo)

METAL PARTS FIRM TO LOCATE HERE

The Foreign Investment Review Agency (FIRA) has approved a proposal by a Georgetown man and four British residents to establish a new business in Georgetown. The proposal by C.A. Warner of Georgetown and the four Birmingham residents is to establish a business to manufacture and distribute roll-forming and related metal fabricating equipment. Mr. Warner's proposal was one of five approved by FIRA, the federal agency which rules on the acceptability of proposals by foreigners to take over existing Canadian business or establish new businesses.



GREASEBALL BOOGIE AT LIONESS SOCK-HOP

Asaay! It was jeans and bobbysocks city at the Lions Hall Friday night, as the Georgetown Lionesses sponsored a frenzied Filites sockhop. But few dancers could out-manoeuvre Flona Sumpton and Brian Getty (above) in the evening's live contest, and they were eventually judged winners by Ward 4 town Coun. Marilyn Serjeantson.

(Herald photo)



Keith Black reinstated

How Acton rescued a friend

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150-acre feedlot operation through which thousands of head of cattle were processed over a 15-month period for Irvington Holdings Ltd. of Toronto. Records show that Mr. Black was not receiving enough money to feed the cattle, so he sold some of the animals to buy feed for the rest. The company responded by removing the remaining cattle, leaving Mr. Black with only his teaching salary to finance the large operation. Bills went unpaid and Mr. Black went into receivership.

The family homestead - 200 acres settled by his ancestors in 1825 and on which he was raised - may be lost as a result. A bank has already sold the feedlot. Mr. Black lives in one portion of the family home with his one-year old son and his 80-year old father. His mother, reportedly suffering from the

stress of the situation, moved into Acton.

The family has been asked to vacate its home. Restitution for the sale of the cattle is still to be decided in civil court.

Mr. Black was given a suspended sentence and three years probation for the technical theft of \$160,000.

Because of the morals section in the Education Act, the superintendent of instruction recommended to the board that Mr. Black be barred from his classroom, his contract terminated in August and that the ministry of education be asked to revoke his teaching certificate.

Last Wednesday, the board spent an hour in debate behind closed doors before concluding that the recommendations should be overturned and Mr. Black returned to his position.

Early in the evening, the

board called Mr. Black, his lawyer David Smith of Guelph, and Rev. Charles Beaton into the committee meeting to clarify further legal points.

Mr. Beaton, minister of Acton's Trinity United Church, was the unofficial chairman of a community support group that spearheaded a campaign to reinstate Mr. Black.

Board chairman Bill Lawson called Mr. Black into the closed committee room to break the board's decision to him in private, then announced the decision over the public address system. Cheers drowned out his words as Mr. Black emerged making a thumbs up victory sign.

"People are just so beautiful," Mr. Black said. "People have their faults and I have my faults but you still love me."

Ron Ness, Ontario Second-

ary School Teachers' Federation president for Halton, said he sees no probability of the Black case sparking changes in the morals clause in the Education Act.

He sees the clause about teaching Judeo-Christian principles as "goals" to which all teachers aspire. "It's a really unworkable clause," he said, "but I don't see anyone trying to change it. It would be like attacking motherhood."

Another teacher expressed the view that teachers were disappointed with the way the board handled the situation although they were satisfied with the outcome.

Mr. Beaton admitted he had been very worried about the decision. "Acton has sort of disassociated itself from the rest of the county and I really wondered if its voice would be heard in this matter," he said.

Region management shuffle

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ment where some revision had to be made" indicates that overwork and lack of control over Halton's computerized information centre are largely to blame for the region's \$600,000 deficit discovered last July.

The understaffed department could not cope with the amount of paperwork needed

to get the budget and audit ready last year. If the auditors are unable to begin before February, the report states, there would be a "virtually certain" of another year of late financial statements and the possibility of surprises well into the 1981 fiscal year.

While it names treasury department staffers to new positions, council also followed the task force's recommenda-

tions to add five more administrative jobs within the department, changes which could cost the region from \$116,000 to \$160,000.

Under a restructured treasury department, the regional treasurer would work with such new officers as a manager of accounting and systems, an operating budget analyst, a systems analyst and a long-sought financial analyst. The fifth position is open for a

secretary to handle the additional clerical work.

The search of a new regional treasurer to replace Don Farmer, who withdrew from the post last July, is continuing. Mr. Raffis said, adding that, although the study urges haste in filling the post, council intends to "move slowly" to pick the right candidate.

"We're not going to move any faster than what council wants us to," Mr. Raffis said.

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