

Developers pay for planner to ease department backlog

BY FRANCES NIBLOCK
The Acton Tanner

To help ease a "phenomenal" work backlog in the Town planning department, Councillors have endorsed a plan for local developers to pay the wage of a senior planner.

Under the scheme, the planner hired for the one year, \$46,000 contract position would not work on applications of the developers who would pay his salary.

The planner would take some of the workload from the planning department and allow staff to speed up processing on applications they say have been "languishing" because staff are too overworked to deal with them.

So far, three developers, including Acto-2 Investments Ltd., with land holdings in Acton have expressed interest in helping to pay for the planner.

Although several councillors questioned whether the Town might appear to have a conflict due to private sector funding, the majority voted in favour of the proposal.

Acton Council. Gerald Rennie called the plan "legitimate, logical and imaginative" and rejected Council. Rob Heaton's suggestions that several restrictions be placed on the person who is hired, including barring them from future Town planning work.

Acton Council. Norm Elliott called Heaton's suggested restrictions "bizarre."

"I don't think there's any question that we can't afford to hire a planner and we desperately need the assistance of a planner.

"We have development interests saying that at arms-length, they will provide funding to get on with it and expedite the (planning) process. If there's ever been a need to get some of this log jam of planning dealt with, it's right now. It's a crisis," Elliott said.

Mayor Russ Miller argued that

without the position, the Town would not get the expected \$500,000 in development revenue, and that could mean higher taxes.

"If there was any other way I wouldn't support this," Miller said.

"Not only will we be accommodating developers, but we will be accommodating taxpayers by not raising taxes."

Council is expected to approve the proposal on Monday.

Seniors' parking lot a hazard?

Town engineering staff will study ways to make it easier for motorists to get out of the parking lot at the seniors building at 17 Elizabeth Drive.

Acton's Community Consultation Committee raised the issue after receiving complaints from people who found it difficult to pull out of the building onto Elizabeth Drive.

In asking Town staff to investi-

gate the issue, Council. Gerald Rennie said two suggestions had been offered by the committee, including a stop sign and a flashing amber warning light.



SHOW TIME! Jill Vanderzand (sitting), gets finishing touches done to her hair by Lee-Anne Goy shortly before hitting the stage to perform the musical *Leader of the Pack* at Acton High last Wednesday. Vanderzand played Mrs. Greenwich, while Goy played Gina. (Doug Harrison photo)

More budget blues

"It's a bitch."

That is how Halton Hills treasurer Ray King assesses the current uncertainty over Provincial spending cutbacks.

A frustrated King told Councillors on Monday night that he is "rather shell-shocked" as the impact of the cutbacks on the Town continues to grow.

Last week King told Council that the impact of Provincial cutbacks in unconditional grants could be between \$110,000 and \$130,000.

"We still don't have an absolute figure, but I did learn today that the reduction in grants is \$150,000, and that doesn't take into account the possibility of some lost MTO (Ministry of Transport) grants," King said.

"In addition to that, the new area is the social contract, which is something quite different.

"In our particular case, in addition to the \$150,000 we will have to make up from some where else, the figure of \$334,000 has been

mentioned as an additional sum that we might have to find, because of the Government's social contract," King said.

Outside Council Chambers, King said the Town gets just over \$1 million in Provincial grants each year and that may be down by 40 percent.

"Where I'm surprised is with the social contract. They're (the NDP) not just talking about direct provincial employees, they're talking about ways and means of implementing this at the municipal level," King said.

King also added that the Province may tell municipalities how and where to make the cuts, including suggestions that all employees take 12 days off a year, without pay, and that there be no salary increases until 1996.

"It could be weeks or months before we know how the social contract relates to Halton Hills. It is impossible to say when this issue will be resolved," King said.

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