

# Politicians voice objections to closure of Acton job centre

By **CYNTHIA GAMBLE**  
Staff Writer

Halton Hills council and Wellington-Halton Hills MPP Ted Arnott are among those voicing their objections to the imminent closure of the Acton Employment Resource Centre (AERC).

Links2Care executive director Sandra Melhuish said she was notified January 30, that funding contract for AERC ends March 31. A four-month contract may be extended to July 31 to help with the wind-down of services. Four employees will be affected by the closure.

Melhuish said Links2Care will do its best to support those employees, either within the Links2Care fold or in other endeavours.

"It was very distressing," said Melhuish, who promptly made calls to Mayor Rick Bonnette and Wellington-Halton Hills MPP Ted Arnott.

At Monday's council meeting, Halton Hills council voted to send Bonnette's resolution to the Province calling on Glen Murray, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities to re-consider and reverse the decision to close the Acton Employment Resource Centre.

"Acton has an employment challenge," said Bonnette, when motioning to send the protest. "and in these times, I don't think Acton should be left out. We don't have the greatest economy. This is a terrible time to close an employment centre in a small town. We have to take the message to the Minister that this is unacceptable."

Bonnette said the Town is not aware of any impact study with financial implications that demonstrates how employment challenges in Acton will be met.

According to the 2006 Census, the Halton Hills unemployment rate (for residents 15 years of age or older who wanted to work) was 4.2%, compared to Halton Region's 4.7% and Ontario's 6.4%.

From April 2010 to March 2011, AERC has served 2,256 people—most of that one-on-one contact, said Melhuish. AERC has had more than 7,500 visitors since opening its doors in 2006.

AERC employment specialists provide residents with resume and cover letter writing expertise and with interview preparation and career exploration help. AERC provides job search resources, computer/Internet workstations, networking cafes, workshops and referrals to community support services. All services are provided free of charge.

Melhuish said Employment Ontario's decision to close the Acton site was not related to its performance but as a result of the overall restructuring of employment resource centres across the province.

"This is about eliminating duplication and delivering the full range of employment services in one location— providing better convenience, accessibility and responsiveness," said Tanya Blazina, Team Leader-Media Relations, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. "When we introduced the Employment Ontario Employment Service (ES) in the summer of 2010, we set a transition period of 18 months to ensure that the new service providers had enough time to develop full capacity to deliver all services. Employment Resource Centres (such as Links2Care AERC) received letters from the Ministry in 2010 that explained that the Ministry was re-evaluating their role in light of our new one-stop full-service delivery model.

"Now that our Employment Service providers are offering a full range of programs, we're winding down Employment Resource Centres and Practice Firms in order to avoid duplication," said Blazina.

This reorganization first began in 2008, she said.

One-stop ES providers for Halton Hills will be the Centre for Skills Development and Training, which will provide a visiting service to Acton, The Centre for Skills Development and Training, 184 Guelph St., and vpi Inc at 235 Guelph St. There are three ES providers in Burlington, two in Milton, three in Oakville and three in Guelph.

Ministry staff will work with AERC to ensure that clients are referred to Employment Service providers, said Blazina.

She said the mobile service provider will come to Acton as often as the community requires it.

"We will work the community to determine what is needed," she said.

Arnott sent a letter of protest on Feb. 1. However, to date there has been no response, he said in an interview Monday.

"It's quite insulting the Ministry announced they were improving employment services when in actuality they're taking away our service," said Arnott.

Arnott intends to bring the issue up in the Legislature when the MPPs resume sitting on February 21.

In Melhuish's call to EO opposing the closure, she emphasized the Centre's closure will leave a gap in service in a community that has no public transportation.

As well, the sympatico relationship between AERC and Links2Care's other services, will be lost. Melhuish said often people who accessed Links2Care services at its 47 Mill St. location could receive help from AERC right next door, and vice versa.

"I fear now some people may fall through the cracks," said Melhuish.



The Acton Employment Resource Centre is located at 45 Mill Street East in Acton.

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