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Sparks fly over escarpment control

By Dianne Cornish

A Halton Hills area resident asked for details of alleged bribery of a town councillor Monday night as town council discussed the possible transfer of development control powers governing the Niagara Escarpment.

Referring to a quote in a Toronto Star column about landowners' offers to pay Councillor Bill Robson's re-election expenses if he went along with their development plans, Kent McClure asked "what action has been taken" as a result of the bribes.

Bribery allegations

McClure is a director of the Niagara Escarpment Landowners Coalition (NELC), a group which advocates the transfer of the escarpment's development control from the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) to the eight regions and counties within its borders. He said that he and other Coalition members are upset over several "misleading" statements in Saturday's column by Michele Landsberg about the escarpment and NELC.

McClure asked Robson to confirm quotes attributed to the town councillor in the column. He also charged that the column gives "the impression" that the Landowners' Coalition made the bribe because it refers to Robson's position as Halton's representative on the Escarpment Commission immediately before quoting the councillor about landowners' bribes.

"This is a criminal offence," McClure said. "The councillor is obliged to go to the police," he added.

Investigative authorities involved

Councillor Robson verified the quote in the column. "The comment by Landsberg is correct. It (the matter) has been turned over to investigative authorities and it will rest with them as to what they do with it," he said.

While Robson made no other comments at council, he confirmed in an interview at the close of the meeting that he passed on information about local landowners' offers of support to investigative authorities, "shortly after" he was approached by the developers. Asked if the landowners had

approached him in his capacity as an NEC member, he said their offers of support were directed to his position as an elected member of municipal council.

Robson would not identify who the landowners were but said he has given names to investigative authorities. He declined to confirm whether any of the landowners are members of the Coalition but suggested that some likely own land on the escarpment.

While the allegations of bribery were McClure's main concern, he addressed other issues related to the Coalition's bid to wrest development control from the NEC and place it in the hands of regional governments and counties along the escarpment.

Cost debate

Referring to a 1989 report from Halton Region's commissioner of planning Rash Mohammed, the Coalition director said Mohammed stated that "some cost saving" would probably result from the transfer because the Region already comments on all NEC applications. McClure suggested that if the transfer occurs, money will be saved because the NEC staff could be reduced from 37 to 10 people.

Halton regional council is scheduled to look at the potential costs involved in the transfer of development control to the Region later this month.

Georgetown resident Barbara Halsall, president of a Halton-Hills based environmental group called POWER (Protect Our Water and Environmental Resources), cautioned council about the possible costs of the proposed transfer. She told council that Peel Region has estimated the move will cost them \$250,000 to \$300,000. Peel has 40% less escarpment lands running through it than Halton Region, she said, hinting that costs would be higher in Halton's case.

Council supported Halsall's recommendation that Halton Hills reject the transfer of delegation control if a tax increase is needed to cover the cost of the delegation switch. Council also backed Halsall's suggestion that the issue of development control transfer be referred to the region's Ecological and Environmental Advisory Committee (EEAC) for comment.



Lighten up, eh Canada!

Ten-year-old Ruth Eddolls nose how to have a good time. The Grade five student from Robert Little Public School celebrated Lighten Up Canada Day in Acton by participating in the red nose round-up along Mill St. Photo by Laura Salverda

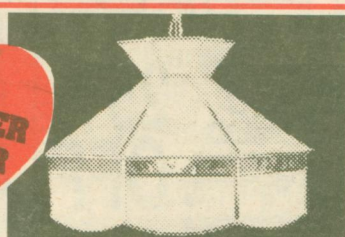
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