

McDermid seeks tax break for firefighters

A year after fire damaged his Ottawa apartment, MP pushing for \$1,000 tax deduction for our volunteer firefighters

From the Ottawa Bureau of The Herald

About a year ago, when Brampton-Georgetown MP John McDermid was getting ready for another day of work on Parliament Hill, the fire alarm in his apartment here went off.

Looking out into the hallway, Mr. McDermid found the corridor filled with smoke. The apartment next to his was on fire.

He ran down the hall, grabbed the fire hose and raced back with it to wet down the apartment. Unfortunately, the hose was 40 feet too short and Mr. McDermid ended on his fanny.

Anyway, to make a long

story short, there was a total of \$4,000 smoke damage done to his apartment. His dry cleaning bill was no joke.

"I can now appreciate the damage done to the personal belongings of people who go to fight fires," Mr. McDermid told the Commons recently.

The MP has a private members' bill before Parliament which urges the government to amend the Income Tax Act to allow volunteer firefighters a \$1,000 deduction on their tax returns for expenses incurred in the exercise of their duties.

This allowance would be used to offset things like dry cleaning bills.

The current exemption is \$500. For many years, it was only \$300 a year.

It may seem like a small matter to bring before a national legislative assembly, but Mr. McDermid underlined the vital importance of volunteer firefighters in small communities.

"The town of Halton Hills is divided into two areas," he said. "In Georgetown there are 45 volunteers and in Acton there are 35. These people are so well recognized in Georgetown that the entire volunteer fire brigade was named citizen of the year a few years ago."

Every volunteer firefighter in Brampton gets

\$40 a year to cover cleaning and the wear and tear on clothing. Mr. McDermid said. In Georgetown, volunteers receive \$1,500 a year for cleaning and gas expenses.

Brampton's brigade answers an average of three to 10 calls a month. In Georgetown the department answers about 17 calls a month.

The \$500 special allowance is not enough, Mr. McDermid said. "Volunteer firefighters are not easy to recruit. Every advantage we can give must be given to those interested in becoming volunteers and to those already fighting a very serious threat to us all—

fires. "We cannot afford to lose these volunteers and the service they provide. It is about time the Income Tax Act adequately recognized their valuable service to all Canadians."

Increasing the tax exemption would cost the national treasury about \$11 million in lost tax revenue, Mr. McDermid calculates.

"Just to put that in its perspective, for most of us \$11 million is a lot of money but the federal government spends \$9 million in the time it takes to hold Question Period—\$9 million in 45 minutes. "We are asking for a tax exemption which will

cost about \$11 million or approximately 45 minutes of expenditure by the present government. We are not asking for something monumental in terms of this tax deduction."

But not all volunteer firefighters in Canada can claim the tax exemption. If they don't receive an allowance from their municipality they can't claim the exemption, Liberal MP Colino Campbell said.

And according to a letter from finance minister Marc Lalonde to Ms. Campbell, it's not that easy to simply change the income tax laws to give volunteer

firefighters a better break.

The finance department seems to feel that if special status is given to volunteer firefighters, the government would be offending other volunteer groups in the country.

The type of expenses claimed by these firefighters are claimed under personal expenses and Mr. Lalonde told Ms. Campbell "it would be very difficult to introduce tax benefits for volunteer services that would be fair to the taxpaying public who must ultimately finance these benefits."

Mr. Lalonde's letter continues: "Permitting a deduction of these ex-



JOHN McDERMID, MP

penses would clearly increase the administrative cost of ensuring the expenses are reasonable. It would also further aggravate the disparity between volunteer firemen and other volunteer

workers—who constantly point out the inequity in a tax concession for firemen and no similar treatment for them."

Ms. Campbell is also interested in increasing the level of exemption for firefighters and she says Mr. Lalonde will take her request "under consideration."

Another Liberal MP, Douglas Fisher, suggested the House "pass along our enthusiasm" for the Campbell-McDermid suggestion to Mr. Lalonde "and leave it at that". That's what happened. Mr. Fisher talked out the remaining time allotted for debate on the issue and no vote was ever taken.

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DANCE COMPANY GOES MAZURKA

While only 12 to 18 years old, members of Oakville's Elizabeth Paterson Dance Company displayed some outstanding professional talent at the company's performance in the John Elliott Theatre Saturday night. There were two different productions for the audience: the first was an interestingly-choreographed performance of Prokof-

lev's Peter and the Wolf with some rather streetwise characters. The second piece was "La Boutique Fantasque" in which a toy shop comes to life and saves the romance of a toy soldier and a French doll. Here, Mazurka dancers spring into form after potential purchasers visit the store.

(Herald photo by Chris Aagaard)

Region unhappy over Stewarttown homes

Sheldon says appeal 'stupid decision'

By CHRIS AAGAARD
Herald Staff Writer

Halton region's planning department came under a blistering attack Monday night from town councillors reviewing a troubled land "re-development" proposal near Stewarttown.

All but three councillors voted to press regional council to reconsider its decision to continue an Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) appeal against the development.

The decision to carry on the appeal, despite a recommendation from the region's planning and public works committee to drop the issue, was described by Esquimes Coun. Pam Sheldon as "the most stupid planning decision I've seen in a long time".

Aler Investments Ltd. and Senga Construction Ltd. of Georgetown have proposed a three-home development on a 3.6-acre property east of the Trafalgar Road on Sideroad 15. See additional story, page C5.

The proposal has already been supported by the region's Land Division Committee, town council and town staff which argue that the development doesn't pose as great a threat to planning in the area as the region says.

"This is the kind of regional planning interference that just infuriates me," Coun. Sheldon said. "If you took the 'book' (official plan) away from our regional planners, they would be incapable of independent thought."

Ironically, not 15 minutes earlier, regional planning and development director Raj Mohammed was among Halton's senior management

team whose members introduced themselves to the new council and outlined issues that the region and Halton Hills will face together in the future. But the team left before council's heated planning debate began.

TWO FIRMS

Representing the two firms, Al Pilutti asked council to formally seek the region's reconsideration.

Mr. Pilutti told councillors he's trying to save the region and the two firms the cost of an OMB hearing. Along with local council's call to review the issue, Mr. Pilutti said he will call the 13 regional councillors who voted to continue the appeal and invite them to personally view the property which was purchased six months ago.

Before the purchase he said, the region acknowledged that it was not good farmland and that by tearing down the existing buildings and putting up new ones, the developers would be doing some much needed "house-cleaning". Neighbors have also supported the project, which he said was a "re-development" of land, not a new development.

(Regional staff has suggested that he seek an official plan amendment which would make his project conform to regional plan policies. That process could take years of review and public hearings.)

While he supported the developers' bid, Mayor Pomeroy didn't like the idea of having council call for a review of the issue based on Mr. Pilutti's visit Monday night.

By getting more deeply involved on behalf of Mr. Pilutti, council may be

setting a precedent for other OMB appeals, Mayor Pomeroy said.

He maintained that, although Mr. Pilutti presented his case successfully to the public works and planning committee, he should have also appeared before council last Wednesday as a delegation.

Coun. Phil Carney, who has previously criticized bureaucracy in the municipal planning process, tossed the region's report on the property on the council floor in a gesture of disgust.

He said he could not trust the findings of the report, especially when another regional planning report for a property issue in Norval last year tended to be "misleading".

In support of Mr. Pilutti's project, most of the councillors argued that the official plan has to have some flexibility.

The document can't possibly cover every corner, Coun. Ross Knechtel said, adding that "the region has gone out of its way to make a mountain out of a molehill".

Reed unsure about waste study but says it disqualifies Site F

If the Ontario Waste Management Corporation's Phase 2 report suggesting potential sites for liquid waste disposal is credible, it "obviously disqualifies" Site "F" in rural Milton as a sanitary landfill site, according to Halton-Burlington MPP Julian Reed.

"Apparently the technology proposed for disposing of these industrial wastes renders toxic chemicals virtually inert," Mr. Reed said in a

press release issued Monday. "At this time it's unknown how this compares to municipal garbage. However, we do know that municipal garbage buried in permeable soil produces a leachate which cannot be totally collected with any known technology."

The Liberal MPP urged opponents of Halton region's plans to develop the 246-acre Site F for landfilling to use the OWMC report "as the

strongest possible reinforcing argument" and advised the region to study the report itself.

Mr. Reed acknowledged that it is premature to speculate on the selection of any part of Halton for liquid waste disposal, but pledged to "do everything possible to protect the interests of the people of Halton".

Mr. Reed identified Site F, located at the corner of Tremaine and Britannia Roads south of urban Milton, as the "area under the epicentre" of Zone 2, one of two areas chosen for study by Dr. Donald Chant, president of the OWMC.

Zone 1 involves mainly the Niagara peninsula, while Zone 2 includes part of Metro Toronto, a small portion of Halton and an area surrounding Zone 1.

"The remaining area involves a large geographic area of Halton region," he explained.

"Therefore, most of Halton can be entirely eliminated from consideration as a possible location for a waste management site. This area also includes Site F at the

epicentre of the transportation area.

"In the circumstances, the area of concern would be to the east of Milton, south into Oakville and

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Securing home? Call police first

Thinking of installing a home security system? Please be careful about the firm you choose to do the job, the Halton regional police say.

Demand to see proper identification, police cautioned in a press release last week.

"Care should be taken when contemplating having your valuables videotaped or photographed. While this information could be useful for insurance claims and identification, the possibility of it being used for improper purposes is a concern of the police force."

"Residents of Halton are reminded that officers from the crime prevention bureau may be contacted for assistance with home security."

Just call the Halton police switchboard at 870-5511 and ask for extension 265.



FAN SUPPORT

Written by Georgetown children's books author Kathy Stinson, "Red Is Best" is rapidly becoming a favorite addition to bookshelves in many youngsters' rooms. Mrs. Stinson, seen here with her children Kelly and Matthew, was one of two storytellers at the Georgetown children's library Saturday afternoon who delighted a large crowd of kids with some unique tales and several musical games. Mrs. Stinson is expecting a second book out in the spring, entitled "Big or Little". Her subjects are drawn right from her own home: Kelly's fascination with the color red provided the story line for her first book while Matthew's adventures with sizes is detailed in the second work.

Three members of a family were treated and released for carbon monoxide poisoning Friday morning at Georgetown Memorial Hospital, in what could have been a multiple fatality situation.

The Shelley Street residents took themselves to hospital after the husband

collapsed in the early hours of the morning.

Deputy fire chief Bob Hyde attributed the build up of carbon monoxide in their home to a defective heat saver that had a crack in it allowing the poisonous gas to seep back into the house.

He said the house was too well insulated as well,

allowing for the gas retention.

Mr. Hyde warns consumers to buy appliances bearing the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) or Underwriters Laboratories of Canada (ULC) label. They indicate the appliance is safe for consumer use and has undergone rigid testing.



WHERE THERE'S SMOKE, THERE'S FUN

Perfect winter weather Saturday night drew a large crowd of North Halton Golf and Country Club members and guests to the Club's annual winter carnival. Last week's freezing spell coated a nearby

pond with a good thick layer of ice which attracted skaters and skiers and tobogganists struck out for snowy slopes.

(Herald photo by Chris Aagaard)