



**DEAL SEEKERS:** The Ramsey-Williams family of Acton, Scott, holding Indigo, Michelle, Oklea and Foryst checked out the gently-used children's clothing and toys at the Mom 2 Mom sale at St. Alban's Church on Saturday. - Ted Tyler photo

## More money and staff needed for Town bridge/culvert inspections and maintenance

**41 per cent of bridges and culverts not acceptable**

It will take more money and more staff for the Town to handle routine maintenance of its aging and growing list of bridges and structures according to Michelle Mathies, the Town's Engineering Design Technologist who delivered the news to general committee members last Monday.

With just 59 per cent of its bridges and culverts deemed acceptable in the last bi-annual inspections, and increasing costs due to provincial downloading, committee members agreed to consider \$87,300 for one new inspection/maintenance staffer during upcoming budget debates, along with an additional \$2-million for bridge and culvert repair/replacement over the next five years.

The Town has 128 structures - 57 bridges and 71 culverts ranging in age from recently replaced to over 100 years old, with a \$101-million replacement value. The current capital forecast identified eight structures for rehabilitation/replacement at an estimated cost of \$3.1-million.

Regional/Ward Two Councillor Jane Fogal asked "is it normal?" to have 41 per cent of struc-

tures found unacceptable, and Town Engineer John Kwast acknowledged that many Canadian municipalities are in the same situation. He said the worst case scenario is in neighbouring Wellington County where a bridge in need of replacement was closed because there is no money to deal with it. He added, "We're on the high side of concerned, with respect to that number," referring to the 41 per cent of structures not assessed as acceptable.

Fogal also wanted to know how it happened, if they hadn't been "paying attention (or) are we squeezing the budget for other reasons..." Kwast said the Town's worst structures get the attention first, and that can be a moving target as they play catch-up. Kwast is optimistic there will be some

federal or provincial funds available, and the Town has several shovel-ready projects.

Noting the budget committee recently instructed staff to prepare a budget with a maximum five per cent tax increase, Fogal asked how the additional money for bridges and culverts would be accommodated. "It's not a rosy picture because we all know where we're at with the funding and yet we're got these additional needs and they're not going to go away."

Treasurer Ed DeSousa said the new staff request (\$87,300) would be sent to the budget committee (all councillors and the mayor) as an unfunded request. He said some bridge and culvert work is in the 2014 budget, and the "rest would be put into the capital fore-

cast, based on available funding," possibly from the federal gas tax or capital replacement reserve fund.

Along with the aging structures, provincial downloading means the Town is responsible for additional maintenance costs - recent cancellation of the Connecting Link program gave the Town responsibility for three additional bridges, with a replacement value of \$44.5-million, with no additional funding. Acton Councillor Mike O'Leary underscored the impact on downloading, noting that since Regional Road Rationalization a decade ago, the Town gained 16 bridges and 11 culverts with no sustainable funding. "That's a substantial amount that we're going to be responsible for fixing, 100 per cent."

## Halton District School Board wraps up talks with all employee groups

The Halton District School Board met the September 30 deadline imposed by the Ministry of Education to reach agreements with its unions in order to qualify for provincial "conditional support."

"We have good relationships with our unions, and our Human Resources staff has been resolute in their efforts to meet the Ministry's requirements for local bargaining," said David Euale, Director of Education for the Halton District School Board, "Our Trustees have also been responsive to the required timelines, approving the appending of the Ministry MOUs (memorandums of understanding) to existing agreements."

During the past several months, the Halton District School Board met with its unions, and reached agreements resulting in the appending of the Ministry's MOUs to the respective existing collective agreements. The MOUs were agreed to provincially, and local Boards were directed by the Ministry to work "with local bargaining units to append the applicable terms of all relevant MOUs".

In its Memorandum B21: "Eligibility for Conditional Support for Appending Terms of 2013 Memoranda of Understanding", the Min-

istry has tied access to funding to the appending of terms. Funding levels will be based on the timelines achieved by local boards in appending MOUs.

The Halton District School Board has forwarded its attestation by the September 30 deadline, indicating MOUs have been appended to all existing collective agreements. This qualifies the Board to receive 100 per cent "transition" funding. Funding decreases for boards that submit by October 14 (75 per cent of funding); by October 31, 2013 (35 per cent of funding), and after October 31, (zero per cent). The Ministry can impose further consequences to Boards that do not meet these timelines by withholding funding from non-compliant Boards' "School Board Administration and Governance" grants.

"The Halton District School Board received regular updates from our Human Resources staff," said Amy Collard, Chair of the Halton District School Board. "We were fortunate to be able to arrange meeting times for our Board to approve the appending of the MOUs as agreement was reached."

The appending of the MOUs extend the terms of the Board's collective agreements to August 31, 2014.

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