

Gardiner prepares to defend integrity in court

BY FRANCES NIBLOCK
The Acton Tanner

Acton-Esquesing school board trustee Ethel Gardiner, both nervous and angry, will be in a Milton court next Wednesday to defend herself against conflict of interest allegations in a case that could affect the voting habits of politicians across Ontario.

Gardiner and four other Halton Board of Education trustees were accused of breaching the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act by a member of Taxpayers Coalition Burlington Inc., who claimed that the five trustees should have declared conflicts and not voted on the Board's \$272 million budget because of relationships they have with board employees, or employees of other boards.

Gardiner, whose daughter

is a teacher with the board, had independent legal advice that she could vote on the entire budget after declaring a conflict on the salary and compensation section.

She said it's important to note that throughout Ontario and since the inception of the Halton Board, trustees have declared conflicts on specific budget items and still voted on the whole package.

"I see voting on the bottom line as a responsibility. I mean if I can't do that, I shouldn't be there," Gardiner said, noting that she followed precedent and did what hundreds of trustees across the province do every year.

In a bizarre twist to the case, Rod Bird, who initially filed the court papers, now denies that he is a member of the taxpayers' coalition, that

he filed the papers and that he later withdrew from the case.

Gardiner showed *The Tanner* copies of court documents indicating that Bird did, in fact, begin the court action in June and then filed a notice to discontinue the action in July.

"The conflict of interest allegation implies dishonesty and financial gain and that is not the case," Gardiner explained recently, noting that the hardest thing for her to deal with is the attack on her integrity and her motive for serving as a trustee.

Gardiner refused to comment on the specifics of the case, except to say it's "dis-



GIVEAWAY! Acton IGA's Mike Manes, centre, recently handed over a number of prizes to local residents as part of the supermarket's Great Summer Giveaway contest. From left, Verna Bloxam, winner of a colour TV; Peter Schmuki, winner of a CD player; Cathy Papillon, portable stereo winner; Lily Higgins, TV winner. (Paul Nolan photo).

Residents air beefs at public meeting

Acton residents, armed with a shopping list of complaints and concerns, aired their beefs at a public meeting last Thursday and appeared somewhat appeased when the three Acton councillors agreed to set up a meeting with the owner of the property that has been the lightning rod for ratepayer frustration.

Although concerns over the current uses of the old Ajax building and adjacent gas station at the Queen and Young Street curve first galvanized the residents into action, their list of complaints included the general shabbiness of the Town, Town Council and staff's perceived unwillingness to enforce by-laws, and on-going problems with noise and loitering at several locations.

Actonite Bruce Cargill set the tone for the meeting when he announced they weren't there to chastise anybody or rip anybody apart, but did want a better flow of information from councillors and staff to residents for the betterment of Acton.

At the centre of the resident's concerns was the illegal uses of the old gas station and the 15 complaints made to the Town beginning in July 1995, about bylaw infractions on the property.

Acton's Ted Tyler summed up the citizens' frustration when he said Town by-law enforcement staff had been shaking a finger at the tenant of the building and the tenant had been thumbing his nose in response.

"After two years of complaints and 15 visits [by town staff], something is very wrong. Why doesn't staff get tough and visit the site every day and start slapping them

with some fines until they clean that mess up?" he said.

Acton Councillor Norm Elliott answered that the Town can't just go in and charge someone with contravening a bylaw. A case had to be carefully built, with repeated warnings and time to make changes, or it would be thrown out of court.

"We only have one bylaw enforcement officer and at the present time the Town has over 450 bylaw infractions that they are dealing with - not just this one," Elliott said, adding the property owner Mr. Freure "doesn't give a damn" about the property because his plans for a

major commercial plaza there were rejected by Council.

Councillor Gerald Rennie echoed Elliott's comments noting the property's file was closed in July, indicating all bylaw infractions were fixed and, "our hands are tied, we can't do anything."

Other complaints raised included noise, loitering and drug use occurring at the former Olympia drive-in and the shabby look of the former Petro Canada and Cango gas stations and Queen's Tire, prompting Elliott to suggest, "maybe we could tie this (all the complaints) up in a general clean up ...but we can't compel a clean up."

FoodShare needs extra space

Town staff will investigate whether Acton FoodShare can use 1,000 square feet of space on the lower level of the old Acton Fire Hall on Bower Street to store its donated food until the building is sold.

Acton Councillor Gerald Rennie told Council on Monday that FoodShare had lost the use of its donated food storage space at the Perth Street location and has no place to put the anticipated 8,000 to 10,000 pounds of

food expected to be collected during the upcoming annual Scout food drive. The actual food bank will still operate from its current location.

Expansion of The Parogy Shack, which leases space in the same building, resulted in FoodShare being forced to look for a new storage area.

Although Rennie asked Council to approve the use of the space in the Fire Hall, which is currently for sale by the Town, Council instead voted to send the request to

staff for a report.

The request prompted Ward 4 Councillor Al Cook to ask that organizers of a new food bank in Georgetown, who have not found an affordable location, be offered the same amount of space in a Town-owned building in Georgetown.

Part of the staff report will also deal with a suggestion from Mayor Marilyn Serjeantson that the Georgetown food bank donations could be stored in Acton as well.

5 GENERATIONS



Doris Kentner, Great-Great Grandmother, resident of Heritage House, Guelph;
Shirley McKeown, Acton, Great Grandmother;
Jim McKeown, Maple, Grandfather;
Leane McKeown-Preece, of Innisfil
Baby Caden John Preece



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