

# Town examines Green Standard

Thinking Green is one thing. Doing it is another as development/building industry officials found out today (Thursday) as the Town unveiled its draft Green Building Standard at a half-day workshop. Comments from the session will be incorporated in the final study to develop a Standard.

The Town's control over water allocations should be used to ensure developers/builders meet the required Green standards, and incentives will make voluntary Green requirements more attractive, Town consultant Lorelei Jones said during a recent Council briefing on the five-phase study to develop a Green Building Standard, expanding on the Town's Green development check list to now also cover low-rise residential development.

The Standard study will review that checklist and look at Green building standards – the use of high efficiency equipment and materials, and elements of sustainable community design – streetscapes, block patterns and landscaping. A key change from the first check list is a new ranking system which will include required and voluntary levels of compliance. Builders/developers who meet voluntary standards will earn points that might possibly save them money for permit fee applications, or application processing time. Some low-rise residential Green Development criteria requires developers to build new homes to Energy Star standards, making them 25 per cent more efficient than those built to the Ontario Building Code.

One incentive for compli-

ance with the voluntary Green provisions is to reduce planning standards to allow lower parking requirements in exchange for providing bicycle parking, or for development that it located within walking distance of Go Transit. That incentive concerns Regional/Acton Councillor Clark Somerville who said there's "never enough" parking.

Somerville is also concerned with an incentive offering a reduction in the Town's portion of Development Charges if a developer met voluntary standards. He said they shouldn't have to offer discounts and incentives – that developers should meet green criteria as "good corporate citizens."

Ward Two Councillor Bryan Lewis also raised concerns with reduced Development Charges and discounted application fees for developers who meet the Green Building Standard. "At the end of the day, when we start offering discounts, some one has to pay for this," Lewis said, asking what additional costs the Green Building Standard would mean for homeowners. Jones could not come up with an amount, but said there was an "over-all benefit" to society from the Green initiatives.

Regional/Ward Two Councillor Jane Fogal said she was "quite excited" with the timing of the Green Building Standard as the Town is ready to plan development of 1,000 acres in Georgetown South. Acton Councillor Jon Hurst questioned if developers/builders have taken the initiative to train their sales staff about the benefits and cost-savings of Green efficient development.

## A better work environment serves employees

Many people spend more time in the office than they do at their own homes. As a result, the environment at the workplace is especially important, and businesses big and small should attempt to make that environment as enjoyable and supportive as possible.

A positive workplace environment not only benefits the company's employees, but it also benefits the company. Numerous studies have shown a link between workplace environment and error rate, willingness to collaborate with other employees and even absenteeism. For example, a study by the United Kingdom's Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment and the British Council for Offices found that something as simple as good lighting and adequate daylight throughout the office can reduce absenteeism by as much as 15 percent. In addition to minor changes around the office, there are several other things companies can do to improve the workplace environment.

\* Increase and improve communication. Particularly in the current economy, where uncertainty seems to be reigning over many businesses, open and honest communication with employees is especially important. As a result, communicate more frequently and effect-



**POOL FUN:** With the day off school on Easter Monday, it was worth the drive to Acton for the Pereira family of Fergus – Dylan, Mom Charmaine holding Aydan, and Zander – who frolicked in the Acton Pool. – Frances Niblock photo

ively with staff. Let staff know the company is always open to suggestions, and respond to all suggestions to let employees know their opinions matter.

\* Emphasize respect for others throughout the company. No one wants to come to work and feel disrespected. Foster a culture of mutual respect wherein everyone knows bad behaviour between employees simply won't be tolerated. Workplace bullying is not that uncommon, and employees who feel bullied or disrespected at the office are bound to be unhappy and less productive. Make sure everyone from the company CEO to the summer interns are aware that they must respect others and that they deserve respect regardless of their position within the company.

\* Involve employees when instituting changes. When attempting to improve a workplace environment, go straight to the source for ideas on improvement. Employees are on the ground floor every day,

and they are an invaluable resource as to what's working and what's not working with regards to the environment at the office. Use them to help institute positive changes, and the result will likely be an improved environment as well as employees who feel more valued.

\* Show appreciation. A 2011 study found that 41 percent of workers studied are not satisfied with the level of recognition they receive at their jobs. Companies hoping to foster a more positive work environment should always show apprecia-

tion to their employees when a job is well done. Appreciation can come in many forms, but companies should never avoid expressing gratitude or appreciation simply because they expect their employees to perform their jobs well. While it's important to set high expectations for employees, always give recognition and appreciation when employees meet those expectations.

Fostering a better workplace environment can be done in a variety of ways and lead to happier, more productive employees.

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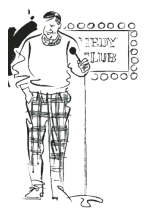
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