

Town vows to battle hydro consolidations

Bigger is not better. That may be the battle cry as Halton Hills Council drafts its fight against provincial plans to consolidate the electrical distribution sector after a blue-ribbon panel said the system's current fragmented nature is a barrier to innovation.

The panel said further consolidation will enhance the safety and reliability of the electricity system, cut operating costs, and enable a renewed focus on the customer. All those things are being done at Halton Hills Hydro (HHH) – wholly owned by the Town – according to HHH officials who presented Town Council with an annual operations review at last Monday's council meeting.

The panel said it would be cheaper and more efficient if the 73 distribution utilities in Ontario are



consolidated into eight to 12 regional distributors. "Poppycock," responded Mayor Rick Bonnette who predicted HHH would be "swallowed up," and forced into a monopoly that would save the average customer \$70 in electrical costs over the next 10 years.

"This is unacceptable," Bonnette said com-

menting on the proposed forced mergers over the next two years. "We may get an offer down the road that makes sense, but don't force us to try to sell... they're going to have a fight on their hands" if the consolidation plans goes any further, Bonnette said, asking staff to prepare a report and recommendation on the issue for the

next meeting.

Regional/Ward Two Councillor Jane Fogal pointed out that HHH has the lowest residential distribution rates in Halton and is also the smallest utility. "Well, isn't it interesting that the assumption is that bigger less expensive?" Fogal said, suggesting HHH's success is due to "attitude

and management."

In his report, HHH President and CEO Art Skidmore discussed safety and reliability, backed up with last year's stats showing that as of February 4 this year, HHH had worked 604 days without a lost time incident, and customers lost power for one-eighth of an hour.

Skidmore said HHH has a book value of over \$40-million and provided interest and dividend payments of \$1.9-million since it was purchased by the Town in 2001. He said a recent Ontario Energy Board benchmarking report found HHH ranked sixth of 73 Ontario utilities based on operations, maintenance and administration costs,

and HHH ranked fourth of 12 of mid-sized utilities based on unit cost.

Skidmore said a customer survey showed HHH what matters to its customers. "Price and value and customer service are important, but not as important as company leadership, corporate stewardship, operational effectiveness and power quality and reliability," Skidmore detailed HHH's successes in energy conservation programs for homeowners and businesses including meeting demand saving and energy saving targets, and he encouraged customers to visit the HHH website for innovative energy savings programs.

Halton Hills Hydro numbers

- one owner – Town of Halton Hills
- 23,000 customers
- 51 staff
- 604-plus days without a lost time incident
- 1,464-kilometres (km) of power lines
- 888-km overhead lines
- 3,828 distribution transformers
- .8 hour – customer power outage last year
- book value of \$40-million
- lowest residential rates in Halton
- sixth in ranking of 73 Ontario utilities based on operations, maintenance and administration costs
- 93 per cent of customers are very or fairly satisfied with HHH



Clark Somerville

TOWN DIGEST

SOMERVILLE – FCM VP?

Regional / Acton Councillor Clark Somerville wants to be third vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Municipalities and – a national lobby group of mayors, councillors and other elected municipal officials with no formal power but significant ability to influence debate and policy.

Somerville announced his intention

to run for the position last week and received the unanimous endorsement of Halton Council, which he's represented for five years, one of 11 Ontario FCM members. He served on the rural forum, and on infrastructure, finance, social economic development and inter-governmental relations committees.

The election takes place at the annual FCM conference this June.

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