

Panel gloomy over housing issue in north Halton

By CHRIS AAGAARD
Herald Staff Writer

North Halton's housing situation is failing to meet the needs of several segments of the area's population, a special panel sponsored by the North Halton Social Planning Council, agreed Thursday night.

One panel member, representing a Georgetown development firm, told the audience gathered at Georgetown District High School there's little hope for change unless something is done to reduce the "bureaucratic quagmire" hindering new construction starts.

The high cost of housing can more readily be attributed to a "hidden culprit" than to lending institutions, senior government, human nature or the builders and developers themselves, according to Phil Carney.

"The culprit is bureaucracy," he said. "Canadians are the most over-governed, over-regulated people in the world."

Chaired by Mayor Pete Pomeroy, the panel also included North Halton Association



A panel convened by the North Halton Social Planning Council attempted to come to grips with problems in Halton's housing inventory. Panel members were (left to right) North Halton Association for the Mentally Retarded president Bert Arnold, who discussed group homes in the community for the mentally handicapped; developer Phil Carney, who looked at bureaucratic barriers hindering new projects; Ann Gabriel, manager of the Halton Housing Authority, who reviewed Halton's subsidized housing needs; and Betty Hill, a Children's Aid Society representative who talked about group homes for troubled youngsters. The panel discussion was held Thursday night in the Georgetown and District High School auditorium. (Herald photo)

for the Mentally Retarded (NHAMR) president Bert Arnold, Halton Housing Authority manager Ann Gabriel and Halton Children's Aid Society (CAS) representative Betty Hill.

By the time a developer is ready to construct new homes in Halton, he may have had to wade through as many as 34 different agencies before the project is finally approved, Mr. Carney argued. He said that as little as ten per cent of the time taken to complete a housing project is spent in construction, while the remaining 90 per cent is taken up by the "planning process".

"I'm not saying the (housing industry) doesn't need policing to some degree," he said. "But these agencies should be streamlined to function as a service for the people, as opposed to the self-serving bodies they have grown into."

He advocated erasing the "duplication of services" in

the regional and local planning departments, as well as other bodies like the Niagara Escarpment Commission and the conservation authorities.

Services should be returned to the local level, Mr. Carney said, charging that regional staff have little faith in local councillors making qualified decisions about development.

Over-regulation may also be hindering plans by the nhamr to establish group homes in Halton Hills, Mr. Arnold suggested.

Homes in which mentally handicapped adults live together with a supervisor and function as part of the community rather than as members of an institution can create "political difficulties", and the town's bylaws currently do not permit group homes in urban residential areas. Neighbors, unfamiliar with mentally handicapped individuals, feel that group homes will threaten property values in the commu-

unity and even pose a danger to the neighborhood.

Mr. Arnold argued that when planners assess the need of having a group home in the town, they may be asking the wrong questions.

"The question is not whether the community needs the group home, but the fact is the group home needs the community," Mr. Arnold said.

Mentally handicapped individuals should be living in the community with the range of services other residents enjoy, Mr. Arnold added. While the NHAMR would like to see group homes established in Halton Hills, it would discourage a "proliferation" of them in the same community.

Too many group homes for the mentally handicapped, he said, could change the "profile" of the community, and for group home residents, there would be little difference from life in an institution.

Additional homes are also needed for "troubled" youths, Mrs. Hill said. Thirty-six of Halton's 200 youths in CAS care are currently residing in group homes, but only two of these children live in Halton. The CAS can offer tempor-

ary shelter for three or four weeks to about 17 youngsters at any one time, Mrs. Hill said. But long-term care in supervised group homes within the child's community is extremely scarce. Even the foster care program is suffering as more women enter the job market to help make ends meet, leaving fewer families time to offer foster care.

UPSET YOUTHS

For "upset" youths bound for a group home, Mrs. Hill said it is better emotionally for them to stay in their own communities, close to relatives and friends.

"We really don't help them by sending them away," she said.

As with group homes for the mentally handicapped, Mrs. Hill said special homes for troubled youngsters are received with considerable skepticism from neighbors. Group homes, therefore have to work closely with the neighborhood to promote understanding about their children.

There is not enough subsidized housing in north Halton to meet the needs of residents who qualify for the provincial assistance, Mrs. Gabriel said, especially for families on a limited income.

Because the Ontario Housing Commission Corporation is no longer in the development business, it will be up to private developers and private and municipal non-profit developers to provide subsidized housing. With Canada's economy lagging, applications for subsidized housing are increasing and waiting lists are getting longer for the few openings available.

Halton must consider establishing "emergency" housing for its residents who are suddenly forced from or lose their homes, Halton Women's Place in Milton provides emergency shelter for abused women and their dependents.

"No, we are not adequately meeting the housing needs of the clients we see everyday," Mrs. Gabriel concluded.

House project review soon

A public meeting is expected to be announced shortly to review two applications to build homes in the John Street and River Drive area above Mountainview Road.

While no date for the meeting has been set by town council, the planning department has suggested May 10.

The first project envisions the construction of 27 condominium townhouses on about two acres of property on River Drive below Mountainview North. A second plan, also proposed by developers Roswood Properties of Toronto, seeks to build 27 semi-detached houses on almost eight acres of property adjacent to the first project sandwiched between River Drive and John Street.

Under the proposed plan, the recreation department is expected to take cash instead of having the developer establish a certain amount of parkland for general use. Open space for the neighborhood is planned as part of the project.

A cul de sac will serve residents in the second proposal which will open out onto John Street. A private walkway will lead through the development, allowing residents and visitors access to cars and play areas.

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Committee members needed for Social Planning Council

An audience of about 50 people may not seem that large, but its response to Thursday night's panel discussion on Halton's housing needs was certainly enthusiastic.

North Halton Social Planning Council representative Bill Thom told The Herald that several people, express-

ing an interest in committees which may be set up to look further into housing needs in the area, approached Council members following the discussion.

One of the objectives of the Council this year is assessing the North Halton housing situation Mr. Thom said, and the council hopes to strike

committees to look at low-rent accommodation, group homes and child care services.

In addition, the council is looking for two more directors. People interested in joining the year-old organization can find out more information about its goals at 164 Guelph St. (the old Fob-

ert realty office) in Georgetown. Inquiries are welcome Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Meanwhile, the Council will appoint a new executive at its directors' meeting May 4. Thursday night's lengthy agenda halted plans to announce the new administration.

Town seeks site plan control for local Croatian centre

If the owners of the Croatian cultural and recreation centre want further development on their property south of Norval, they'll have to submit a 20-year "site plan" for town council's consideration.

In a recorded vote, Monday night, councillors John McDonald, Russ Miller, Marilyn Serjeantson, Walter Bich, Harry Levy, George Malby and Terry Grubbe and Mayor Pete Pomeroy supported a planning department recommendation to reject plans for an 8.8 acre cemetery at the centre at the northwest corner of Sideroad Five and Winston Churchill Boulevard.

Councillors Pam Sheldon, Mike Armstrong, Dave Whiting and Ross Knechtel joined Roy Booth to oppose the recommendation. Coun. Booth had expressed concern that the issue would be debated before the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) and the town could lose.

Centre representatives have promised there would be no funeral processions on town roads, to preserve farmland on their property, and sign "no litigation" agreements with neighboring farmers concerned that noise from their farm operations and use of herbicides may disrupt burial ceremonies and the condition of the cemetery.

Following their decision, councillors asked the centre's representatives to meet town staff and draft a site plan for the 160-acre property, "building in" municipal controls on the property's future development.

William Whiteacre, the centre's lawyer, asked council to delay its decision on the cemetery proposal and promised that his clients would

return in two months with a comprehensive plan. Coun. Whiting suggested the cemetery recommendation be tabled until council received the detailed site plan.

However, most councillors felt that a decision had been delayed long enough. Council deferred the decision at the end of January to allow the centre time to study the effects the cemetery would have on neighboring farms.

Mr. Whiteacre told The Herald after the meeting that he will have to talk with his clients about their next step, and would not say if Croatians would appeal council's decision to the OMB or negotiate a complete site plan with town staff and council.

Mayor Pomeroy acknowledged that council may have to consider the proposal again as part of the complete site plan.

As a condominium project, the first proposal will form a corporation to tend playgrounds, clear internal roads and take care of garbage collection. Plans for both projects were submitted with the town's site plan control bylaw in mind, which allows the town some control over design.

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