

Study needed for new fire station

A one-year hold has been put on the replacement of the Georgetown fire station.

At a recent meeting, Halton Hills council agreed to move the replacement of the Maple Ave. station—estimated to cost \$2 million—from the 2003 budget year to 2004. The action will give the fire department time to hire a consultant to do a study on the best location for a new headquarters building and forecast the need for additional stations in the future. The study will cost about \$10,500.

According to Fire Chief Bob Meads, while the need for a new Georgetown station is critical, "it's deemed even more critical" that a study be done to ensure that the best possible location is found.

"We want to look at the broader scope, and to make sure we've covered all the bases by thoroughly analyzing the issues that's related to location and what's going to serve the community in the years to come," said Meads.

Mississauga, Oakville and Burlington are all facing that situation, said Meads. Stations were built five to 10 years ago, but development went in other directions, and now the stations are in the wrong locations.

The Georgetown station has been housed in a refurbished public works building on Maple Ave. for the past 25 years. That "temporary" home first housed two full-time staff, 45 volunteer firefighters and five pieces of equipment. Now a quarter of century later, the building houses the communication centre, training facility, 16 full-time staff, the 45 volunteer part-time firefighters and 10 pieces of equipment, five of which are routinely parked outdoors.

In the 1990s during the discussions on the Dominion Seed House land, a plan to locate a new fire station on that property was scrapped

by council.

There are several factors, which have to be figured into finding the right location for a new station:

- How response times are affected by the number of intersections along primary response routes, traffic volumes and peak traffic times, installation of Opticom on traffic control lights, proximity of the station to the residential areas where part-time staff live, and the type of equipment being used.



BOB MEADS

- The current location is located beside a main railway line, where several significant derailments have occurred in the past several years, stated Meads in his report. Dangerous goods routinely pass within metres of the station on a daily basis and in ever-increasing quantities. Even a minor derailment involving hazardous goods could result in a need to evacuate the station and its communication centre, resulting in serious operational problems.

- The fire department is considering a joint training facility with a neighbouring fire services, and any discussions must be factored into the study.

- Currently all fire department staff is located at the fire station. Meads proposes to move some of the staff that deals with permits and plan approvals, to the Civic Centre to improve customer service.

- The layout of the town. "The biggest problem for us is having two very geographically separated urban areas (Acton and Georgetown) now and the potential to have a big industrial area (401-407 Corridor) that is separated from those two urban areas. That's not typical municipality growth. We've got three very separate unique areas," Meads said.

—By Cynthia Gamble, staff writer

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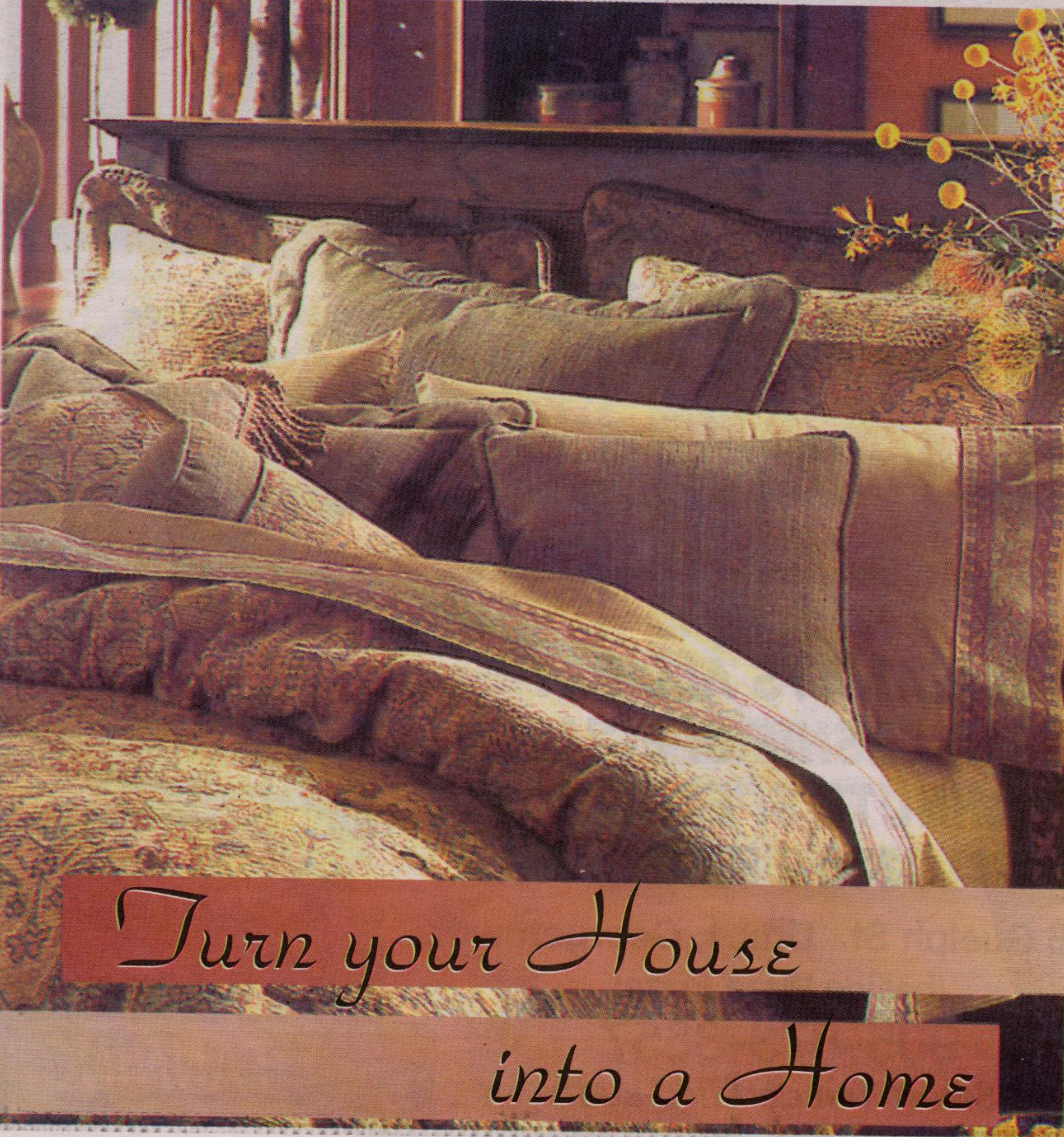
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