

Opinion

Willow Park residents deserve a reprieve

This is another call for anyone in Halton Hills with a piece of property that may be appropriate to house 30 mobile homes to apply to the Halton Hills Planning Department as soon as possible. The residents of Norval's Willow Park, off Highway 7, will be grateful knowing they will be out on the streets if a site for their mobile homes isn't found.

The point couldn't have been made clearer during a Willow Park Relocation Committee meeting at the Town Civic Centre Thursday night.

During the meeting, one resident explained that he, along with the majority of other residents, each have significant outstanding mortgages on their homes. Residents and politicians alike attending the meeting agreed the people couldn't pay off the mortgage by selling the mobile

homes. The value of a mobile home is reduced by up to 95 per cent if it isn't on a piece of property. As the resident states, there is no way he could afford that kind of loss, support a family and have the money to pay first and last month's rent on a new apartment.

Willow Park residents must leave the park by May 15 because the land has been expropriated by the Credit Valley Conservation Authority, (CVCA). The CVCA expropriated the land because it lies in the Credit River flood plain, meaning the residents' lives would be in jeopardy if a serious flood happened. The residents expected to move to an Acton location, but despite Town Council approval, the application was appealed by the people living near the proposed site to the Ontario Municipal



Ben's Banter
by
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Board where the appeal was upheld.

On the possibility of an extension of the eviction deadline, CVCA General Manager Vicki Barron suggested it would be unlikely since the authority has already extended the deadline twice, in the hopes the residents would be permitted to move to

the Acton site.

The authority can't justify another extension with no new proposed site on record and the continued threat to life still existing if the people are allowed to stay in Willow Park.

The residents can't afford to leave the property and the CVCA can't afford to permit them to stay.

The only compromise that would allow the people to keep their mobile homes is if another viable site is brought forth. Ms. Barron suggested at the meeting an extension is more likely to be considered if there is a real chance the residents could move to another park.

Another scenario would be involvement by the province.

Halton Hills Mayor Russ Miller estimated the Acton application cost the Town, Willow Park residents and the proposed sites

applicants approximately \$100,000, and in the words of Mayor Russ Miller, "all for nothing."

It's unfair to expect Town residents, Town council and others to pay out similar amounts of money to process a new application when, in the end, it too could be rejected. Since the provincial government appears to be a big advocate of affordable housing and mobile homes fit this description it seems reasonable for the province to step in.

Halton-North MPP Noel Duignan said he would set up a meeting between Willow Park residents, Town officials and Ministry of Housing officials to determine if a solution can be found.

It would be nice to say time will tell, but the point is, there is no more time.

Consumer confidence still at stable level

OTTAWA - In what passes for the Canadian economy these days, one must seek good news wherever it can be found.

So, stretching the point a bit, one turns to the Conference Board's latest survey of consumer confidence. The best that can be said is consumers were no more gloomy about the economy in the final months of 1990 than they were earlier in the year. That's the good stuff.

Naturally, this dubious tidbit of hope needs to be balanced with some bad news: To wit, consumer confidence remains at historic lows.

There's precious little reason, indeed, for consumers - whose spending accounts for about 60 per cent of economic production - to be happy. In the depths of recession, it seems better to hang on to what one has and wait out the storm.

Paul Darby, the board's director of forecasting and analysis, sums it up: "Although low, the bright side is that consumer confidence has remained stable for

the last three quarters. This may indicate a bottoming out. We expect to see consumer confidence pick up by this summer."

Feel better now? The board, a private research agency, finds the pessimism is consistent right across the country, an unusual phenomenon. And it's worse when the board asks about job prospects over the next six months.

SHAKEN CONSUMERS
This question really shakes consumers up. Confidence is at the lowest level since the survey began in 1960.

There's a good reason for this. Statistics Canada's help-wanted index, described as an early indicator of demand for labor, fell 7.1 per cent in January, with all regions contributing.

Meanwhile, economists are predicting a 9.7 per-cent jobless rate for most of 1991, which may mean some months of double-digit unemployment. The year started off badly with a 9.5 per cent rate.

Businesses are no more

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spirited than shoppers. The board found entrepreneurs are more pessimistic than at any time since the final three months of 1982, when we were in a recession.

Nearly three of four business leaders expected their firm's financial position and profits would deteriorate over the next six months. This was the worst reading in 14 years of the survey.

Half of businesses have decided the first six months of 1991 is a bad time to invest and, not surprisingly, have decided to slash

their investments. Weak consumer demand, doubtless arising from that depressed feeling among shoppers, and high interest rates are cited as key worries.

StatCan's latest leading indicator, which is used to predict trends, won't help the public mood. The last report showed the indicator dropped by 0.7 per cent in November, with household spending leading the plunge.

WOES COMPOUNDED
The results of a survey by the federal agency of economists' short-term predictions only compounds things. Their "mean" forecasts - that's mean as in average, not spiteful or vicious, in case you're wondering - predict higher unemployment and more inflation.

And in case you're turning an expectant eye to governments to spend the country out of recession, the influential C.D. Howe Institute has called for "heroic" spending cuts by Ottawa in the forthcoming federal budget.

Heroic, one suspects, might be

a word better applied to those who must endure cuts, rather than those who inflict them.

By now, the keyboard on which this column is written is in danger of seizing up from the tumbling tears, so let's look for happier news.

Interest rates are continuing to come down, a hopeful sign for both consumers and businesses. The stock market has just had its best day in more than two years, and manufacturers anticipate some improvement in production over the next three months.

Inflation, while higher because of the goods and services tax and oil prices, may not be as fearsome as predicted. The federal Consumer Information Office has found that more shoppers now believe savings on particular items from removal of the old federal tax and its replacement by the GST will be passed along. Of course, it took a recession to dampen the GST impact on prices.

We'll take any hand up we can get.

Land battle in Persian Gulf war is looming

Not surprisingly, most people find it hard to visualize where the coming ground battle in the Persian Gulf War is going to be fought.

Kuwait is simply a blob on a map on a television screen or in a newspaper.

It might be easier to understand if looked at this way:

The battle zone, smaller than Lake Huron, includes all 7,000 square miles of Kuwait and as much area again in adjacent Iraq. It is perhaps 150 miles (three miles equals five kilometres) wide from east to west, 100 miles deep from north to south.

The Iraqi attack on the Saudi Arabian town of Khafji was launched from the prominent southern bulge of Kuwait that lies along the Persian Gulf coast. Because it can be cut off relatively easily, that bulge is unlikely to be heavily defended.

The Iraqi Main Line of Resistance (MLR) starts about 30 or so miles north of the Saudi border and runs about 90 miles across Kuwait in a straight line from the Persian Gulf to north of where the borders of Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait all meet.

The Iraqi MLR then extends further west perhaps 40 miles into Iraq proper before curving north to where it intersects the northeast-southeast line of the Haniya Ridge. It then seems to follow the Haniya another 30 to 50 miles north to the Euphrates River. The elite Iraqi Republican

Guard units are east of the Haniya and south of the Euphrates.

175 MILES LONG
In short, the Iraqi MLR is likely 175 miles or so in length. The whole area is known as the Dib-diba, a steppe desert of gently rolling hills composed of slightly sandy soil. There are low shrubs, and at this time of year, portions of it should be covered with grass and shallow pools of water. Sandstorms can happen anytime.

It is, frankly, perfect country for tank warfare. There is nowhere to hide, and, excepting some bedouin shepherds, no civilians.

Further west, beyond the Iraqi defences on the Haniya Ridge, the country becomes progressively more rugged, the ground rocky and jagged with numerous cliffs - what is called the Hajara or stony desert. It is not, however, impassable, just difficult.

Within the area occupied by the Iraqi forces there is only one prominent geographic feature, that being the wide and (usually) dry depression known as Wadi al Batin that runs northeast from the Saudi town of Hafar. The Kuwait-Iraq border runs down the middle of it until the frontier line curves to the coast.

The Iraqi port of Umm Qasr sits just north of the coastal frontier, about 30 miles south of the major Iraqi city of Basra on the Euphrates River.

With the geography in mind, it

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becomes possible to make some educated guesses about what the Allies might do. There is no magic in military strategy. The problem is in the implementation, not the theory.

Current U.S. military doctrine, the AirLand concept of continuous mobile battle, which exalts manoeuvre above brute force in achieving victory, would seem to suggest a westward flanking movement by U.S.-British-French armor.

Such a flanking movement would have as its goal the coast near Umm Qasr, and possibly the Euphrates west of Basra, with the aim of encircling the 550,000 Iraqi soldiers behind the MLR and forcing them to surrender.

Certainly, the main armored attack will not go up the coast from Khafji toward Kuwait City. That will likely be left to Arab allies and possibly the U.S. Marines.

PUNCHING HOLE
Much more likely is punching a

hole through the Iraqi lines just west of Wadi Batin, using it to secure the right flank of the advance, while using the Allied left flank to roll up the Iraqi defence lines along Haniya Ridge from the east and rear.

On the other hand, the main assault may swing completely around the Iraqi MLR and hit Haniya Ridge from the west and much further north. The disadvantage of this is that it greatly lengthens supply lines in a battle where a tank division needs as much as 2,500 U.S. tons (600,000 U.S. gallons of fuel alone) of supply a day to function offensively.

Both of these options would obviously put the major fighting in Iraq rather than Kuwait - and re-

quire rolling over the Republican Guard - but it would be relatively close to the Kuwait border and probably politically acceptable. The lack of civilians is a bonus. Other than Umm Qasr, which might be taken by U.S. Marine assault from the sea or airborne units, no towns or cities need be entered, even Basra or Kuwait City. Bridge destruction by bombing can keep the whole battlefield isolated from Iraqi intervention from north of the Euphrates.

We'll know very soon.

(The above analysis is based on information obtained from a variety of private and public sources.)

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