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Halton Region wants the escarpment

By Dianne Cornish

By a vote of 13-10, Halton regional council gave the nod Wednesday to a controversial bid which will wrest development control of Niagara Escarpment lands in Halton from the Niagara Escarpment Commission and put it squarely in the hands of the region.

By approving the move, Halton joins two other regions, Hamilton-Wentworth and Niagara, in asking the Ontario government to transfer the delegation of development control power from the Commission to regions and municipalities along the escarpment.

Several environmentalists, many of them from Halton Hills, have opposed the proposal since the public debate began. They contend the NEC should maintain development control authority because the escarpment will be more consistently protected by one body with one mandate than by several regional and municipal governments with several development issues on their plates.

Economics have also entered the debate. Many opponents to the proposal say Halton will spend as much as \$200,000 annually in administering the Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP), which guides development on the escarpment. At present, Ontario taxpayers pay the cost of administering the entire plan.

Regional council listened to 11 delegations Wednesday. Nine spoke against the regional proposal; of those, six were from Halton Hills. Two members of the NELC (Niagara Escarpment Landowners

Commission) urged regional council to go ahead with their plans.

Halton Hills and regional councillor Pam Johnston played a key role in having the transfer bid proposal re-introduced at regional council. Her motion to reconsider a rejection of the proposal by regional council earlier this month won council support and the issue was put back on the table.

Burlington mayor Walter Mulkewich opposed the motion. The 400-page report on the NEP should be studied more fully before council makes a decision on the transfer bid, he said.

Mulkewich said Halton will face additional costs if it goes ahead with the proposal. The Region and area municipalities will have more development work to do and this "will add to the tax bill," he argued. "You're going to create more duplication, more red tape, more entanglement," Mulkewich added.

After the vote, Halton Hills environmentalist Barbara Halsall vowed to continue the fight. The president of the Halton Hills-based group called POWER (Protect Our Water and Environmental Resources) said she'll respond to recommendations in the hearing officers' report. Asked if she was surprised by regional council's decision, Halsall said, "No, frankly, I wasn't surprised. Many of the councillors had their minds made up before they had the information" on the transfer bid's financial implications, she charged.

Ballinafad area resident Lois McClure expressed an opposing point of view. "I'm very happy

with council's decision," she said.

McClure, who is co-chair of NELC, said the landowner's group will meet today "to plan where we go from here." She said members of the group also plan to thoroughly read the hearing officers' report and "encourage the provincial government to adopt the report's recommendations."

GO offer continues

GO Transit is extending its "companion pass" offer for another three months, till the end of June, to give its monthly pass holders extra value for their fare.

The offer lets adult monthly pass holders take a friend or companion along - free - on the GO Train or GO Bus on Saturdays, Sundays, and statutory holidays until the weekend of June 26-27.

GO began offering the incentive last fall to introduce people to its service and let them experience the benefits of public transit firsthand.


It extended the offer at the beginning of this year and is doing so again to give people the opportunity to sample GO service now that the busy season is starting for special events and attractions such as Blue Jays home games, Ontario Place, Harbourfront, and Exhibition Place.

"In these recessionary times, this offer is an added benefit for our monthly pass holders," says GO Chairman Lou Parsons. "We're a competitively priced alternative to driving by car, and we hope the offer attracts new riders to our service."

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