

Cat got your tongue, Carman?

Carman Widdess of Georgetown Chrysler carefully pets his new roommate, Apollo, a 15-month-old, 375-pound Siberian tiger. Apollo will be among the cats in illusionist Claude Haggerty's shows at the John Elliott Theatre Saturday, October 25. Haggerty's two shows are presented by the Georgetown BIA and sponsored by Georgetown Chrysler and Kathleen Walsh Re/Max.



Photo by Herb Garbutt

Permits not needed for small wood decks

Homeowners wishing to build a wooden deck, no more than two feet off the ground and not attached to their homes, will no longer have to apply for building permits.

A review of building permit issuance from May to December 2002, showed that it took, on average, one to two months to go through the steps to get permit approval for a wooden deck. During that time period 630 building permits were issued generating \$886,970. Of that, only 55 were small projects such as decks \$8,000 in fees.

A survey of surrounding municipalities also revealed that few require building permits for decks or for stages (used by festivals) that are less than 24 inches above the finished grade. Council approved the new policy to waive the building permits at Monday's meeting.

Cricketers allege increase in user fees was based on race

The president of the Georgetown Cricket Club alleges racism is behind an increase in user fees that will likely drive his organization out of town.

Solomon Tancoo said cricket players—mainly dark-skinned—were harassed while playing at Stewarttown School field this past summer. The user fees, which will increase about 710 per cent for his organization, is just another attempt to get the club out of town, he said at recent public meeting on plans to up user fees for town recreational groups and businesses.

The Cricket Club has been operating in Georgetown for 25 years, 15 of those at Stewarttown School where the club funded and maintained a pitch. He said the annual flat rate increased annually, but the club never objected.

However, the change from a flat rate to an hourly rate is unfair for a club that plays seven-hour matches.

"It has been very obvious from recent events that you (the town) are not comfortable with seeing people of colour in your community every weekend during the summer months," said Tancoo.

He said when cricketers cheered for their teams, noise complaints were filed with town and police by nearby Stewarttown residents. He said cricketers were blamed when teens squealed car tires in the school parking lot, long after the cricketers left.

"We have recently received another threat," said Tancoo. "Authority will not be granted to play unless we submit to the Recreation and Parks Department names, addresses, telephone numbers and dates of births of all playing members. Do any of the other teams have to submit this information before receiving a permit? There is only one reason while the Georgetown Cricket Club is being singled out for this type of special treatment

— that is the 710 per cent increase in fees, constant complaints about the players and threats from the authorities—figure it out for yourself as it is so obvious."

Director of Recreation and Parks Terry Alyman dismissed the allegations of racism, saying, "they're nowhere near what we're trying to do which is to enforce the town policies and procedures for all sport groups."

He acknowledged a letter had been sent to the Cricket Club asking for personal information—but only for members of the club's executive. This request is made of all town user groups, he said.

He said he has been made aware that some complaints have been filed with the town regarding noise and alleged alcohol consumption, and his staff is obliged according to policy to follow up with the club to discuss them.

"We would do the same thing with any of other sports groups," he said.

"It's really unfortunate (the club is considering moving) because we were prepared work with him to look at phasing in any major increase," said Alyman. "In review of his group's situation, they are in fact facing the biggest jump because of the nature of their particular sport (long matches)."

"For the most part, it (the decision to charge hourly rather than per team) worked out fairly consistently and the process, in part, was designed to level the playing field between what people were paying and what they were getting," Alyman said.

The charges of racism came as a surprise to councillors.



TERRY ALYMAN

"I can assure you that these costs are reflective of all user groups and it doesn't have anything to do with race, colour or background," said Wards 1 and 2 Regional Councillor Rick Bonnette, chair of the public meeting. "Rest assured this is not to get the Cricket Club out of Halton Hills, this was to look at user fees."

Ward 2 Councillor Joan Robson said a complaint had been made to her about open urination by cricket players (during the seven-hour long matches) and it had been resolved with the installation of a portable toilet.

"At no time was there ever any mention of race or colour," Robson told *The Independent & Free Press*.

"It is most unfortunate that any user group using a Town of Halton Hills facility would have the feeling of a prejudicial or racial concern, when in fact, it started out to be a financial issue, one shared by other organizations and businesses with Halton Hills," said Ward 2 Councillor Bryan Lewis. "These gentlemen of the Georgetown Cricket Club have used this facility for many years and very little problems have arisen."

—By Cynthia Gamble, staff writer

Town approves hikes to user fees

Continued from pg. 1

at the end of the day, the additional fees won't contribute to additional repair and maintenance, they will essentially maintain the same level of service we experience now."

Council, in response to the residents' complaints, made no changes to the proposed fee increases. However, Councillor Rick Bonnette did request that the body parlour fee remain at its present level \$5,000 (it was recommended to drop to \$3,000) to deter any future entrepreneurs.

Under the revised Municipal Act, towns must be able to justify user fees, licensing fees and service charges—that there is reasonable relationship between the fees charged and the costs of providing the services, including the labour costs. Municipalities are allowed to raise its user fees and service charges to gain a 100 per cent cost recovery

The clerk's department fees, such as business licences, are lower than those charged for similar services in other towns and cities. This department is only recovering about 28 per cent of its costs at this time. Now some of its fees will

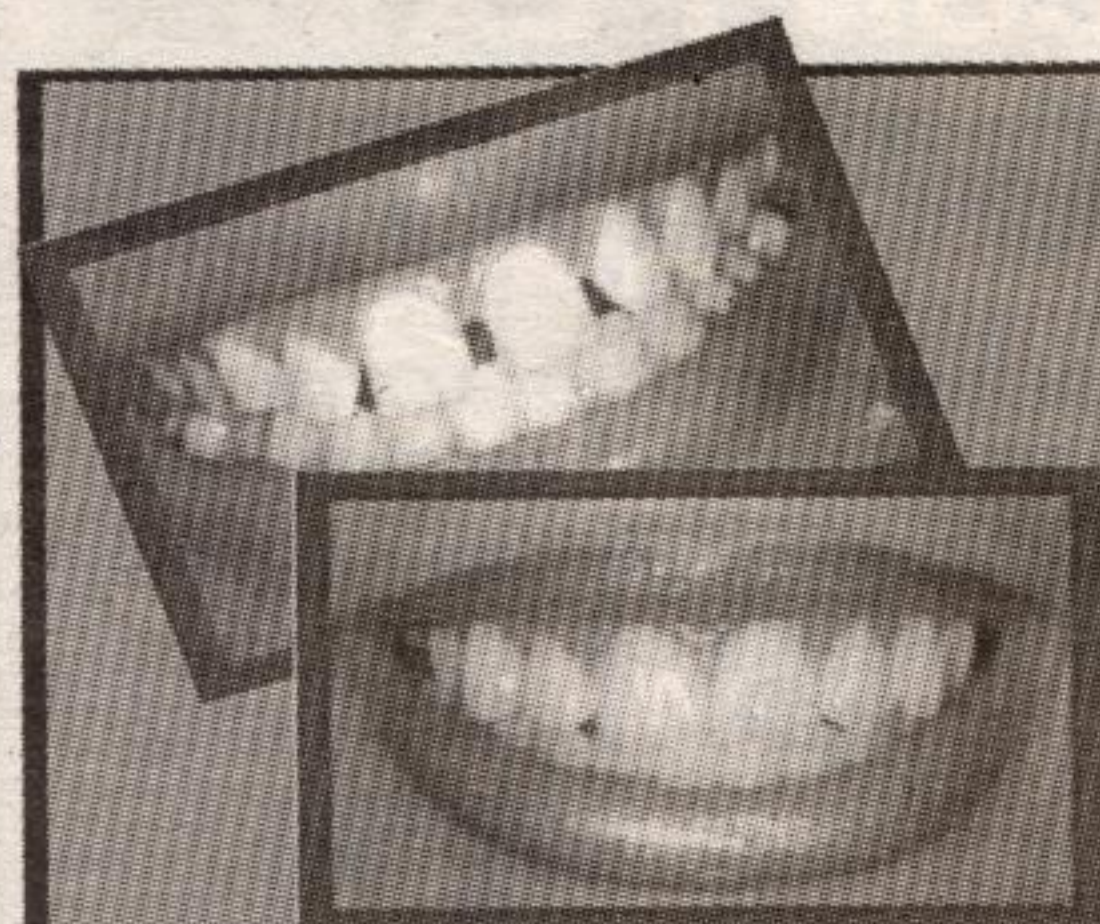
increase, some will stay the same while others will decrease, resulting in an additional \$35,800. For instance, plumber and electrician licences will jump between 50-275 per cent (\$25-\$55).

The recreation department has a higher cost recovery—50 per cent. It spends about \$6 million on operating costs but receives about \$3 million in revenues. Approximately \$128,300 will be realized.

Not all departments that charge for services fall under the Municipal Act guidelines: the planning department charges are laid out in the Planning Act while the building department will be charging for services under the new BRAGG legislation and other regulations. The planning department was directed earlier this year to raise its fees so that 75 per cent of its costs are recovered. Other departments, such as finance, are already at or near the 100 per cent cost recovery rate.


For more information on the fees, visit the town's Web site. www.haltonhills.ca, and check out council agendas (Sept. 22 and report 8L) or call the clerk or finance departments, 905-873-2600.

—By Cynthia Gamble, staff writer



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