

Seniors housing also surfaced as an issue at the meeting

By Melanie Hennessey
Special to The IFP

While Acton's traffic problems dominated the evening, Ward 1 councillor contenders were also asked to share their thoughts on other key issues like affordable housing for seniors and economic development at last week's all-candidates' meeting.

The crowd of about 50 interested residents came to the Acton Town Hall armed with a wide variety of questions for the by-election candidates: Terry Jackson, Norm Paget, Mike Albano, Sue Walker, Robert Bedard and Geoff Maltby.

While the candidates generally agreed on some topics, such as the merits of community gardening, they also presented varying opinions on other issues, like how to encourage economic growth in Acton's downtown core and industrial area.

Bedard proposed creating economic development zones in town that would offer tax breaks or subsidies to provide incentive for new businesses.

But Maltby begged to differ, questioning why the Town should reward new ventures when existing businesses aren't receiving the same treatment. He suggested streamlining the entire business licensing system to make it easier for new businesses to set up shop—a sentiment echoed by Jackson and Paget.

"I think as a town councillor, we have to make sure the process to start a business is really simple," said Jackson.

As a real estate agent, Paget noted the biggest concerns that prospective downtown business people have are related to traffic and parking.

"Once we solve the traffic and parking problems, it will be a little easier (to attract businesses)," he said.

Walker said she feels that new ideas are often met with negativity from some downtown businesses.

"Even when they're presented with good ideas, they find a reason why it won't work," she said. "Let's focus on some of the positives and good things we have and stop being so negative about what we don't have."

And Albano said he would work with local business people, council and MPPs to help attract new businesses to Acton.

"The BIA has been doing a great job and I would continue to support their work," he said.

On the housing front, Hillsideview Active Living Centre President Dave Maloney asked the candidates to address affordable housing for seniors.

Bedard said any future affordable housing would have to be created through redevelopment of existing spaces, which could be encouraged through subsidies.

Maltby concurred infill development that keeps seniors close to amenities would be the way to go, pointing to property on Bower St. as a potential location for seniors' housing.

Jackson presented details of a rent supplement program offered by Halton Region as one potential solution to the issue.

Paget noted the Region has been working to address affordable housing through the Sustainable Halton process. He also gave the audience an inside scoop from the local real estate market, saying he's aware of two lots in Acton being eyed as potential locations for seniors' housing.

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Geoff Maltby

Occupation: Agribusiness owner and farmer.

Previous political/municipal experience:

- In 2014 ran for Ward 1 Municipal Elections
- Advisor for The National Farm Animal Care Council, since 2010
- Director for The Ontario Harness Horse Persons Association



WHAT MAKES YOU THE BEST CANDIDATE FOR WARD 1?

I am the only candidate that has the vision and drive to fill the current void on Council.

I am not the kind of person to sit back and hope the issues take care of themselves. We need a person that will not be afraid to confront the issues head-on and make real proposals to help solve the problems.

I am the only candidate with a real option for a by-pass on Hwy 7. I was the only candidate to say that Seniors Housing is the #1 issue we can resolve in a 3-5 year time span. I am also the only candidate with real experience working on environmental issues first hand and have a in-depth knowledge in Water Source Protection.

I look at being your Councillor as a true honour, not as a job. I will be their for You, working with You and never above you.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BIGGEST ISSUE FACING THE WARD?

Well many people say traffic, especially truck traffic. Well I have a definite plan for that! Unfortunately the Region has said it will be at least 10-15 years for that.

I believe the biggest issue we have that we can make a real difference in 3-5 years is Seniors Housing. Why do most of the people who made Acton a great Town have to leave in retirement? We need to develop lands in town, such as the two acres on Bower St. into real housing geared to seniors. We cannot allow the current five-year waiting period to continue. Nor can we have housing built outside of town. We need to deliver on this and keep our seniors here in Town, where they belong.

Thank you and please vote on Sept. 21.

Sue Walker

Occupation: Business Owner/Social Media Strategist

Previous political/municipal experience:

Political Experience - none. Municipal experience is extensive, having sat on a wide variety of municipal and regional task groups and committees.



WHAT MAKES YOU THE BEST CANDIDATE FOR WARD 1?

I've lived in Acton for almost 30 years. I've raised my family here. I volunteer here. I've started a business here. During the 15 years I worked at Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce, I got to know Town Staff and our Elected Officials. I've worked on the Shop Local Program, sat on the Halton Hills Cultural Master Plan Task Group, the Halton Hills Tourism Committee, Halton Region Economic Development Committee, Halton Hills Green Plan Task Group, and various sub-committees relating to the business licensing bylaws. I know and understand the issues facing Acton and will transition smoothly into the role without a learning curve. I already have in place the experience and skill set required to be a powerful voice for Acton.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BIGGEST ISSUE FACING THE WARD?

The biggest issue at the moment is the increase in truck traffic through Acton (and Halton Hills), should the Hidden Quarry application be approved. Downtown Acton is already struggling with the amount of truck traffic that goes through town. Adding an additional 26 trucks or more an hour is a frightening prospect to businesses along Mill street, and to parents whose children have to cross Mill Street to go to school. Business owners on Mill Street are watching this issue closely. Many are concerned about the longterm impact this might have on their ability to do business in Acton. The number of brightly coloured "Stop Hidden Quarry" signs in storefront windows and on residential lawns speaks volumes on the importance of this issue.

Norm Paget

Occupation: Realtor

Previous political/municipal experience:

Served on a number of committees at Halton Hills and the Region of Halton such as the Rate Payers representative for Halton Hills on the Halton Official Plan Review committee.



WHAT MAKES YOU THE BEST CANDIDATE FOR WARD 1?

I have been apprenticed by my work experience, my volunteer experience, and personal life to understand the needs of a community, my community, Acton.

I have lived and worked locally for many years. I married a local girl with deep local roots.

My skills— in real estate, with the Chamber of Commerce, the United Way, the Optimist Club, with Town and Regional committees and councils— have taught me the outcome is often determined by vision.

Someone envisions a better community, a better use of land, and new home. With that vision we and they make it happen.

I will be a good journeyman politician. I will work with other members of council and staff to make Acton a better place, a safer place, and a more liveable space.

I will offer my best to my community as we imagine a better future for children. Then I will work to make that future happen. I will do my best is what I promise.

I believe my work experience, my volunteer experience, and personal life to understand the needs of a community, my community, Acton.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BIGGEST ISSUE FACING THE WARD?

I believe the biggest issue facing ward one is the current transportation infrastructure. Main St. and Mill St., which used to serve horses and buggies, now is the only route for hundreds of vehicles per hour, and possibly an increase from the Hidden Quarry. Main Street fronts on one school and a library. Mill St. and Queen St. are close to two schools.

Does the Region, the Town, and the province really want our children and seniors on roads suitable for a horse and buggy era? If we let this go on, our children and seniors will need to compete with dump trucks, garbage trucks, buses, and monster-size tractor trailers. I know they would not win the collision between themselves and such vehicles. Our children, seniors and our employers need a modern road, not only in Acton, but in Georgetown, that is suitable for modern transportation era that will also foster the revitalization of the downtown core.

Our internal streets are for the community. These streets need to be re imagined and re shaped so we can more easily walk, shop, and do our leisure time activity in Acton and Ward 1 in safety. We need a good transportation system for traffic passing through the town. We also need a good street system in town so we can live in our community.

I will work with staff, council, the Minister of Transportation, and our community to develop an Acton truck and traffic bypass and to make our streets part of a liveable community.