

Council rescinds lot levy delay policy

An impassioned plea by Councillor Joe Hewitt Monday couldn't stop his colleagues from rescinding a Halton Hills policy allowing apartment developers to hold off paying lot levies for up to six months.

Councillors scrapped the policy first put in place two years ago when developers of the Sands condominium units asked for the deferral of lot levies.

Lot levies are a per-unit charge developers must pay to the town to help fund services for new development. They are charged by the household or by the apartment unit. The levies were increased moderately last week at the recommendation of a consultant.

It was the second time in as many weeks Coun. Hewitt argued in favor of retaining the deferral policy. Last week at the town's general committee meeting, councillors voted 7-6 to rescind the policy. That vote was duplicated Monday.

Allowing developers to defer paying lot levies would help some developers who are short of funds, to get the building started, said Coun. Hewitt. They would have a few extra months to collect the first advance mortgage payments, he said. "Multi-unit residential occupancy has got to be the biggest windfall for the town," said Coun. Hewitt.

And apartments and con-

dominium units don't heavily tax the town's services because of their confined location, he said.

The deferral policy wouldn't apply to every multi-unit developer, but it would give the town flexibility for those who need it, said Coun. Hewitt.

"If we don't have this flexibility, then we'll just be administrators rubber stamping things."

Mayor Russ Miller disagreed. Halton Hills has some of the lowest lot levies in southern Ontario, he said. And when the town doesn't receive lot levies on time taxpayers have to start paying for new development, he said.



Joe Hewitt

"I think we should stay in the driver's seat. I think we should run this town, not negotiate with developers."

Town treasurer Ray King said

most municipalities in Ontario charge lot levies when the building permits are issued. And the issue had to be dealt with because that recommendation was made in the consultant's report, he said.

As well, it's impossible to relate services, such as new fire stations or recreation facilities to one specific development such as a condominium, he said. With new growth, those facilities are needed and it's impossible to point a finger at one aspect of new growth and say the new services are needed because of that development, he said.

In fact some services are often in place before new development is complete, he added.

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Homeowners await conclusions

By BRIAN MacLEOD
 Herald Staff

Help from Halton Region doesn't appear imminent for over 100 anxious people who are afraid of losing their newly-purchased homes in Halton Hills Village.

Halton's planning and public works committee decided Wednesday not to allow Fernbrook Homes to register three parcels of land containing 237 homes on the west side of Mountainview Road.

The decision leaves 108 people who have purchased homes wondering if the subdivision will be registered before the deadline runs out at the end of February making the deals void.

In January, Bruce Hayward, a Georgetown resident who had sold his home to purchase a house in Halton Hills Village, asked the town to step in and help save 114 people from losing their new homes.

Since then, Fernbrook Homes spokesman Danny Salvatore said six people have opted out of their offers to purchase houses.

Fernbrook Homes purchased the 237 lots on the west side of Mountainview Road from the developer, Halton Hills Village Homes. Fernbrook began selling houses in the summer. In the late fall, Halton Hills Village Homes changed the phasing of the lots for the second time with the permission of Halton Hills council. Because of water servicing limitations, Halton Hills Village Homes is allowed to build a total of 510 homes. The re-phasing in the fall switched most of the houses to be serviced from the west side of the road to the east side.

Now, only 93 homes on the west side can be registered and built. But 108 people have purchased homes.

The houses sold were spread among three parcels of land, actually mini-subdivisions, on the west side of the road. Fernbrook wanted the Region to allow

registration of all three parcels containing 237 homes, so everyone who has purchased a house would be eligible to have their homes built. The 93 who actually got the homes would be decided later.

But Halton has said no to that plan. Regional planner Rash Mohammed said that idea means homes would be built scattered throughout the subdivisions and that is bad planning.

And, once the plans are registered, the builder could conceivably sell the remaining houses, and the new homeowners could force Halton to issue building permits through the courts.

Since the homes were sold last year, the price of houses has gone up by more than \$20,000, Mr. Mohammed says.

People who have purchased homes are afraid they will have to pay the inflated cost of housing if all the deals have to be renegotiated.

And Mr. Salvatore is worried that Halton Hills Village Homes could actually cancel the deal which allows Fernbrook to purchase the 237 lots. That would terminate the deals with all 108 new homeowners.

Mr. Salvatore said he wasn't told of water servicing restraints until November - after 114 homes were sold.

And Fernbrook had recently submitted plans to build the houses in clusters of 25 or 30 homes throughout the three parcels of land so that no houses would be scattered throughout the subdivisions, he said.

Mr. Salvatore said Fernbrook could absorb increased construction costs which have occurred over the last year, but not the increased cost of land the firm would have to pay if the deal between Fernbrook and Halton Hills Village Homes runs out in February.

Halton wants Fernbrook to redesign the subdivision so that on-

ly 93 houses can be registered and built.

If Halton doesn't allow registration of all three plans, Fernbrook will have to build the 40-ft. and 50-ft. ravine lots first, because they were sold first, said Mr. Salvatore. Those lots with houses are \$200,000 more expensive than the 30-ft. and 40-ft. lots, many of which have been sold, he said. Those homeowners who have purchased the 30-ft. and 40-ft. lots couldn't be expected to "trade" their lots for the bigger lots and pay the increase in price, he said.

Allowing the clusters as Fernbrook has suggested would allow homes to be built on a variety of lot sizes, he said.

At Halton on Wednesday, Regional Chairman Pete Pomeroy said the problem has nothing to do with Halton Region.

"It appears to me the town of Halton Hills council ... referred (the issue) to Regional council just because it was too difficult to deal with at home," he said.

"We (Halton Region) were innocent bystanders and we were swept up in this thing."

Halton Hills Coun. Marilyn Serjeantson urged her colleagues to allow Fernbrook to register the three parcels of land, even if it is bad planning. "In the end, what difference does it make," she said.

"If we have to do an inappropriate design (of the subdivision) to help out (homebuyers) then why wouldn't we do it?" she asked.

"We're trying hard to accommodate them," said committee chairman Pat McLaughlin.

"I don't believe we are," Coun. Serjeantson shot back.

Mr. Salvatore said Thursday he was not told of a pending decision at Wednesday's planning and public works committee meeting.

He plans to appear before Regional council on Wednesday to explain the concept of building the homes in clusters.



They're all heart

David Hope, 6, and Kerrie Fleming, 7, were crowned King and Queen of the winter carnival at George Kennedy Public School last week. David and Kerrie are

French Immersion students who ate the lucky cupcakes to win the title as carnival king and queen. (Herald photo)

African union
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Bigger challenges
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