

Columnists

Council should learn from development fiasco lesson

In past columns I have written about how important it is for Halton Hills Council to ensure that the town has sufficient numbers of well qualified staff to meet the needs of the community.

A good case in point of what can happen to the town without well-qualified staff serving, is revealed in the controversy surrounding a residential development project in Stewarttown.

The residents of Harrison Place, Applebee court and Thompson drive had to experience a new homeowners' worst nightmare before getting the quality homes they were supposed to have over a year ago.

Residents originally found their homes to be in such

disrepair that if they had been left as is, they could have presented a safety hazard to the occupants.

The onus was on the developer, Halton Hills Development Corporation, to live up to its promise of building quality homes. But it failed and failed badly. Thursday the corporation was fined \$162,000 after being found guilty on 162 charges under the province's Building Code, Water Resources Act and Planning Act.

The town's building inspection staff detected the numerous deficiencies in the houses, including several unsafe fireplaces, during its final inspection of the homes in the summer and fall of 1989.

The staff's efficient work led to



Ben's Banter
By Ben Dummett

the charges being laid and the town and the province's new home warranty program taking over the project.
When the charges were laid

this summer, the town's Administrator-Clerk Dan Costea said of town staff, "we now have an inspection staff that is very well qualified and reliable."

But the town didn't have the same inspection staff in place during a good part of the development's construction which began in 1988. It was the previous staff that carried out four of the five inspections during the construction of the houses that the town does with all developments to double check the quality of work being done. Most of the deficiencies were found during the final inspection by the new staff.

Something went wrong during the first four inspections. As Mr. Costea said this summer, there is

a "probability" that some of the deficiencies could have been detected earlier.

But Mr. Costea stressed at the time, the houses were being fixed.

Is this the point? Yes and no. Yes, because the homeowners now have good quality homes. But no, because most of the problems and the subsequent headaches could have been prevented if the previous building inspection staff had been attentive to the work at hand.

Council should learn from this episode and ensure that before it cuts out jobs as a so-called act of responsibility, it should fully understand the consequences of its actions.

Successor to Dye will be chosen carefully

By STEWART MACLEOD
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Ottawa - Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, no doubt with a great deal of help from his ministers, now must decide who will become the new auditor general of Canada. After completing his 10-year term, Kenneth Dye is preparing to step down.

And, while choosing Mr. Dye's successor may not be the most crucial decision ever faced by the prime minister, it's not something he'll take lightly. It's akin to an actor having to hire a theatre critic.

It used to be that an auditor general kept his nose in the accounting books. Traditionally, that was his job - a "watchdog on government spending."

Of course, it used to be a small operation, with a couple of dozen accountants. Now, the auditor general commands some 700 employees and the operation costs more than \$54 million a year.

It wouldn't be surprising if, one of these days, outside auditors are hired to audit the auditor

general's department.

Meanwhile, Mr. Dye has been spreading his wings, so to speak, to the point where he now goes far beyond the books and is offering views on policies and programs. Accounting procedures are no longer the sole aim of his studies; it's a question of whether taxpayers are getting value for their buck.

As a result, the auditor general's annual report has become a broad critique of the government's performance.

MANY EXAMPLES

This doesn't mean the books are being overlooked. In his latest report, Mr. Dye entertains us with all sorts of horror stories about wasted dollars. We're told of millions that go into non-productive companies, the unnecessary refitting of rusty ships, the purchase of land that's never been used and of unpaid debts and uncollected taxes.

It's all there. But in his 750-page report - which used to come in folder size - we get a far broader look at certain departments. For instance, Mr. Dye this year spent a great deal of time



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looking at the defence department and reached the conclusion there would be "extreme confusion" if our army goes to war.

He says the military has no "defined wartime objectives," an observation that's not the normal preserve of accountants. He goes on to say the defence department, in times of war, could not properly recruit, train or care for personnel.

Not surprisingly, Mr. Dye's comments brought a tart retort from Defence Minister Bill

McKnight. "I am not sure, with all his attributes, that the auditor general is the best qualified to be a military strategist," he said.

I suspect Immigration Minister Barbara McDougall had similar sentiments about Mr. Dye's comments on AIDS testing for new Canadians.

But, in looking at the government's spending habits, the auditor general is free to say just about anything he wants.

IMPORTANT POST

This year, Mr. Dye even delved into the attitude of public servants, and the goal of putting "fun" into the workplace. He emphasizes "value, service and performance." We've come a long way since the 1950s when the auditor general of the day first made headlines by discovering horses were on the payroll at a military base.

It's not difficult to see why the choice of Mr. Dye's successor is so important to the prime minister. There will always be waste and mismanagement in anything so massive as the federal bureaucracy and, since orderly business procedures in-

spire few headlines, there is no way the government can win the day with an auditor general.

All previous prime ministers suffered from these watchdogs, while the opposition embraced them. It was only seven years ago that Mr. Mulroney accused the prime minister Pierre Trudeau of inhibiting the auditor general's work. If a Tory government were elected, he said, things would change.

A year later, he was preventing Mr. Dye from getting at cabinet documents relating to the purchase of Petrofina by Petro Canada. It doesn't take long for governments to regard auditors general as another opposition party.

And, once the watchdog is appointed, there is little the government can do to curtail his or her activities for the following 10 years. That's why, we suspect, Mr. Mulroney and his ministers are keeping their eyes peeled for an accountant of the old school - one who is happier with financial statements than with policies.

But (dare I say it?) now that the Dye has been cast...

Saddam's gamble could lead to bigger stakes

TORONTO - A great fear lurks at the heart of much of the worldwide resistance to the aims of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

It isn't just that he committed aggression; it isn't at all that he runs a particularly nasty regime; it isn't even that he threatens the oil of the western world.

Rather, it is that he unilaterally and arbitrarily changed Iraq's borders through military conquest of a neighbor. That is the only genuine no-no in international relations today.

The great post-Second World War principle is the sacredness of national frontiers.

One could measure this by the reaction of Arab countries such as Yemen or Jordan.

They abstained during the initial world outrage over Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. They thought Iraq might have had a point in its financial and border disputes with Kuwait.

But once Saddam Hussein annexed Kuwait, they and other doubters supported sanctions.

ARTIFICIAL

Saddam's sin is so unpardonable because so many countries in the world today are totally artificial.

Iraq's claim to Kuwait is itself an invention, based on the premise that Kuwait was once nominally part of the Ottoman or Turkish Empire, even though the al-Sabah family has ruled Kuwait for almost 250 years.

In fact, Kuwait's refusal to be dictated to by the Ottomans led it to seek British protection in 1899.

This lasted until 1961, when, after one last deployment of troops to face down Iraqi annexation threats of that day, the U.K. withdrew.

It is important to note that Iraq is itself a creation of European imperialism, being carved out of the Turkish Empire at the end of the First World War as a gift for the Hashemite family in return for wartime aid. (Alec Guinness portrayed one of the family as a cunning Arab leader-politician in the movie Lawrence of Arabia.) The Hashemites were overthrown in Iraq in 1958, but still rule Jordan.

Iraq's boundaries are arbitrary, combining people of different ethnicity and language. If Saddam really wants to negate the political effects of European imperialism, then he'd need to return both Iraq and Kuwait to Turkey.

But what Saddam's seizure of Kuwait has shown is that, unless done voluntarily, the world won't accept such boundary changes. Even supposed exceptions prove the rule.

The Korean and Vietnam wars were treated as civil wars, with the two halves of each country in conflict with each other. Thus much of the world readily accepted North Vietnam's conquest of the south, but would not have accepted formal North Vietnamese annexation of its Laotian and Cambodian takeovers.

JUSTIFIED

Any invasion today must be justified by subsequent military withdrawal, as the U.S. did in Panama and elsewhere, or Tan-

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zania did in Uganda, or the Soviets accomplished in Afghanistan. Ob-

vious permanent outside conquest is simply not acceptable, even where there is an acknowledged impossibility of withdrawal in current circumstances, such as in Israel's unrecognized (by anybody) annexation of the Golan Heights in Syria. Saddam doesn't even have the kind of security excuse for his actions that Israel does.

In fact, if Saddam had agreed to withdraw his troops from Kuwait, it is a moot point whether international action would have been sustained against him or any puppet

government he left behind. It is his annexation that has got him into such universally deep water.

The fear is that if Saddam's Kuwaiti gambit succeeds, other countries will draw the appropriate conclusion and attempt to re-arrange their boundaries.

In a world where a majority of states make no real sense in terms of their frontiers and who does or doesn't live within them - and where most countries have territorial claims of one sort or another against neighbors - that is a genuinely scary prospect.



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