

Area builders voice concerns

By LISA TALLYN
Staff writer

It was standing room only at a meeting Tuesday night between members of the Halton Hills Construction Association and the Town of Halton Hills.

Kent McClure, speaking on behalf of the construction association, said several association members and other builders, are experiencing long delays in receiving building permits and confusion about what is required by the town's building department at the application and inspection stage.

In a report issued in August by Henry Tse, the town's director of building code and bylaw enforcement, he said about 68 per cent of building permits are processed by the town within six weeks; if subdivision permits were excluded, the number dropped to 46 per cent.

In July, the outstanding permit

backlog sat at 113, up from 27 in February. Currently, Tse said the backlog is between 80 and 90, due partly to the fact part-time plans examiner has been retained by the town.

"As you can see by the number of people here there are some very real problems with the building permit process," said McClure. "We must all work together for a speedy resolution of these concerns."

McClure outlined solutions proposed by the association.

Acceptable times for receiving permits were set at 24 hours for a foundation permit, one week for framing a house, and three weeks maximum for all other permits.

McClure also said "staff should be encouraged to show a positive, cooperative attitude toward applicants," and a checklist should be posted and given to potential applicants at the building department.

Other immediate actions to be taken by the town according to the association included having a plans examiner at the counter for an initial review of all plans, streamlining building permit applications and the hiring of a temporary plans examiner to process the backlog.

McClure said applicants who are facing more than a three week delay in receiving a permit should have the choice of going through the town's building department or hiring a qualified consulting engineer to review the process.

"Applicants who choose the consulting engineer alternative should receive a refund of most of the application fee," said McClure.

Over the next three months McClure requested the town compare the efficiency of the town's process with other municipalities and institute a merit pay system that rewards efficient processing of building permits and encourage staff to upgrade their skills.

McClure suggested the town take more dramatic steps in the next six months if timelines put forward by the association can't be met.

"The town should tender the plan review process and the building inspection process as other work (like road building) is now tendered," said McClure.

The tendering would be competi-

tive bidding, parties invited to tender would include the town's building department, private consulting and engineering firms and other municipalities in the area.

"The town should retain a management consultant firm to conduct a review of the building/inspection functions of the town and to recommend action," added McClure.

Town administrator Ray King said the association's recommendations would be considered as part of a service level review that is currently being undertaken at the town.

"We are trying to determine what is the biggest concern to the public," said King.

Tse said since he was appointed head of the department in 1991, his focus as mandated by council has been on legal responsibilities and liability of the town.

The town can be held partially or perhaps solely responsible for example if a building inspected by town staff collapses.

"We have been sued in the past and we are currently being sued," said Tse. "We have to be very cautious."

Tse added the coroner's recommendations regarding a chimney which collapsed in a Ballinacree house last year killing an occupant, included the fact that plan reviews must be done by professional engineers.

"We have to be extremely careful in handling our work," said Tse.

Tse said in the next round of budget deliberations for the town he would like to see a full-time plans examiner added to his department's staff, and in Halton Hills the ratio of plans examiners to inspectors is 20 per cent compared to the average of 54 per cent in the other municipalities.

"That will be a council decision," said Tse.

Regarding the association's suggestion the town compare Halton Hills permit turnaround time to other municipalities Tse cautioned "we have to be sure we are comparing apples to apples."

Tse said he would welcome a review of the building/inspection department as suggested by McClure.

Police Blotter

Tools and clubs stolen

Police are investigating the theft of about \$1,700-worth of tools and golf clubs from a home on Wildwood Rd. in Georgetown which occurred sometime between Sept. 10 and Sept. 27. Police report the items were being stored in an outside basement stairwell when they were stolen.

Fire investigation

The Fire Marshal's Office is investigating the cause of a fire that started Wednesday night at about 8:20 p.m. in an upstairs bedroom of a townhouse on Pine Valley Trail in Georgetown. Police say the four occupants of the townhouse escaped without harm after hearing the smoke alarm. Damage is estimated at about \$10,000 to \$15,000 and police report the occupants did not have contents insurance.

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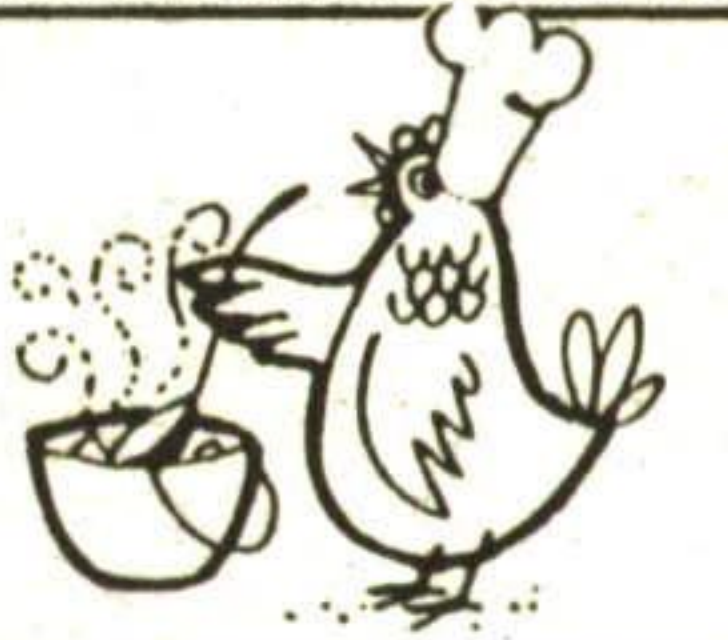
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