

Town will foot outstanding \$346K Heritage Acton bill

By **CYNTHIA GAMBLE**
Staff Writer

The Town of Halton Hills is bailing out Heritage Acton, which is has run into financial difficulty and can't pay its bills.

The group owes \$346,115.36, which the Town will pay immediately to the creditors. Heritage Acton will pay the Town back as it raises funds.

The heritage group of volunteers, which for the past several years been renovating the Acton Town Hall Centre, has fallen on hard times after unexpected costs during Phase Two of their renovation project and fundraising that failed to meet its target.

"This is what happens when you renovate an old building, let alone add an addition (to accommodate the new elevator), said Mayor Rick Bonnette. "There was some issues with the water connections and of course, some donations did not come to fruition. I can say they worked their butts off to try to do the best they can, but unfortunately there was a major shortfall. ... and they (Heritage Acton) are committed to pay back the difference."

"Heritage Acton is very pleased with the loan agreement that was ratified by the council Monday evening," said Heritage Acton chair Lloyd McIntyre in a statement to *The Independent & Free Press*.

"The positive comments from Mayor Bonnette and Councillors (Jon) Hurst and (Ann) Lawlor regarding the historical significance of the Acton Town Hall Centre and the essential roles played by volunteers in our community certainly confirmed Heritage Acton's mission and helped to somewhat alleviate the embarrassment associated with the need to ask for a loan."



THE ACTON TOWN HALL CENTRE

Bonnette calls the 1882 building now a viable, successful building, particularly since it's become more accessible.

"They (Heritage Acton) are committed to pay back the difference," he said, adding that being a non-profit group they can apply for grants. "I think it's a good deal and I just think it's going to be a longer partnership than what we anticipated."

"Heritage Acton is very proud of the results of the Citizen's Hall addition to the Acton Town Hall Centre and the fact the facility is now totally accessible," agreed McIntyre. "We were certainly disappointed by the fact that the task of joining a new building and elevator to a historic building produced a number of unforeseen additional expenses that moved the cost beyond the original budget. At the same time our anticipated donation goal was not met.

"Although our brick donation campaign which continues, has been successful with individual and small business contributions, we now realize that the other cam-

paigns in the area (arenas, hospital, senior centre, etc.) have exhausted the available donations from many of the corporate and larger groups.

"We certainly want to recognize Acton Rotary for their generous donation of \$50,000 (\$10,000 per year). This donation will continue until 2016 and will assist with ongoing building maintenance and our loan repayment," added McIntyre.

The Town had two options:

- Allow Heritage Acton to fold, in which case the building and its liabilities would revert to the Town
- Allow the creditors to place a lien on the property, in which the Town as default owner would be liable

Town staff suggested since the Town is ultimately responsible for building, it would be best to upfront the financing to the Heritage Acton, who would then pay it back over 15 years— that works out to about \$23,000 plus interest every year. This would also mean that the group would continue to operate the facility instead of using Town staff.

"Town staff involvement was excellent and they deserve a great deal of credit as they exercised due diligence and assisted us to develop a repayment plan," said McIntyre. "Heritage Acton is very pleased with the wonderful facility that is now providing a hub for the many varied events in our community, with the ongoing support from the community, and with the support from Halton Hills staff and council."

In 2012, The Town also signed a pre-paid 50-year lease agreement, valued at \$300,000, with the group for the Acton fire hall, which adjoins the Centre, to be developed into the new Acton youth centre. The Town also holds a \$150,000 mortgage on the property as well.

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