



Consultants examine our downtown cores

BIA's look ahead

By CHRIS AAGAARD
Herald Staff Writer
Halton Hills must protect its Acton and Georgetown downtown areas, a consultant's report insists, but each for substantially different reasons.

Approximately 25 members from both downtown Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) and representatives from the Acton and Georgetown Chambers of Commerce attended a public meeting during the town's planning board session were told that downtown Georgetown will never likely become a major retail hub for the community.

Meanwhile, proposals for a shopping plaza on Highway 7 just beyond Acton's western urban boundary pose a serious threat to that community's bustling Mill and Main Streets shopping district, the report adds.

The Walker, Wright, Young Associates Ltd. study, gathered in conjunction with a number of smaller analyses carried out by other consultants, concludes the first third of a 20-week study aimed at giving council guidance in establishing planning policies for both BIAs and suggesting some redevelopment proposals.

LARGE PLAZAS
Peter Walker, head of the consulting firm which is conducting the study, explained

that shoppers and merchants in both communities were surveyed for their views on downtown shopping opportunities. In Georgetown, shoppers were also briefly interviewed in two large shopping plazas about a mile west of the downtown core.

The results from the surveys and the consultant's own observations, Mr. Walker said, indicate that BIA merchants in Georgetown will be "spinning their wheels" if they think they can outdraw the plazas for shoppers by adding retail space.

"It's not possible for Georgetown to remain a major retail centre," he said, adding that the downtown core is still important to Georgetown and the rest of Halton Hills.

"What we have to do is make the downtown section live with a much-reduced retail component. The merchants (in Georgetown's BIA) are fighting and doing well. They're the kind of merchants who will be valuable for the downtown Georgetown of the future."

CENTRE FUNCTION
If Georgetown's BIA is unlikely to become the commercial heart of the community — and of Halton Hills — it must regain its function as a municipal centre, Mr. Walker stressed, warning that proposals for putting the Halton Hills' anticipated town hall outside of the downtown core would further erode the BIA.

And even though some merchants have told the consultant team that they don't particularly like the idea of introducing more office space for professional services — lawyers and doctors — Mr. Walker said that this might be one of the salvations for the downtown core and "not one of the detractions."

Georgetown BIA merchants and municipal planners should seriously consider the beneficial impact of having a food-store in the district, the consultants' report suggests. However, a large department store like Simpson's or The Bay locating outside the downtown area could deplete trade and it is unlikely these mall-oriented outlets would build inside the BIA.

The study also maintains that it would be pointless to spend money on large-scale landscaping plans for both areas. Acton needs greenery, the report notes and, architecturally, merchants would do well to improve both the exterior and interior designs of their stores. The "greening" suggested would help break up the "barren" appearance of the downtown core, airing out the impression of store and traffic congestion.

Georgetown already has a unique "openness" and visual appeal, the study acknowledges. Store owners should be encouraged to develop an im-

Continued on page 5

Downtown's more colorful with new banners

By CHRIS AAGAARD
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The Georgetown Business Improvement Area (BIA) has gone absolutely "banners".

Next time you head into the community's downtown core, take a look at the middle of Main Street, angle your head upward just a bit — and there they are: banners which not only identify the BIA but also signify merchants' pride in doing business in the area.

There are eight colorful banners hanging from the lamp posts in the traffic island straddling the centre of the street and, since most shoppers are usually busy eyeballing bargains, they've probably been largely missed even though they have been up since

Pioneer Days in mid-June.

Nevertheless, the brilliantly colored stripe which sweeps down the entire six-foot length of each banner and the familiar "DG" logo are certainly worth a moment's perusal. After all, while many of us may take them largely for granted, they convey important messages to visitors, indicating that this is historically "old Georgetown" and people have been shopping for values here for over a century.

Some of the banner backgrounds are blue, others white, still others a crisp shade of red. The stripes which make a dramatic bend upwards almost at the bottom of the banner before ending in "DG" are colored in mixed shades of

gold, orange, red and green.

The banner project is among the many ideas which the local BIA is moving off the drawing board and into reality. Their design was contributed by Paul Martel, the architect formerly involved with plans for the downtown area.

Lynn Barnard, president of the Georgetown BIA, has a great deal of appreciation for the Halton Hills Arts Council, for it was through their help that the BIA was able to get the banners made quickly and inexpensively.

Initially, Mrs. Barnard recalled last week, there were some rather exorbitant price quotes from professionals offering to do the job, most

around \$5,000. When the Arts Council was approached, the BIA was able to get the job done in about half the time and at half the price.

Actually, time restrictions prevented the Council's own member artisans from making the banners. Arts Council past president Gretchen Day explained later. But Kennedy's in Erin, widely acclaimed manufacturer of enormous flags and banners for clients throughout Canada, was approached and proprietor Bob Dixon promised they'd be ready for the Pioneer Days celebrations.

"I thought they were very pleasant," Mr. Dixon said of the BIA's banner design.

Each of the 12 and a half foot wide strips took about four hours to produce, he added, as logos and striping are sewn to the backgrounds and not silk screened.

About four people were needed in an assembly line fashion, one drawing the pattern, another cutting, another sewing and still another for the final trim.

Once the banners were ready, the town's public works department hoisted them about 15 feet above ground, where they beamed down on Pioneer Days celebrants for the first time June 18 and will continue to brighten up the downtown core until Oct. 1.

Meanwhile, working just below the banners but a little less

recognizable, are consultants hired by the town to come up with redevelopment plans and policies for the Georgetown downtown area and the one in Acton.

The local BIA hopes that, eventually, overhead wires along the route will be buried, lighting will be a little more stylized and the area surrounding the Mill Street-Main Street intersection will be improved to conform with the appearance of the rest of the downtown section.

Even though there are no confirmed plans for Mill Street: there are four more banners ready to be hung when it finally boasts a new appearance.

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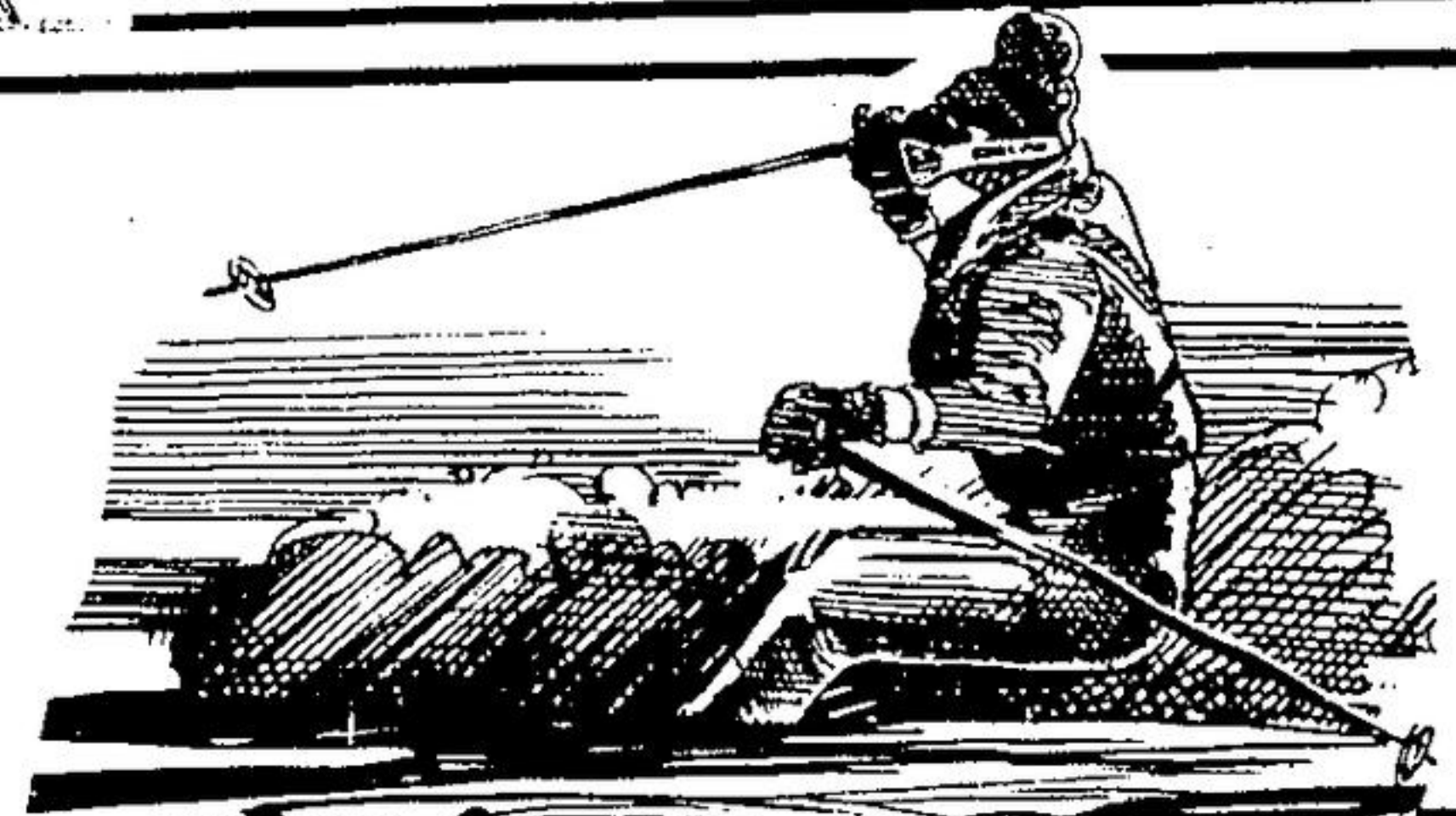


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