

Ward 1 candidates debate

Growing traffic, affordable housing for seniors and bringing business to Acton were some of the major concerns brought forth from the public during the Ward One debate held at The Acton Town Hall Centre on October 14.

By: Dawn Brown

Incumbents Jon Hurst and Mike O'Leary faced-off with new comers Robert Bedard and Geoff Maltby. Candidate David Hyde was unable to attend.

After opening remarks, Dana Selby, chair of the BIA, asked candidates if elected, would they support the town's decision denying mayoral candidate, Sally Stull—who was in attendance at the debate—from bringing in 900,000 cubic meters to fill an abandoned pit on her land, potentially leading to between 80,000 and 90,000 trucks travelling through the town off Halton Hills.

Bedard responded by saying he believes there is due process for these sorts of activities. He supported the council in taking a position, but his core belief is that there is due process and that the process needs to work its way through.

Hurst, however, sup-

ported council's decision to turn down the application. He believed the problem was the disruption to residents in the area due to the truck traffic.

Maltby said he did not feel comfortable giving an answer as he was not familiar with all the details regarding the matter, and he was a little disappointed by the question as he did not feel it was a matter that affected Ward One.

O'Leary disagreed. "With all due respect, this could affect Ward One. Who knows where this fill is going to come from. It could come from Brampton. It could come from Guelph. It could come from Milton. These are issues that have to be addressed." He believed with so many trucks there was a strong likelihood that roads would suffer damage, and Halton Hills tax payers would inevitably bear the cost. He voted against the application, and will continue to against it if re-elected.

When asked about affordable housing for seniors who are downsizing, all candidates agreed more needed to be done. Hurst said the struggle stemmed from getting developers and builders to provide appropriate housing. That the money was in choosing to build larger homes, rather than smaller homes more suitable to the needs of seniors. "We were successful in getting that type of small development just off of Dr. Moore Court. And we certainly recognize we need more of that in our community."

Maltby believes that council has had eleven years to work at the problem and they haven't yet found a solution. "I thought we were the ones on council," Maltby said, "that set forth the rules that the developers have to work by, and to coerce them, at least, into building the proper homes we are looking for in this town."

O'Leary admitted that affordable housing, not just for seniors but for everyone, has been a struggle, and the problem lies with the cost of land. "If Canada Packers would move on their property, I know that there are 13 acres free and clear of

any contamination at the very front of the property, and I would be looking for that," O'Leary said.

Bedard understands and supports the need to make available affordable housing, and not just for seniors. The challenge, he believes, is how to pay for it. The ability to leverage that sort of development with new subdivisions in particular is limited. "The more restrictions you put on, the more likely the developers are going to go somewhere else where they can get what they want for the money they're looking to spend," Bedard stated. If affordable housing is a real priority, he believes the community must be prepared to pay for it with taxes.

When asked about Acton showing little economic growth and how the candidates would encourage businesses to come to the town, Maltby stated that big business is looking for tax breaks, but says giving it to them is a double edged sword. "If you give it to them, you're not getting anything off them. If you don't, they don't come." While he admitted that he hasn't dealt with that sort of issue yet, he will be there working toward bringing business Acton's way and good jobs to this town.

O'Leary said they were

limited by the waste water restrictions. The plan to debate upgrading the system is not slated until 2017, and this is issue that is holding up development. Until the waste water issue is settled, development cannot go ahead.

While admitting to a limited understanding of the infrastructure restrictions, Bedard has experience with these sorts of things from "the other side of the fence." He has been in a position where he has negotiated for concessions to get business into communities. "Ultimately, if you can get those jobs here, get those taxes being paid here, from an employee level, then there's an advantage to having it done and I'm willing to pursue that."

Hurst backed up O'Leary's statement that the waste water restrictions were limiting Acton from growing its businesses. He also stated that until the water issues were sorted, encouraging development in Georgetown would benefit Acton as both towns are part of Halton Hills.

Mayoral candidate, Sally Stull, asked candidates how they intend to deal with increased traffic, particularly for Highway 7. The issue was a concern for other residents,

who brought up the future construction of 109 townhouses on McDonald Boulevard and the pressure it would put on the Wallace Street exit—which is already a difficult turn to navigate due to volume.

O'Leary admitted that traffic is a huge problem—especially increased truck traffic. As a provincial highway, there are regulations that make it difficult to make changes.

Bedard believes the best way to combat increased traffic is to get as many people out of their cars as possible by increasing Go Train service and busses. In terms of heavier vehicle traffic, Bedard would like to see a by-pass around the town, but was uncertain as to the degree of control the town has with the highway.

Hurst agreed traffic in town was serious issue, made worse by the truck traffic. He believes a by-pass is the best solution, and working with the province to make them understand the town's needs.

While Maltby feels a by-pass is something to be considered, he fears there is also the issue that it could cause the town to wither and die. He feels an advanced green on Highway 7 South would help to alleviate some of the volume.

Mental illness awareness - needs more than a week

By: Jane Dougan

October 6-12 was National Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW) across Canada. October 10th was World Mental Health Day. One in five Canadians will directly experience mental health concerns at some time during their lives; I have been one of them. Setting aside a designated time for Canadians to become more aware of mental health opens up real possibilities. The first step is to build awareness; the second and more critical step is how we then respond.

True story. A client of a local psychiatrist once felt so isolated and hopeless that he walked to the tallest building and got into the elevator, intending to ride to the roof and jump. But during that brief ride, someone nodded and smiled at him. I'm not sure the person even spoke, but it was enough. Based on that simple gesture, on that acknowledgement, he stopped his ride, got off the elevator, and said 'yes' to life for another day.

Mental health concerns are complex and wide-ranging in form and duration. They are not 'fixed' by such simple one-off gestures as a friendly smile or a listening ear. On a day-to-day basis, however, I know that community awareness and support can make a real difference, together with professional counseling and other interventions.

National Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW) is about the impact of mental illness and mental health. But more than that, it is about how we respond to the challenge. Think back to the movie in which the make-believe woman-on-the-bench got up and walked away. Perhaps -- understandably -- she felt threatened, or

awkward and unsure of what to do. Perhaps she was struggling with challenges of her own. For someone like her, now could be a time to take steps towards becoming more informed. She might drop by her library and find a book, or seek out mental health organizations and resources in her community. She could ask a question, or start a conversation.

There are volunteer opportunities, educational programs, and mental-health supports at many agencies throughout North Halton. I'm involved with one community-based volunteer registered charity: the Dr. John Dougan Centre for Mental Health Promotion. Our focus is on providing regional social support for those with mental-health concerns, e.g. an annual Christmas Party and Summer Picnic. Public education is also one of our mandates, hence this article.

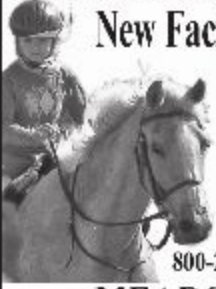
At its root, National Mental Illness Awareness Week is about recognizing our common humanity and working together to fulfill our common potential. All Canadians

have a stake in this. Please consider becoming an active supporter of a non-profit mental health group or agency in your community, such as our Centre. Whether you donate, volunteer, drop by a fund-raising event, or bring your curiosity and ideas to a general meeting, there's always room -- and a welcome.

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