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SECTION B, Wednesday, March 28, 1984 - Page 1



Fighting red tape Planners explain the lengthy but necessary application stage

By CHRIS AAGAARD
 Herald Staff

Planners call it "process", developers refer to it as "red tape". The steps involved in getting a development project built are numerous.

One developer speaking at a regional housing conference last year referred to the procedure as a "Pac Man maze" and called for changes to speed things up.

It's not uncommon to developments to take two years or more to move from the formal application stage to a final subdivision agreement with the town and region.

Meanwhile, developers say they incur the "carrying" charges of holding on to the land—the interest rates and land taxes they must pay while they wait for permission to build.

Delays in getting developments approved aren't entirely the fault of the system, planners point out.

will be affected by adding homes, how the drainage from rainstorms will be channelled away from the development and which show that there is adequate capacity in sewage plant and water supply to accommodate the project.

COMMENTS

If needed, applications to amend the town's and region's official plans are made to the respective planning offices and then "circulated" for comments. (Zoning amendments are made to the town first).

Municipal departments like public works, police and recreation, as well as outside agencies such as conservation authorities, are among the 15 to 20 agencies which comment on the applications.

When the comments are submitted, the town planners prepare a report for council, recommending a public meeting. (Responses are usually made in 30 days).

Official plan amendments, once approved by the region and town, are sent for final approval to the provincial ministry of housing and municipal affairs. Zoning amendments are endorsed by the Ontario Municipal Board.

Concerns about an amendment application can delay the process as outstanding questions are researched and answered by the developer or municipal staff.

When the official plan and zoning approvals are secured, the developer submits a draft plan of subdivision to the region. The region then sends it to the town for comments and public meetings are held to gather the views of neighbors and other residents.

ADVICE

On the advice of its staff, council decides whether to approve or

not approve the draft plan.

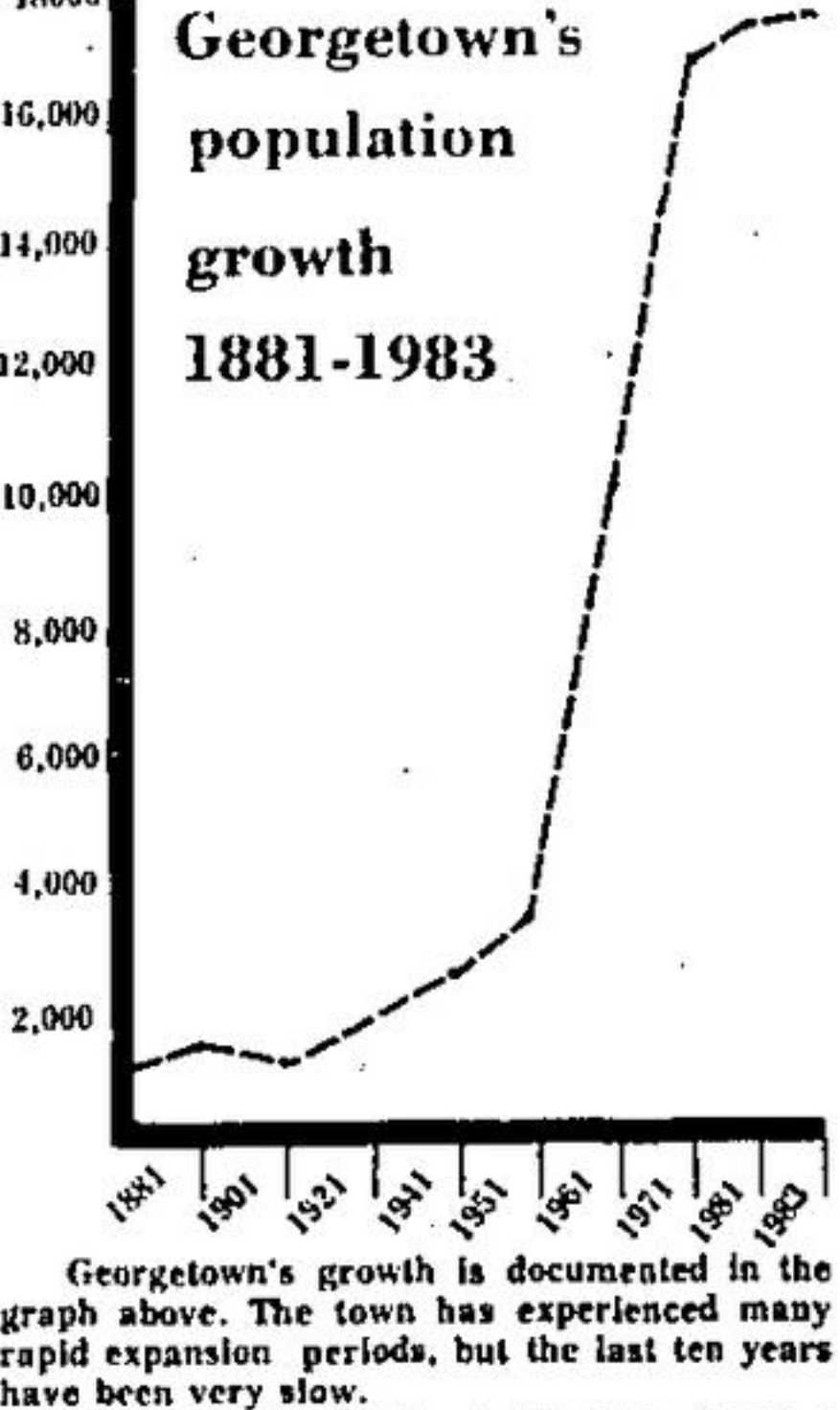
If it concurs with the staff report and the studies carried out by the developer, council agrees that the town, region and the developer should move to the next step: a subdivision agreement.

If the developer has the money to begin the housing project, he applies for his building

OMB. (Decisions of the OMB may however, be appealed to the provincial Cabinet).

JUDICIAL

The OMB is a semi-judicial body and the proceedings are similar to those of a court of law. The gallery rises when the board (one or as many as three officials) enters; proponents and opponents call their own expert wit-



Georgetown's growth is documented in the graph above. The town has experienced many rapid expansion periods, but the last ten years have been very slow.

(Source: Statistics Canada)

Lack of subsidized units

Opinions vary on housing needs

By CHRIS AAGAARD
 Herald Staff

There isn't any shortage of opinion about what kind of housing Halton Hills badly needs. All kinds, the experts say, housing to match a broad range of family incomes.

Within Georgetown's newly expanded urban boundaries, whole new areas are destined to become residential, industrial and commercial neighborhoods.

Through a secondary planning process, guidelines will determine

where certain types — of certain densities — of housing can be located.

"We need a good mix of housing across the community," Halton Hills Coun. Mike Armstrong said, "something which solves the needs of younger couples and middle income families."

The vice-president of one local real estate company said that most of the housing demands in Halton Hills is for homes below \$100,000.

"Nice, semi-detached homes in the \$60,000 to \$70,000 range — people

really need them," Dan Timmons of Foberts-Remax said. Housing, he added, should also reflect changes in society.

OLDER

There are more older, single professionals and single parent families around — people who want smaller homes, Mr. Timmons commented.

"It's a social issue which is not being addressed."

Halton Hills is also suffering from an acute shortage of apartments. In 1980, Halton region



DAN TIMMONS

was presented with a report on the conversion of apartments into condominiums. It notes that Halton has a vacancy rate of lower than the three per cent guideline suggested by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp.

In Halton Hills, there is about one per cent of all rental accommodation unoccupied which means a tough search for people looking for an apartment.

Rent controls have been blamed for curbing new apartment development.

But Albert Euteneler, who wants to build an apartment development on Carruthers Road north of Georgetown's downtown area, points out that rent controls don't apply to new buildings.

Authority).

The waiting list to get into family housing in Halton continues to grow. Authority manager Ann Gabriel told The Herald.

"The turn over for family housing is small," Mrs. Gabriel said. "People could be on the list for years."

Some people drop from the list, she said, and the actual need for subsidized housing may be greater than the list indicates.

NON-PROFIT

Few developers have been inclined to build non-profit housing projects as a means of providing affordable housing for low to middle income families.

However, Halton Hills' first co-operative housing development (The Morley Mills Co-operative) was built last year as the second stage of the River Run townhouse development.

In the co-op system, residents buy into the co-operative, and then pay a monthly fee for their homes. They share the upkeep of the development and they get their initial co-op membership charge back when they move out.

Mr. Timmons also said that Georgetown is an ideal location for condominium development.

Among those he believes would welcome more condominiums are older couples who want to give up the responsibility of tending gardens, yet still have space for their furniture and memorabilia.

While the town is excited about the possibilities for growth in Halton Hills, it's not looking for the suburban sprawl which surrounds Toronto, Coun. Armstrong said.

Form task force to aid development says chamber head

Herald Staff

The Georgetown Chamber of Commerce president would like to see town council, the chamber and citizens form a joint task force to tackle economic expansion in town.

That's Dave Kentner's opinion on how to attract more growth to Georgetown.

"I think council has to throw the goal out to the community and sell them on the idea (of increased growth). Councilors often find themselves distracted by issues that arise from week to week, but long range planning to attract development would be beneficial, he says.

Businesses would like Georgetown to "intelli-



DAVE KENTNER

gently arrive at 40,000 over the next 10 years," he said.

The town will want to avoid big growth, he maintains. "We all have to know about it (new development) and care. We don't want to upset the small town balance. I think that's in everyone's mind."

Georgetown needs an industrial base, he says, but finding the available land is the problem.

A joint task force to look solely at the problem of development would enable the town to come up with a goal and a "game plan," he says.

After the BIG Celebration (Business in Georgetown) is completed, the Chamber will have more time to work on individual projects, he says.

If new stores are attracted to town, it will mean residents won't have to travel to other areas for items they need, he says. That means the dollars will stay in Georgetown and benefit the community, he says.

BETTER RISK

As a developer, he believes his apartment project to be a better financial risk than single family homes, at least while the economy recovers.

But some families have no other way of affording homes except government assistance. There are only 18 publicly-subsidized family homes in Acton and none in Georgetown.

There are also 151 subsidized senior citizens apartments in Georgetown and 65 units in Acton (administered by the Halton Housing

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No extra charges for new development

By CHRIS AAGAARD
 Herald Staff

Regional council is determined that it's not going to raise money by imposing extra charges on new industrial-commercial development.

Last week, council steered away from a proposal to study how "capital contributions" from industrial land developers would help pay for such regional responsibilities as social services and policing.

Many councillors feared that the study would be the "foot in the door" to reintroduce capital contributions. They were scrapped by council last year amid warnings from develop-

ers that the extra charges discourage industries from locating in Halton.

Had they been endorsed by council, the contributions would have been the first of their kind in the province.

That, developer Bill Robertson told last week's council meeting, would prompt industrial and commercial developers to locate in communities where they would pay fewer municipal charges.

Councillors favoring the capital contributions argue that the costs of new development, either residential or industrial-commercial, shouldn't be borne by existing ratepayers.

Talk of the contributions particularly concern councillors in Milton and Halton Hills. The competition among municipalities for new industry is intense enough, they maintain, without Halton being burdened with discouraging extra development charges.

"Just to give you an idea of what we are up against," regional chairman Pete Pomeroy said, "there are 8,000 acres of industrial commercial land in the region of York where there are no (capital contributions)."

Mr. Robertson commented that while there are indications of a recovery

Few high rises

There are very few high rises now in Halton Hills and Mayor Russ Miller doesn't foresee many more being built.

There'll be more single family homes constructed in the town for the 5-6,000 population growth the mayor anticipates.

"Georgetown's unique now because we don't have large multiple dwellings in one area but throughout the town," Mayor Miller said.

50 per cent rented

At least half of all farm land in Halton Hills is leased, says the president of the Halton Federation of Agriculture.

James Reid of RR2 Georgetown says 50 per cent of local agricultural land is leased now. He called it "a very high percentage" and said he'd like to see more of the land owned by the farmers who farm it.

"With rented lands, you don't have continuity of support in maintenance; it's just like the difference between owning and renting a car," Mr. Reid said.

Interest rates have been too high to encourage farm land ownership, he said.

Real estate values of farm land have been declining, Mr. Reid said.

Delays, extra money frustrate developers

By CHRIS AAGAARD
 Herald Staff

Developers point to two-tier, regional-town planning as a source of the delay in getting projects approved.

Joe Rossett, a developer who wants to build townhouses and double-link semi-detached homes between John Street and River Drive near Mountainview Road, has been waiting six years to build.

The town recently endorsed a sub-division agreement with him and when The Herald talked to him a couple of weeks ago, he was still waiting to here from the region.

"It discourages me a bit," Mr. Rossett said. "This is a wonderful town to live in. But to develop something takes a long time."

In Peel region, local municipalities are given more control over planning matters. Mr. Rossett said it took only six months to have a project he was working on in Brampton approved.

"It costs a fortune to get approvals," Mr. Rossett said. "If we're not careful we'll price ourselves out of the market. The politicians say, 'put the costs on the price of the house.' Well, it's not nice to do that either. We want to build houses for the people that they can afford, plus make a little profit, for us."

The absence of region-

town planning does help speed the process up, Guelph planner Mario Venditti, said. Two years ago, he moved from the top post in the Halton Hills planning department to run Guelph's planning office.

Guelph tries to get the approval process done in six months, he said. The final approvals are handled by the province.

To help avoid the stumbling blocks to development, Guelph works with developers' and homebuilders' associations to get their comments as part of a report which is presented to city council.

Development in Halton Hills, he pointed out, is also hindered by the sewage capacity problem in Georgetown and the sewage and water problem in Acton.

Without these constraints, Guelph is able to handle large-scale housing projects.

It's in the larger developments, Georgetown lawyer Bert Arnold commented, the policies of the town's official plan can best be realized.

The development trend today, he said, is towards projects which highlight a neighborhood identity, rather than sprawling masses of roads.

"There's more thought given to housing projects now," Mr. Arnold commented,

pointing out town policies for parks, fitness trails and housing mixtures.

By planning development on a large scale, the official plan can ensure the "aesthetics of living" which it is supposed to support.

Mr. Arnold said he feels the policy of "infilling"—located smaller housing projects on vacant chunks of land in the old Georgetown urban area, is responsible for a large share of public resistance to development.

"You're doing something in the middle of their neighborhood and they don't know what it will bring," he said. "What's needed instead is orderly expansion."

Large scale expansion, should involve the public beyond the public meetings and council sessions which discuss the proposal, Mr. Arnold said.

Educating the public would help clear up some of the concerns people have about large-scale growth, he added.

permits. The development can go ahead anytime, weather permitting, after that.

That's the process in its simplest, uninterrupted form.

But objections from the region, the town, even adjacent landowners and other developers, can come almost at any time.

If they're not resolved through negotiations at the municipal level, then usually the final arbitrator is the Ontario Municipal Board, more familiarly known as the

nesses and are generally represented by lawyers.

Testimony is sworn in and the evidence given is understood to be truthful. Maps and documents used by both sides of the case are entered as exhibits.

If the process frustrates developers, municipalities are frustrated with developers who fail to build once they have secured all the approvals.

Sewage treatment capacity is committed to them, Mr. MacLean explained.

High time good rural planning was done

By ANI FEDERIAN
 Herald Staff

It's high time there was some good rural planning done, the mayor for Halton Hills said.

"I hate to see the rural community cut up too badly, but I guess that's a sacrifice we have to make. They're not making any more land," Mayor Russ Miller said referring to town growth that infringes on the rural area.

A rural resident himself, the mayor said it was unfortunate the number of farms that have been destroyed in Halton Hills, "but you can't plan retroactively," he said.

"I've always been viewed as a person opposed to growth," Mayor Miller said. "I'm not opposed to growth. I like to see good growth, not helter skelter growth."

He said he's opposed rural subdivisions because of the destruction of agricultural land. The mayor objects to people who say "we've got to have growth and it doesn't matter what kind it is."