

Town could have negotiated for more in McGibbon settlement: councillor

By Kathryn Boyle
kboyle@theifp.ca

One councillor is unsatisfied after the Town of Halton Hills reached an agreement with Silvercreek Commercial Builders regarding the McGibbon Hotel.

During a special council meeting last week to adopt the agreement between the two parties, councillor Moya Johnson opposed accepting the Minutes of Settlement because she said the town could have negotiated for more.

I don't think we got as much as we could have. I think we lost, she said.

According to the town's official plan, buildings cannot exceed eight storeys, and the McGibbon reconstruction will be ten storeys.

I fully believe we should have supported what our official plan said. That was the planning document for the downtown, how the growth should be managed, the height, the density and we didn't fight for it. I think we should have.

When Silvercreek representatives first approached council, they were prepared to build around and within the original McGibbon building.

Then, Johnson said they came back with feedback from their engineers, and they could not go with their original plan. The town then hired its own engineers, and they were told the building could in fact be saved.

Within the settlement, the town negotiated for reducing the building height from 11 storeys to 10 storeys, creating 20 indoor parking spaces for the public, and reusing existing

brick from the McGibbon as it stands today in the final reconstruction.

An important consideration Johnson wanted to see was heritage preservation.

In the settlement, the Town will receive \$500,000 from Silvercreek for downtown Georgetown initiatives and projects towards heritage preservation, but Johnson said there was room to ask for more.

I'm totally on board with development there, she said.

To me, the height was excessive, the density was excessive, and the heritage preservation was not to the level we could have achieved.

Mayor Rick Bonnette knew of Johnson's concerns regarding the project, but felt the town negotiated for what was fair.

I personally don't think we could have negotiated for more, he said. We were able to get from 11 storeys down to 10, and get something for our number-one issue, which was heritage preservation.

The style of the building is also a concern. Johnson said she would also want a style that's more projective of the downtown core, instead of using glass for the condominium.

But after Silvercreek filed with the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), the zoning specifics are something the town doesn't have any control over.

Johnson read up on some articles pertaining to updating old buildings, and some of the projects she came across she described as spectacular.

To me, this sticks out like a sore thumb, she said. But



Councillor Moya Johnson, pictured above, expressed her disappointment in the Minutes of Settlement regarding the McGibbon Hotel redevelopment, saying the town could have negotiated for more but didn't fight hard enough for it.

Photo by Graeme Frisque

that's my personal opinion, and I have no control over it.

Even though she supports the project, Johnson was hopeful council would fight for a downtown Georgetown landmark.

Sometimes things are worth fighting for, and to me, that corner is so significant in the town, I thought it was worth the fight, she said. But council

didn't agree with me.

Bonnette said the corner is worth the fight, but the high price of going through a trial at the OMB would not have been the only cost.

Could we have said no? It would have been \$250,000 to go through with a hearing at the OMB, he explained. Did we want to take a chance and lose?

Jeff Wilker, the town solicitor, agreed with Bonnette.

It was a win-win for both sides, he said. In order to speculate whether or not we could have negotiated for more, we'd have to see the other side. I believe we reached a good settlement for the town, we reached the best settlement we could reach. What was achieved was fair.



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