

Consolidation of planning could save the environment say experts

By STUART JOHNSTON

Planning communities has always been a series of errors in the past, but caring for the environment is now, slowly but surely, becoming one the first priorities for development in Ontario.

That was the predominant theme of the second meeting of the newly-formed Silver Creek Environmental Association, held Tuesday night at Georgetown's Cultural Centre.

Guest speakers Jack Imhoff and Don Greer, both from the Ministry of Natural Resources, gave brief presentations on "watershed planning"-- the growth and development in and around areas where rivers and streams receive their supply of water.

Both insisted that, in order to plan a healthy community, the environmental effects from development must be considered first, not after all of the other plans are in place, as has been the case.

"We call it death by a thousand cuts -- we treat everything in isolation and then wonder where the mistakes were," Imhoff told the group of 40-plus in attendance. "The problem is, we've never looked at how things are all connected before...Ecosystems cannot be managed on a plan for subdivision level -- it's too small of an area. We have to know what we're dealing with overall before anything can be designed."

Greer agreed, adding that, unfortunately, planning is done on a piecemeal basis, within political boundaries. So, a consistent, overall plan is never done -- at least not yet,

he added.

"The planning downfall is that the environment goes beyond the boundaries of Halton Hills -- we may have the greatest plans to care for the environment, but our neighbors must also do the same," he said. "But, there's no mechanism in the Planning Act for it. Hopefully, the (Province) will be looking into that. We must be able to make knowledgeable decisions on developments, and know what impacts there are going to be."

Imhoff reminded the group that approximately 80 percent of Ontario communities rely on groundwater, not lake-based water. Therefore, he concluded, detailed watershed planning is vitally important to the well-being of communities.

Municipalities should find "better ways of moving water off the land" than present practices, such as gutters and storm sewers, he added. Everything that is collected, such as fertilizers or other contaminants, is collected in the runoff and dumped into the closest creek.

"It's crazy -- we build new homes, move the water off the land faster so it doesn't accumulate in the backyards, which hurts the wells because they don't replenish as fast anymore, but the homes rely on those wells for their water," he added. "Yes, mistakes have been made, but we're only now learning and applying what know to improve things. We just take our lumps and learn from it."

Group: how much water do we have?

How good is the quality and quantity of your drinking water? Well, the Silver Creek Environmental Association wants to know.

The newest of the local environmental groups is taking on the arduous task of monitoring as many wells in the rural area as possible.

Formed late last year, its goal is to "recognize and protect the significant natural environmental features within the Town of Halton Hills, including Environmental Sensitive Areas, Black Creek, Silver Creek, Credit River and other rivers and streams; valley lands, wetlands, hazard lands, groundwater recharge areas and woodlands."

To date, the group has about 50 paid memberships, and is slowly growing.

Due to the large number of rural members, and the fact that Halton Region is delaying a costly detailed study of water quality and quantity in the area, the group wants to find the information out for itself.

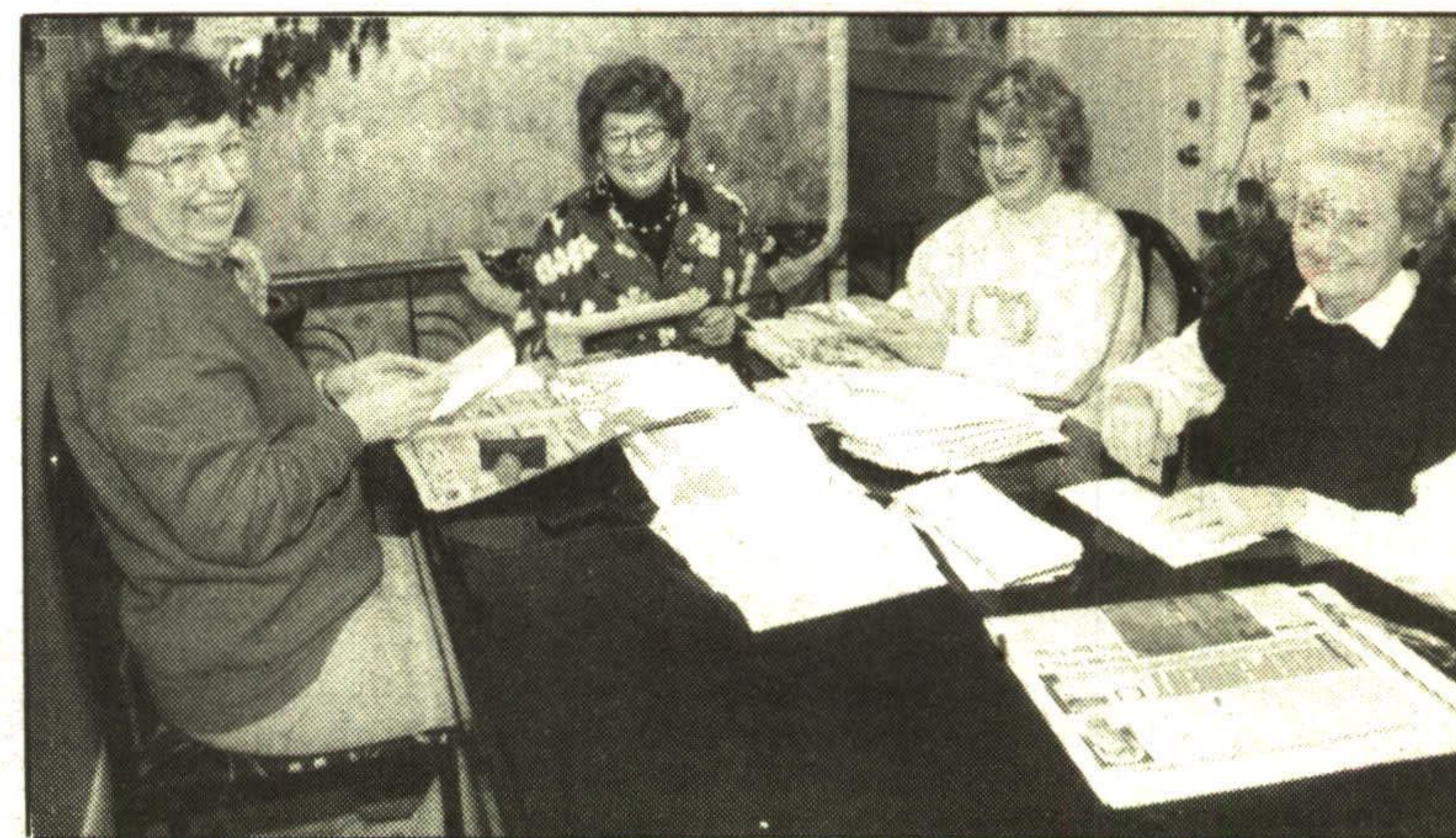
It has just begun delivering questionnaires to all rural residents, which asks for such information as size and location of well, past or present problems and when it was dug or drilled.

"We need to assess these wells now," director Daphne Shropshall said. "There's been no attempt made to look at the overall picture. Everything has been done on a site specific basis, and there's no clear picture of the surrounding areas."



Don Coghlan of Georgetown Lions Club officially presented the club's lensometer and a donation of 3000 used eyeglasses to Ken Davis, of The Canadian Foundation for World Development, (CFWD) at the club meeting, Tuesday (Feb. 4). The eyeglasses will be sent to Mexico, where Davis has organized a program to have them distributed to the needy people of that country. Below: Members of Georgetown Lioness Club gathered last week as they inserted envelopes with March of Dimes donation forms. They spent five nights inserting 9000 envelopes which will be sent out to all of Halton Hills. Members taking part included (from left) Marcella Neely, Joyce Tilson, Mary Tennant and Madeleine Collier.

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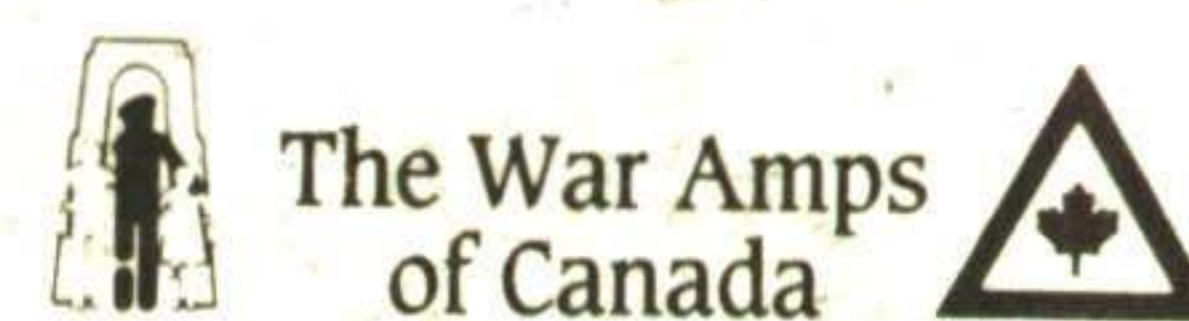
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