

Halton Hills residents angry with unfair property assessments

THE COMPASS

Alarmed by their property assessments, Mac Sprowl and Lou Bonnette spearheaded an information session at the Acton Legion on Wednesday, February 12th. Although the average assessment increase in Halton from June 1999 to June 2001 was 12.4 per cent, 682 Halton Hills properties have received assessments with increases ranging from 20-75 per cent. Since these assessment increases translate into tax increases, with some taxes increasing from \$300 to \$3,000, residents are upset.

Mac Sprowl, former sheriff of Halton County for 29 years, received a 26 per cent increase of \$84,000. There have been no recent renovations at his home. He is pressed to understand this new assessment and why his taxes will increase by approximately \$700. Similarly, Lou Bonnette received a 25 per cent increase of \$55,000, and he too is wondering why.

The provincial government set up the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) in 1998 to be responsible for all Ontario property assessments. According to Sprowl and Bonnette,

MPAC's pattern of assessment increases appears to be flawed and unfair. Within single neighbourhoods, some properties are valued well below market value whereas others of comparable value have received significant tax increases. According to Lou Bonnette, since MPAC's assessment notices provide less information than a phone or gas bill it is impossible to determine the reasoning behind these assessments.

On February 12th at the Acton Legion, a mixed crowd of about 200 residents assembled. Mr. John Hogg of the assessment firm, Cole Layer Trumble Canada, Inc., addressed the group and explained how to best deal with an unfair assessment. Since MPAC is interested in the market value of properties, he advised the audience to find a friendly real estate agent to provide the selling price of comparable properties within a neighbourhood. Assessment Appeals cost \$50 and must be filed by March 31st, 2003. A Request for Reconsideration must be filed by the end of the year.

Lou Bonnette told the crowd,

"We are strong: We have a lot of power here tonight." People in the audience were encouraged to sign up and join a steering committee. A member from the audience agreed that a steering committee approaching MPAC would probably be more successful than individual residents approaching MPAC. He added, "I just want to live here in this town...What can we do to stop this nonsense?"

Councillors Rick Bonnette and Bryan Lewis both offered their support and suggestions at the Acton meeting. Joyce Savoline, Chairman of Halton Region, was reportedly told that provincial assessors would take a second look at areas facing large assessment increases. Meanwhile, the grassroots revolt started by Sprowl and Bonnette in Halton Hills against the assessment system, is taking off. Audience members contributed more than \$500 to help in the upcoming battle with MPAC, and the Halton Hills Assessment Support Group has now been established. For information, please call Mac Sprowl at 519-853-1195.

Water battle continues

continued from page 1

Council. Mr. Hatch offered, "If the resource is high enough, there may be enough to justify piping it to another location." Puslinch Council was just as concerned with Hatch's suggestion of piping out the water. Councillor Bulmer speculated, "At least with trucks, you can see the water leaving. With a pipeline, you have no way of knowing how much is being piped."

In the end, Mr. Hatch's arguments were in vain as Council voted unanimously to postpone his proposal. Puslinch Mayor Brad Whitcombe stated, "We're going to get some expert advice before going forward with this." He also recommended that a public meeting on the proposal take place. "Everyone is going to have the chance to give their input," he promised. "I will make sure of it."


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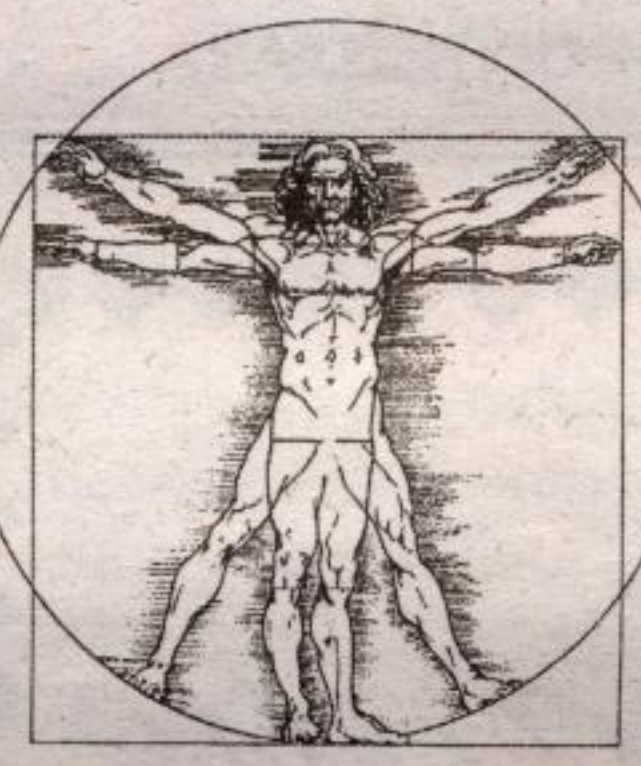
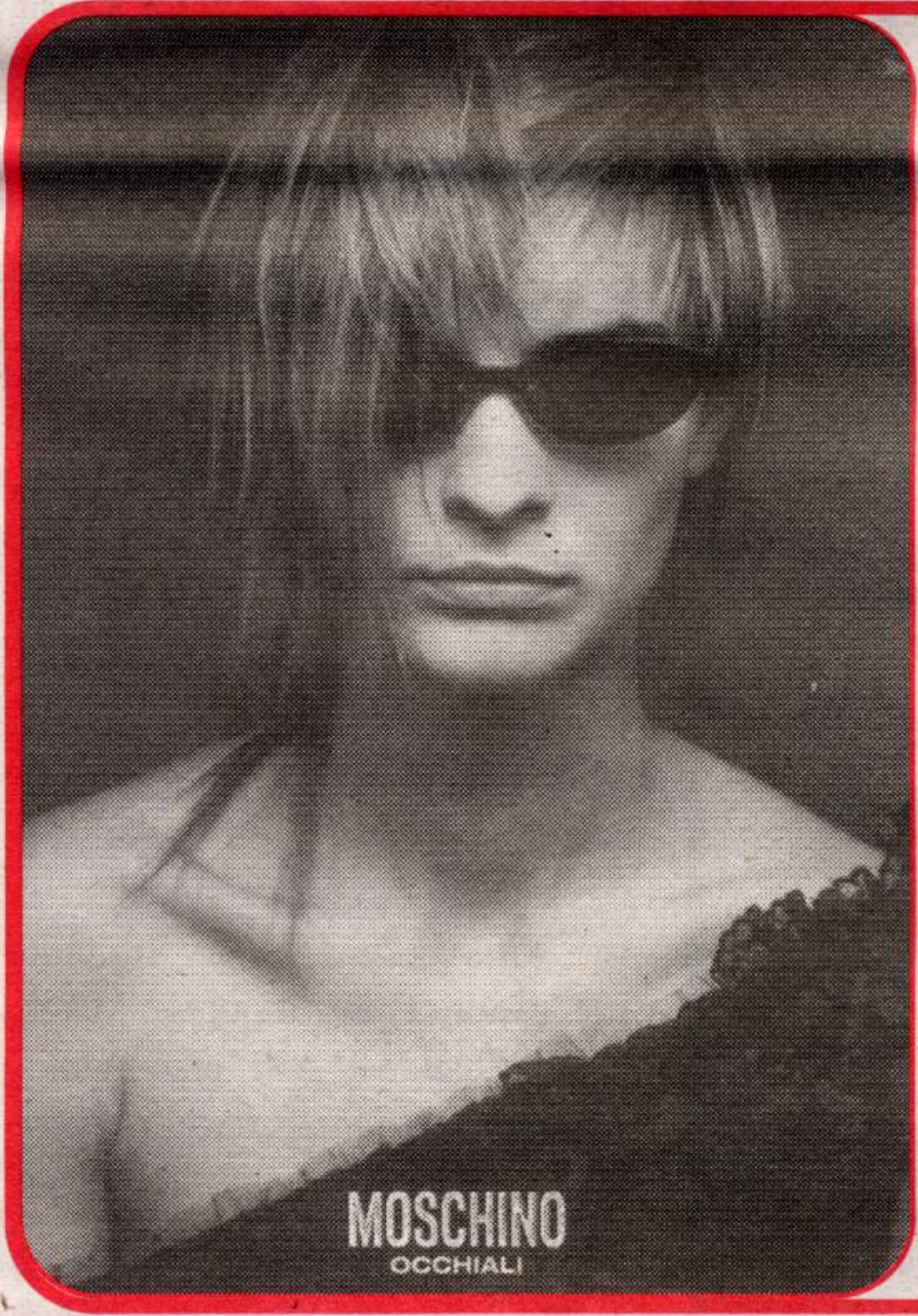
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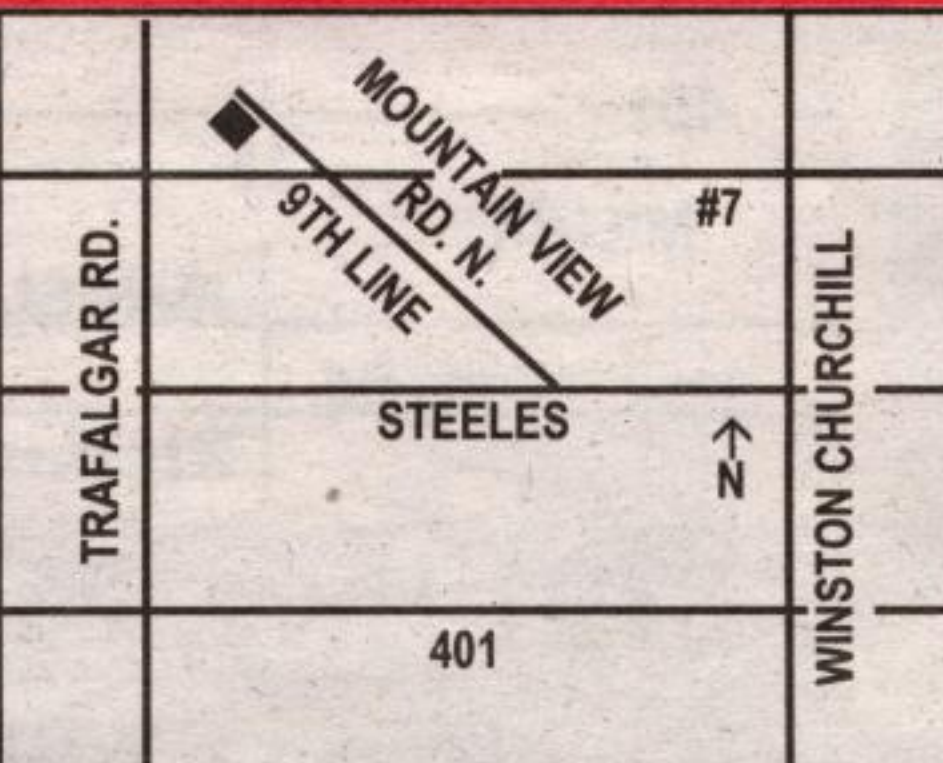


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