

In My Opinion

Wards 1 and 2 are getting the shaft

BY MAC SPROWL

This article is one of a series I'm writing about Prospect Park, the old Acton arena and touching on matters of property tax and revenues on certain sections of the four wards of Halton Hills.

I feel saddened about the demolition of the old arena; women this week have wept about it. Figure skaters have said this arena had the best ice for miles around. Workers taking the building down have stated the purlins and are just like new lumber, are not rotted at all, and it was a poor decision to demolish it.

Indeed, the demolition of the old arena was the worst business decision I have ever seen, taking down a 24,000 square foot building with a replacement value of \$2 million, and paying a construction company to tear it down when \$500,000 would have restored it at a cost of only 25 per cent of the asset. It was done against the will of 1,704 persons who signed a petition to restore the building as a community centre. Council paid no attention to this petition or the wishes of the people who signed it.

It is sad to say that those of us who worked so hard raising \$64,000 in 1961 to see our efforts go down like this. Later, as a Rotarian, we worked hard and put an \$8,000 time clock in the arena and that goes down with the wrecker's ball. On July 8 this year I was invited to go through the old arena along with members of the Fair Board, councillors, the structural engineer who prepared the report that \$530,000 would bring the arena to standard.

The whole walk-through was a staged affair with very rude remarks about the building's condition from some individuals. Last year the arena operated. Six months later we were told it was unsafe and with the new arena built it was not needed. In 1996 the arena took in revenue of \$208,000. Expenses were \$190,000. Does that sound like it was a dinosaur?

Councillors told us Halton Hills was well served with three ice pads, that the ratio is one pad for 25,000 people. Maybe that ratio is okay for Florida but this is Canada. At Belleville for instance, where the population is 40,000 there are four ice pads (and an arena older than Acton's), which translates into one pad for every 10,000. Arnprior's 7,300 people, plus 2,300 in adjacent areas, has a twinned arena, which means one ice pad for less than 5,000.

I don't know where Council got their figures but it seems to me these two other corporations seem to be serving their community better than Halton Hills with 42,000 and only three. When the Alcott arena was built in the 1970s, Councillor Ern Hyde objected to the Georgetown Memorial Arena being torn down. It is still standing, and in use.

When Heritage Acton called a meeting August 9th on the steps of the Acton town hall to start a campaign to save the old arena, mayor Marilyn Serjeantson was the only person from Council present. And she said she would like to see the old arena saved. I spoke briefly there recalling the 1961 campaign and offering to pay the postage for a public subscription campaign to 4,600 residences, industries, businesses and farms. Later I got another person to volunteer to donate the 4,600 letters.

At the council meeting of October 26, 1998, the Heritage Acton committee I was part of, asked for a

six month deferment to see if we could raise the money to restore the arena to a condition that would meet insurance and building codes. The vote was once again 6-5 against any deferment. In my opinion the Council was mean spirited in not giving us the opportunity to raise the money.

I am not a rich person but gave \$400 for two seats at the new arena and \$600 for trees at Rotary Park. I've always been a strong supporter for things in my community. I will always contribute if it helps youth or seniors but I have given my last penny to help the Town or any capital project they want in the future.

It seems to me Council has no problem accepting recommendations from their various departments where they prepare material from consultants such as the \$379,260 to conduct the 401 Corridor Integrated Planning Project, the Facility Strategy Study Consultant in the amount of \$40,000, a study to look at Indoor Recreation and Leisure for \$50,000 when a building suited for it is being torn down.

Much has been said about the great advantages of regional government which amalgamated the three communities of Acton. Esquering and Georgetown into the Town of Halton Hills. Acton was made Ward 1, Esquering Ward 2 and Georgetown Wards 3 and 4. Ward 1 has 7,304 residents, Ward 2 has 10,328 people and Wards 3 and 4 have 23,908.

Time and again Councillors have said there is no way Acton could have the advantages it has since it only contributes 13.2 per cent of the Town's assessment, while Esquering has 29.0 per cent and Georgetown 57.2 per cent. When regional government came in 1974 the total tax dollars were \$5,263,229 with education getting 47.76 per cent, Halton Hills 38.9 per cent and Halton Region 13.27 per cent.

In 1997, 23 years later, the total tax bill is \$53,879,186 with education receiving 53.5 per cent, Halton Hills 33.92 per cent and the Region 15.53 per cent.

Today, Acton (Ward 1) has 100 streets and has an assessment of 13.2 per cent but from 1994 to 1998, the average received from the Engineering and Public Works is only 4.8 per cent of that budget. Is that fair?

Wards 2 (Esquering) has 10 Lines and six crossroads within its boundaries from Lot 1 to Lot 32 with approximately 200 miles of roads, mostly gravel, most without water, sewers and street lights and no garbage pick up. It has an assessment of 29.9 per cent and only receives 9.5 per cent from the Engineering and Public Works budget. Is that fair?

Wards 3 and 4 in Georgetown have 230 streets and an assessment of 57.01 per cent but receives 41.1 per cent from Engineering and Public Works budget.

Acton has received an average from the Parks and Rec. budget from 1994 to 1998 of 1.6 per cent but pays 13.2 per cent. Is that fair? Ward 2 (Esquering) has received an average of 9.5 per cent in the same time period. Is that fair? Wards 3 and 4 (Georgetown) have received an average of 41 per cent of the Parks and Recreation budget.

The comparisons I make clearly indicate Wards 1 and 2 are not getting their fair share from either Engineering, Public Works or Parks and Recreation. Acknowledging these two large departments are not the total is it still apparent Wards 1 and 2 trail by a country mile in money from these two departments.

Living in Ward 2 I was pleased

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Legion members George O'Donnell, George Forrest, Peggy Graham, Carl Fisker and Frank Koen made the presentations to the winning students in the Remembrance Day poster and essay contest. Here, Cassandra McBride receives her award.

Who cares about Quebec?

Originally, I had intended to wait for the results of the Quebec election before writing this column. The fate of Jean Charest, and possibly the country, will be this week's major news story. Over the weekend, however, the polls looked to be firming up. The projection is that Benedict Bouchard and his merry bunch of traitors would cruise to a majority.

I found myself losing interest in the whole procedure. For an ardent Canadian like myself this is quite a turn-about of attitudes. I have actively fought the separatists since 1980. The first referendum I went to Quebec and spoke to friends, customers, etc. about voting no. I couldn't go for the second vote but did work the phones. The Ancient Kid went to the big rally. My point is that, in the past, this Canadian was not prepared to entertain the possibility of this country splitting up without getting involved in some small way.

Make no mistake; a win by Benny and boys will mean yet another four or five years of political and economic instability. We'll all suffer. There will probably be another referendum. Hopefully the federalist side will win it. But I won't get involved to the same level again. I think I have a case of fed-up with Quebecitis. It's a malady affecting many Canadians these days.

Perhaps the turning point for me came when Jacques (Lobster Boy) Parizeau pointed out that P.Q. governments can wring more booty out of the feds. They are proficient at holding a knife to the throat of the country and negotiating hefty blackmail payments.

The Way I See It

with Mike O'Leary



Personally, I'd like to shove that knife up his fleur-de-lys.

There's a common perception that Quebecers vote with their hearts. It's not true. They vote with their wallets. Just like the rest of us. The proof is that while it appears the Separatists will be re-elected almost 60 per cent of Quebecers don't want another referendum. They just figure they'll be bucks ahead with a P.Q. government over a Liberal one. The past 30 years have proven them to be right. So why are we getting so upset? They are playing us like fish, and we keep rising to the bait.

I despise Bouchard and everything he stands for. The man should be in a federal prison. Actually, he should be shot as a traitor but that's another story. So I'm not going to play his little game any more. If Quebecers want to elect a P.Q. government well, as the old saying goes, they'll get the government they deserve. If they hold another referendum, and they will, fine - have a nice day. Wake me when it's over. I refuse to waste any more energy on their silly little games.

Columnist Allan Fotheringham calls the Quebec exercise a "Neverendum". It looks like this is the tact. More and more votes to suck more and more money out of you and I. It will go on ad nauseum. Sorry, count me out.

I'm going to conserve my energy.

But if the traitors should ever succeed and start to break up our country then that's when we need to act. We will have to ensure that no-one on the federal side of the negotiations has any roots in Quebec. No sweetheart deals here.

For starters, the English areas and the Native lands must be allowed to stay in Canada. Provided, of course, they vote to do so. If Canada is divisible by a democratic vote then so is Quebec. There must be no backsliding on this issue. No compromise.

As for the rest of it, I will be demanding that my government put the screws to the traitors until their eyes cross. They may go, but they'll rue the day they started this nonsense. A good start would be if the federal government stopped squandering money in Quebec in a pitiful effort to buy votes. It's not working. They're not getting a return on our money. I would prefer to see them run a once and for final vote. Let's get it over with, one way or the other. Along with the vote would be constitutional changes to declare the country indivisible. Let's not leave this issue for our grandchildren to settle up.

As I write this Quebecers are voting. I hope Jean Charest can pull off a political miracle and beat the separatists. By the time you read the Tanner we'll all know the results. And we'll handle whatever problems this election causes. The Canadian way. With fairness, calm and above all, the resolve not to be cheated or steamrolled into a deal we find unpalatable. Enough is enough. Finish.



It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas!