

Town libraries called 'an embarrassment'

Consultant suggests new \$11.8M facility is needed

Although parking concerns and staff space limitations were of prime importance at Thursday night's Halton Hills Public Library Facility Site Study public forum, consultant Jim Morgenstern of dmA Planning and Management Service summed up the state of the facilities of Halton Hills Library in one brief statement.

"The library facilities are an embarrassment to the Town."

Morgenstern added, "Halton Hills has great schools, civic buildings and arenas, not to mention the community centre, but the libraries are an embarrassment."

The meeting, held in the Gallery of the Cultural Centre, was the third of three public forums held to garner public input before the report is presented to council in mid-November. Meetings were also held in the Gellert Centre Oct. 1, and Wednesday night at Acton branch of Halton Hills Library.

The site study, requested by Halton Hills Public Library Board, gave a brief history of existing facilities from 1981, and their ability to serve the Town, then extrapolated the needs of the library to accommodate the Town's needs until the year 2021, when there will be a projected population in excess of 70,000.

Although the report acknowledged the need to upgrade or replace the Acton library facility, the focus of the

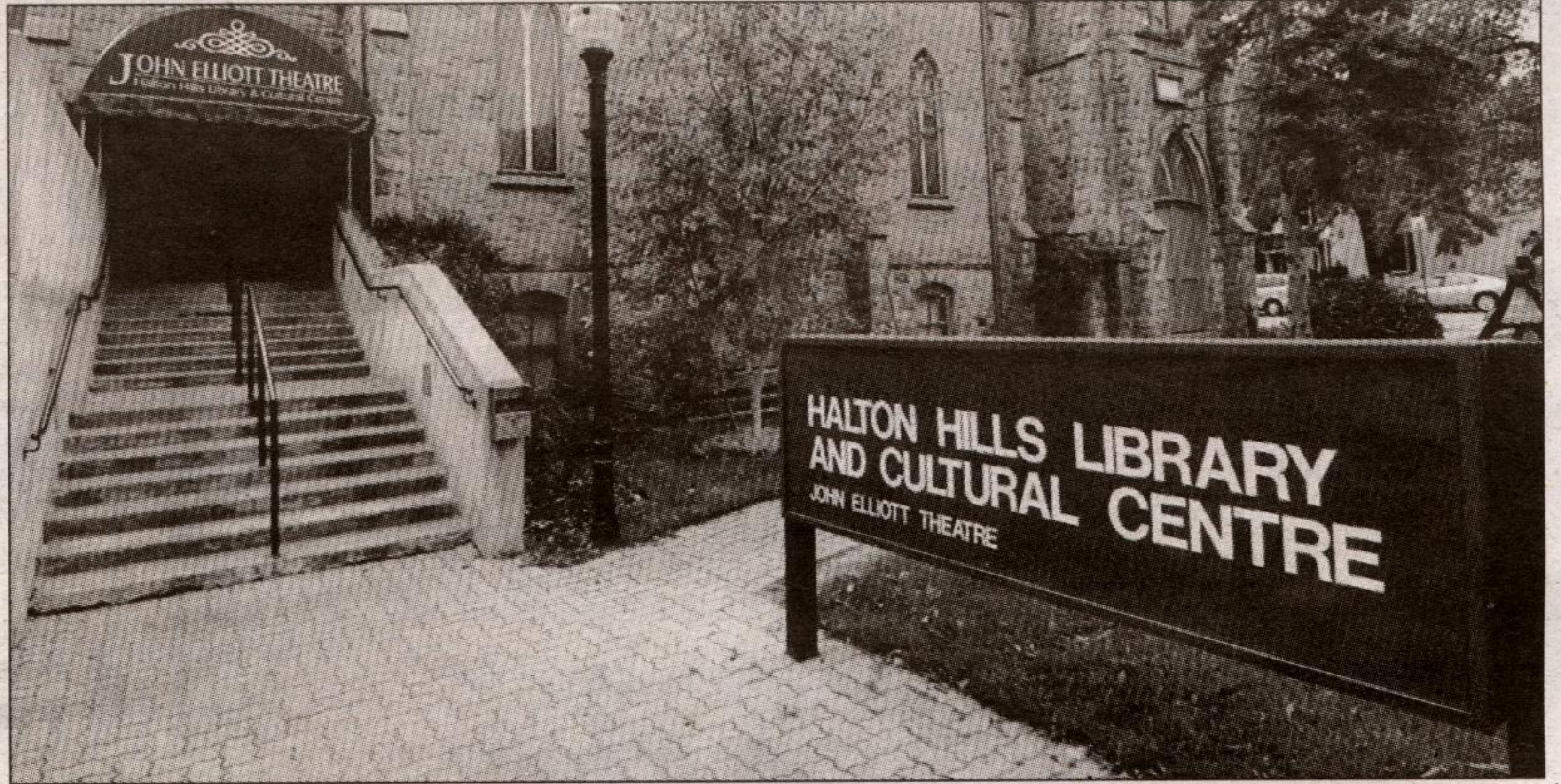
study was the Georgetown facility and how to deal with its shortcomings.

Morgenstern said the Town will need 33,000 square feet of library facilities to properly serve Georgetown and the rural areas of Halton Hills by 2021, and the current Church St. location has only 12,000 sq. ft., which is spread over two floors, making it less efficient than a single storey layout.

He illustrated the newest trends in library design, showing examples of newly constructed facilities with an abundance of natural light, and a more welcoming entrance and check-out desk. New libraries have also been including 'reading gardens,' outdoor areas that are conducive to reading and study, as well as wireless networks to allow patrons to use laptops anywhere in the building.

"Parking is one major constraint of this (Georgetown) facility," said Morgenstern, "But not the only one. The lack of work space, program rooms and staffing space—a situation the general public doesn't see—are all shortcomings of this facility."

Various scenarios were presented, ranging from a completely new 33,000 sq. ft. facility, to various compromises, including keeping the existing Church St. location and adding a 21,000 sq. ft. facility in town. Another slight deviation to the proposal included downsizing the Church St. facility to 6,000 square feet and creating a



The Georgetown branch of the Halton Hills Library is cramped and too small according to a consultant's report which calls for a new \$11.8M library. Photos by Yves Desjardins

27,000 square foot facility elsewhere.

The concept of retaining the original Church St. facility and constructing another 21,000 sq. ft. building appeared to appeal to the crowd, but Morgenstern pointed out that maintaining two locations in Georgetown would add about \$440,000 to the annual operating budget of \$2 million.

By the end of the presentation, Morgenstern unveiled the 'first choice' which was to build a completely new 33,000 sq. ft. facility elsewhere in town, suggesting the town could possibly reassign the existing space at the Church St. location to other uses.

Morgenstern outlined numerous Town-owned sites that were possible locations for the facility.

Sites considered were:

- Gellert Community Centre lands, located in close proximity to the existing Gellert Centre
- Civic Centre lands, located adjacent to the Town Civic Centre
- Former Dominion Seed property
- Trafalgar Sports Park land
- Fire Department property on Maple Avenue
- Memorial Arena site
- Cedarvale Park
- Mold-Masters SportsPlex land

The study went on to eliminate those sites that weren't feasible due to servicing or size and the final recommendation

was to build a 33,000 square foot facility on the Dominion Seed property, with the Gellert Centre site coming in as a second possible choice.

Morgenstern suggested the

feel the lack of parking is something of a myth, even if I had to park in the Municipal Parking Lot behind Young's Pharmacy and walk up to the Church St. location. When I go to downtown Toronto, and find a parking spot that close to the place I'm going, I feel like I've died and gone to heaven."

Others suggested taking an existing building in town and converting it to a 33,000 sq. ft. library, thereby saving money. Morgenstern was quick to disagree, pointing out that converting existing

structures is usually not feasible because they weren't built for the unique needs of a library, and more money would be spent on retrofitting with a sub-standard facility as a result.

Another woman in the group expressed concern about moving the library out of the downtown core, saying it would also impact the local businesses downtown, as there would be less people in the area.

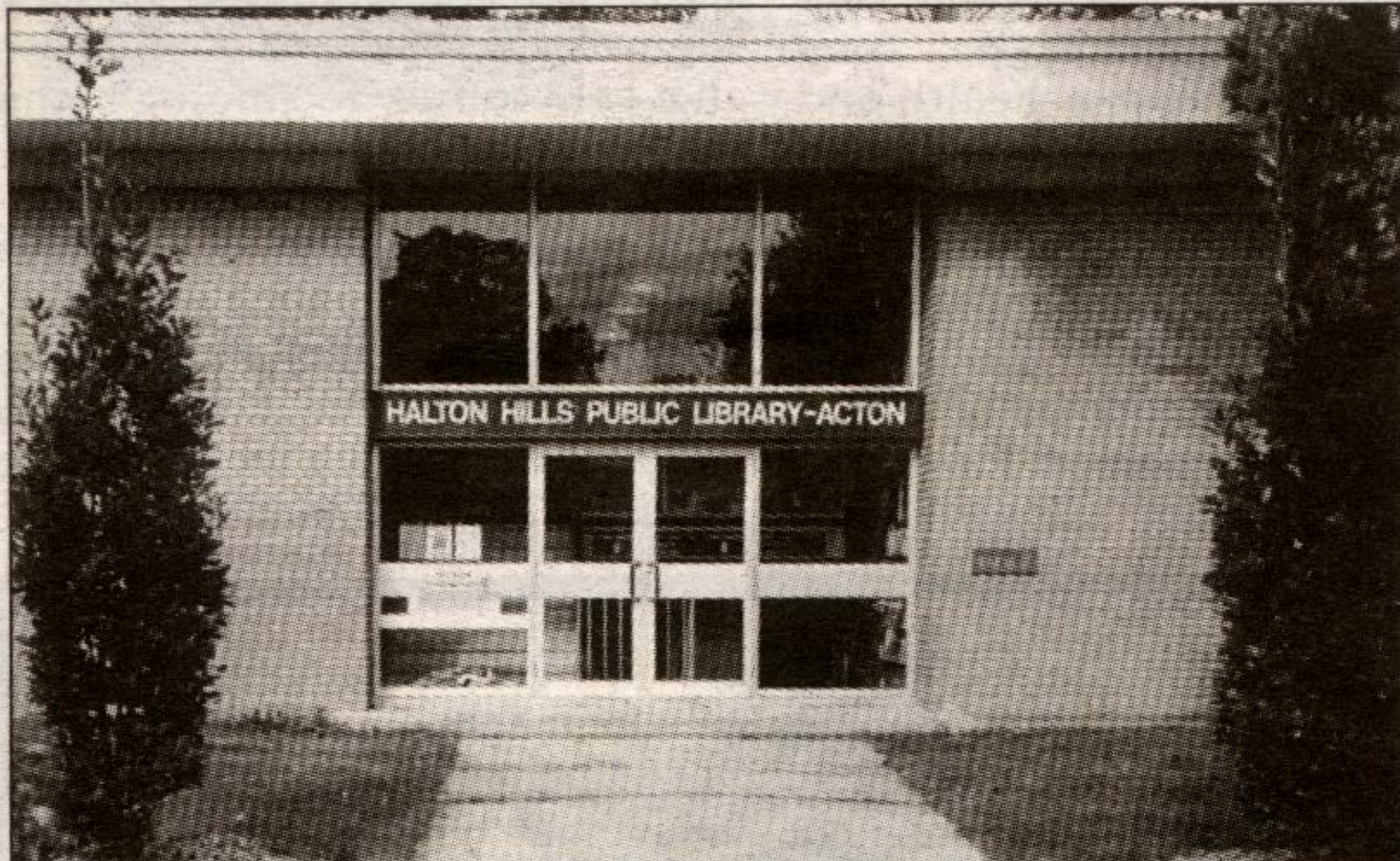
Halton Hills Public Library Board is asking for public comments on the site study, and will be including them when the report is presented to council in mid-November.

The report is available at both branches of the library, as well as on-line at the library's web site, www.library.hhpl.on.ca.

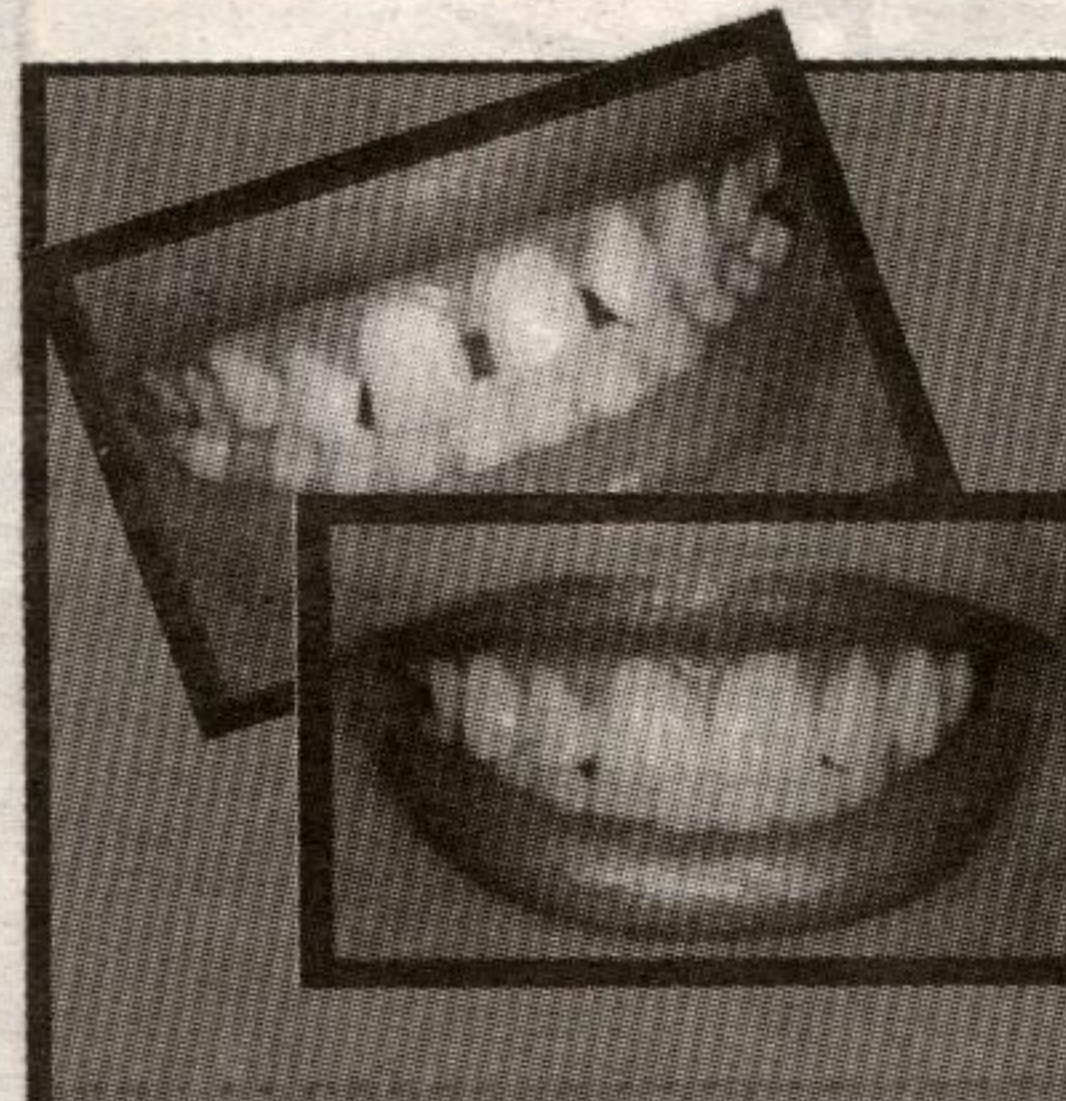
—By Ted Brown, staff writer

'The lack of work space, program rooms and staffing space—a situation the general public doesn't see—are all shortcomings of this facility.'

—Consultant Jim Morgenstern




The Acton branch of the Halton Hills Library should be upgraded or replaced according to consultant who deemed the town's libraries 'an embarrassment'.



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