

## A new ice age

The big question before Town council re: the current arena debate is not whether Halton Hills needs three additional ice surfaces. The answer to that question is yes.

With many ice users being forced to go out of town because there is not enough ice here to meet the current demand (and no drop in demand expected in coming years) it is obvious any additional rink would be a benefit.

No, the big question is whether the Town—and ultimately Halton Hills taxpayers—can afford new arenas at this time.

Under the current funding plan the Town could go \$25 million in debt to twin Acton Arena and add two additional rinks to the Mold-Masters SportsPlex. The aging Memorial Arena would likely soon be demolished afterward so the town would then be left with six ice surfaces—four at Mold-Masters; two in Acton.

Combined with the current \$5 million debt load the Town carries and the \$6.3 million for the new and improved libraries, adding three ice surfaces would bring the Town's debt total to nearly \$36 million. That's if all three rinks come in on budget, interest rates stay the same, etc.

Ice users argue they have "waited their turn" for new facilities with the last new surface being the twinning of Alcott Arena in 2000. But with sky-high development charges, a lack of water and much local opposition to growth, waiting for facilities is nothing new in Halton Hills. Just ask Halton Hills firefighters who waited **30 years** for new digs.

While the town is expected to grow substantially by 2031 under the Province's Places to Grow plan, Halton Hills will likely see little development—residential or industrial—in the next few years—the years in which it will have to tackle any arena debt. To pay for these buildings in the foreseeable future, the onus will fall on the local taxpayers who will also be paying for improved roads, seniors' centres, etc.

Three new ice surfaces would be very beneficial but it is not a **critical** need. That said, under the current fiscal plan, it is difficult to support moving ahead with three ice surfaces—at this time.

One additional pad—possibly the twinning the Acton Arena—would seem to be the most cost-effective option available at this time, while lessening the impact on taxpayers.

One positive aspect of this arena debate is that it has stirred public interest in municipal matters. We hope that interest continues when this debate has been settled and other crucial issues are brought to the forefront.

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## WEB POLL RESULTS

Which Halton team will advance the furthest in this year's Provincial Jr. A Hockey League playoffs?

- Burlington Cougars (28%)
- Georgetown Raiders (31%)
- Oakville Blades (41%)

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## Letters to the editor

### Local libraries 'alive and well'

Dear editor,  
 As Chair of the Halton Hills Public Library Board, I want to respond to some recent comments about the declining use of the public library. The statistics indicate otherwise.

- In 10 years, borrowing has increased by 81%;
- In the last 5 years:
  - borrowing is up 40%;
  - attendance at children's programs is up 37%;
  - use of in-house Internet stations is up 15%;
  - the number of questions answered has increased 10%.

Clearly, the Halton Hills Public Library is being used more, not less. The Library has 17,000 active cardholders and we know that number is actually greater given that children and spouses often share cards.

It is estimated that 80% of Halton Hills households have an active library card. We see an average of 2,220 people every week, in addition to 3,060 electronic visits per week.

In 2010, 504,564 items were

borrowed, 18,166 people used the library's Internet stations, and 14,896 people attended library programs.

The Halton Hills Public Library is alive and well and will continue to leverage its unique assets of free access, well-balanced and reputable collections, welcoming and comfortable space, and knowledgeable staff to build a healthy and prosperous community.

*Jay Jackson, Chair  
 Halton Hills Public Library Board*

### MPAC off the mark

Dear editor,  
 I have read with interest the debate and opposing opinions held by politicians and citizens alike on the issue of recreational and hospital equipment funding.

I thought it would interest the citizens, particularly those living in recently-purchased newly-built homes, to know that while a small minority are paying their property taxes based upon a true assessed value of their house, most residents are not.

That is because MPAC (Municipal Property Assessment Corporation), which bears the responsibility of conducting yearly property assess-

ments, do not seem to be able to accurately capture the true value of homes as they increase in value. Therefore, someone living in a eight-year-old home worth \$550,000 may be paying taxes based upon an assessment value of \$400,000, an annual loss of property tax income to the Town of \$1,500. If you multiply this lost revenue across all the under assessed homes in town, the loss in tax revenues is astounding.

Most residents are unaware of this trend, and are in no way culpable, however, I feel it is the responsibility of Mayor Rick Bonnette and our Regional councillors to act on behalf of their electorate, including the small minority being unfairly burdened by property taxes. Should MPAC not be equipped and bound to assess homes accurately? Perhaps if more towns and cities took issue with this process, then MPAC would improve their processes.

How could it be fair to tax a small portion of town residents at 1% when the majority of residents are taxed at lower rates? Addressing and righting this "inequity" would make huge strides in closing the gap in town coffers, and this tax revenue could fund many recreational initiatives, without having to raise taxes.

*Kelly Hammond. Georgetown*