

EDITORIAL

By MAGGIE PETRUSHEVSKY

How will firing volunteers make improvements?

The firing of all the volunteer directors on the Conservation Halton Foundation board raises so many questions it's hard to know where to start seeking answers.

The Foundation, which has been around for 25 years, is the fundraising arm for Conservation Halton, probably better known by its former title of Halton Region Conservation Authority. The Foundation has pledged to raise \$1.8 million for Conservation Halton projects by 2005.

Provincial funding cuts prompted Conservation Halton board members to have a consultant design a restructuring plan for them. Changes to their structure required changes to the Foundation's structure and fundraising methods if the Foundation were to remain capable of achieving its goals.

These are not unusual conditions and the public has recently seen this happen to many familiar structures from schools to hospitals, recreation centres to community support facilities.

But firing nine volunteers with community profiles like a former provincial cabinet minister, a sitting Milton councillor and a manager with a major life insurance firm? The Foundation board only had 14 members, including two vacant seats. And why fire non-voting life members, one of them a Milton Citizen of the Year, when they have no board seats and attend only to help where possible?

Conservation Halton directors and staff may want to dress up the term but dissolving the board, dismissing directors, forcing resignations, whatever you call it, remains only a fancy way of saying fired. And by the way, if the board was fired or dissolved, why allow three Conservation Halton directors to remain? Their status as new appointees is no excuse to protect them. If other members are invited to re-apply, they could also be re-appointed. This way smacks of "purging the board" as Halton Hills Councillor Clark Somerville of the Conservation Halton board says.

The first suspicion, of incompetency or misconduct (theft by a gentler name), is denied at all levels. In fact, the press release on the matter praised the group for raising \$1.7 million over 20 years.

So if they want to "strengthen the board" with new members with different connections and fundraising methods, how do these firings help? How for example, do you solicit new Foundation board members when the senior partner treats volunteers in this fashion?

Then there's the issue of public confidence. Would you make a big buck donation where unresolved issues of some sort have raised some doubts (and eyebrows) to say the least? Or would you hang back until you were sure the institution was stable (and credible) again?

Probably the easiest way to reassure the public would be to obtain a legal opinion on the validity of Conservation Halton's "strengthening" methods and to make it public.

Reluctance to reveal details of the situation only increases suspicions of impropriety - by one or both boards. Both Conservation Halton and its Foundation are publicly funded organizations, one through provincial taxes and Halton Region grants and the other through public donations. Shielding organizational laundry is not acceptable when tax dollars are involved.



YOU WANTED SOMETHING?: Youngsters made good use of the sunshine and the sandbox at McKenzie-Smith Bennett School last Saturday while their mothers got in some softball practise. The little ones are from the left Samantha Mitchell, 5 and her brothers Steven, 8 and Spencer 5. - Maggie Petrushevsky

The dark side of spring

Spring is a time of rejuvenation and rebirth, but it also has a darker side - it's the start of pesticide season in Canada.

Every spring, people across the country purchase vast quantities of toxic chemicals and spray them on lawns and gardens to remove undesired insects and weeds like pesky dandelions. Often, it is an unquestioned ritual that may continue throughout the summer and fall. In Canada alone, sales of insecticides, herbicides and fungicides top \$1 billion annually.

The federal regulations that govern these chemicals are now under review because they are in desperate need of an overhaul. Nearly a third of the ingredients in common Canadian pesticides were approved before 1960, when little was known about their long-term effects and standards were less strict. Further, the regulations are based on exposures for average-sized adult males and fail to take into account the greater vulnerability of children and women.

Children in particular absorb larger quantities of pesticides for their size. A study last fall by the Ontario College of Family Physicians found that pesticides posed an "undeniable" risk to Canadian children, particularly to children living near farms that use pesticides, Inuit children and those living in housing that is sprayed with insecticides to control cockroaches and other pests.

Around the world, use of these chemicals has increased 33 fold since

1942! Studies in Switzerland have found that European rainwater is often laced with toxic levels of common pesticides and herbicides like 2-4-D, often well above guidelines set for drinking water. In Canada, an apple may be sprayed with up to 16 different chemicals before it reaches the consumer. According to government statistics, pesticide residues on Canadian food have doubled since 1994.

Many of these chemicals are linked to cancers such as Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, which has increased by 73 per cent in the US since 1973. A 1987 study published in the US Journal of the National Cancer Institute reported that children whose parents commonly used pesticides in their homes and gardens were seven times more likely to get leukemia/

Some of the more potent of these chemicals also "bioaccumulate" up the food chain and end up in toxic amounts in marine mammals. And pesticides are thought to play a role in a rash of frog deaths and deformities seen around the globe in recent years.

In addition to the environmental and health effects resulting from the over-use of pesticides, they cause significant global economic costs to society. These are estimated to be at least \$100 billion annually according to an article in the journal Nature.

Some food crops have been genetically modified to have insect resistance built-in and have been touted as effective alternatives to using pesticides. But the fact that these crops

Science Matters

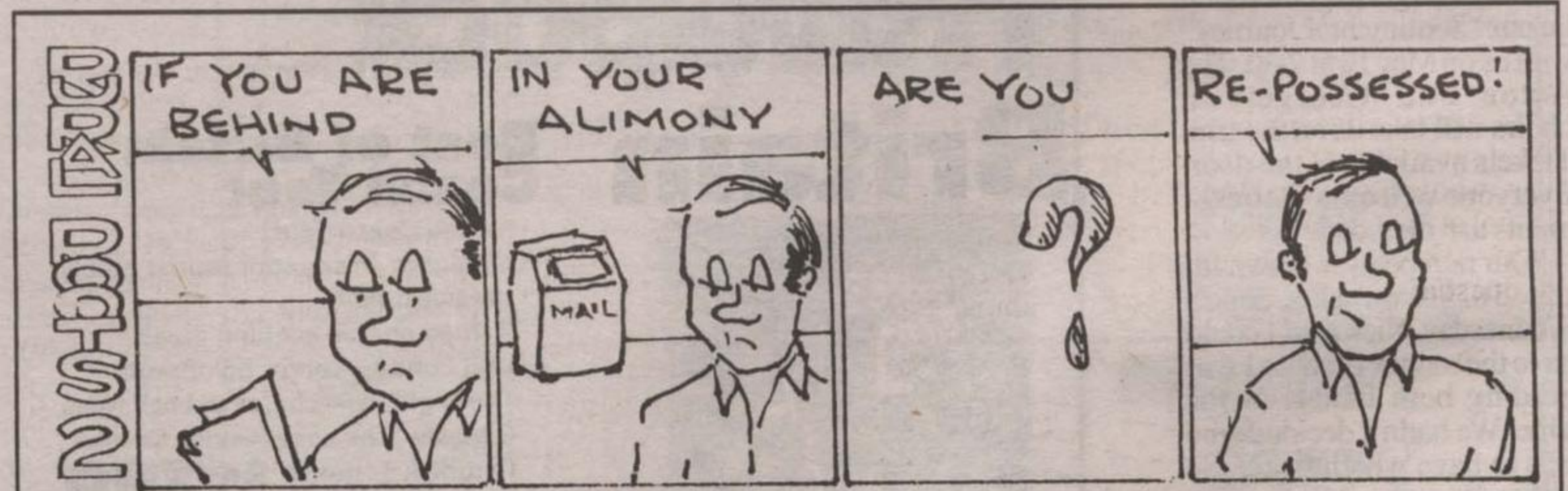


d by David Suzuki

can also kill other non-pest organisms has caused concern among ecologists, and there's a good chance insects will develop resistance to them as they have to pesticides. In some cases, crops with built-in herbicide resistance have resulted in an increase in the use of these chemicals.

If you are concerned about pesticides, you can reduce your exposure by buying organic produce and by not using them on your lawn or in your garden. Instead, you can plant low-maintenance native shrubs and flowers, and reduce the size of your lawn. Lawns are vast monoculture crops that require tremendous amount of water and chemical inputs to stay green and weed-free.

To find out more about common pesticides and herbicides, visit www.scorecard.org, a site administered by the US-based Environmental Defense Fund. There, you can enter the name of virtually any herbicide or pesticide and the site will rank its toxicity and provide a list of potential side-effects. Considering the unnecessary added risk many of these chemicals pose to us and our ecosystems, a few dandelions on the lawn may not be so bad after all.



Publisher

Ted Tyler

Editorial

Hartley Coles

Frances Niblock Mike O'Leary Ellen Piehl

Maggie Petrushevsky Angela Tyler

Advertising and Circulation

Marie Shadbolt

Composing

Karen Coleman Penny Zurbrigg

Distributed to every home in Acton and area as well as adjoining communities.

ADVERTISING POLICY

Every effort will be made to see advertising copy, neatly presented, is correctly printed. The publisher assumes no financial responsibility for typographical errors or omissions in advertising, but will gladly reprint without charge that part of an advertisement in which an error may occur provided a claim is made within five days of publication.

THE NEW TANNER

59 Willow Street North
Acton, Ontario
L7J 1Z8

(519) 853-0051 Fax: 853-0052