

# Farmers market in jeopardy

By WENDY LONG

Special to the Independent/Free Press

A proposed Halton Hills farmers market is on the line after the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) balked on issuing the necessary entrance permits and continue to stall.

The market, to be located just west of Georgetown on Hwy 7, south of the Silvercreek cutoff, is the dream of farmer Philip Bender and Marion Rusk.

Last November the two entrepreneurs, known as Barnside Marketeers Ltd., began creation of the proposed farmers market on the former Timberland Lumber property.

Originally scheduled to open to the public in December, the market was stalled days before its opening by the MTO requesting a traffic impact study and expressing concern a left turn lane was needed for the high-volume road.

For the last three months Bender and Rusk have been chasing provincial politicians for their help in obtaining the MTO's needed certification without the costly expense of the left turn lane.

At a meeting Tuesday evening at the Georgetown Optimist Centre, Bender and Rusk faced 25 would-be vendors to explain the situation and ask for their continued support on a

strained financial time line.

The pair object to the MTO's concerns in several aspects. Primarily, Bender and Rusk explained that the MTO's figures are based on guidebook numbers that fail to look at the individual situation. The proposed market would operate on weekends only, eliminating the threat of rush hour traffic and prime periods, explained Rusk.

As well, they said they are opposed to paying \$180,000 (a figure taken from a nearby left turn lane recently added on Hwy 7 to enter a housing development) for the turn lane when Hwy 7 is scheduled to be widened within two years, destroying the turn lane anyway, Rusk said.

Bender and Rusk said they tried to suggest alternatives to the turn lane to the MTO, which all but fell on deaf ears.

Bender and Rusk pointed out that a farmers market is zoned commercial and that the property under discussion has been a commercial property since 1957. Three properties on the strip were given permits last year without a turning lane required, said Rusk.

"We're paying \$7,000 taxes a year on this property and we can't use it," Rusk said emphatically. "How can they legally and morally do this?"

Barnside Marketeers Ltd. have forked out cash for engineers, architects, lawyers, planners, a traffic impact study and other expenses. But the well is running dry, and Rusk said that they can't hold out any longer than May 1.

In light of frustrated attempts to establish the market on the initial property, Bender and Rusk are considering alternative locations.

"I think our one last hope is to raise a little hell," Rusk told the vendors in attendance at the meeting. She asked vendors and members of the public to get mad and write, phone and fax their MPPs (some vendors are from neighboring communities outside of Halton) and the Ministry of Transportation.

In an initial marketing survey conducted by Barnside Marketeers, Rusk said 98 out of 100 called approved the creation of a farmers market. She added that there is a vendor waiting list, and citizens continue to ask when the market will finally open.

The major stumbling block remains the MTO's cooperation and approval. Rusk said that a meeting with Transportation Minister Gilles Pouliot is the only solution left to tackle the left turn lane dilemma.

This meeting has to be requested by a political representative, in the case of Halton Hills, MPP Noel Duignan. Rusk and Bender have felt thwarted in this avenue as a meeting has not been forthcoming.

"We've been waiting from the first of January for our MPP to make a phone call to the Minister of Transportation," Rusk said in disgust.

At this point in time, support for a farmers market has been expressed by hundreds of citizens, Mayor Russ Miller on behalf of the town, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the Milton Chamber of Commerce (Milton operates a successful farmers market in their downtown core), the Halton Hills Chamber and the Niagara Escarpment Commission, which issued Rusk and Bender a permit based on 24 conditions being met.

"The mayor has been 110 per cent behind us," Rusk said. "He even wrote a letter to the Ministry saying he wants this in the community. The town has already said they'd move mountains for us."

Many expressed feelings that the market, selling produce and artisans' handicrafts, will benefit the community of Halton Hills and maintain a quality, rustic air of rural Ontario.

"I can't understand why they're going to allow a left turn lane which has never been there to get in the way," said one vendor, adding that he believes the market will create at least 100 jobs and stimulate the local economy.

## Stores may open Monday

Police have been instructed to charge stores which open on Good Friday, April 9 and Easter Sunday, April 11 unless they qualify for an exemption under the Retail Holiday Business Act.

Stores may remain open on Easter Monday, contrary to a story Wednesday's paper stating that stores open Monday would also be charged.

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