

Councillors declared several conflicts of interest during term

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Staff Writer

Wives, jobs and property ownership led to numerous declarations of pecuniary conflict of interest by members of Halton Hills council during their 2003-2006 term of office.

A review of the declarations made at the start of each meeting, from December 2003 to July 10, 2006, shows that job conflicts top the list of declarations.

Under the Ontario Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, a council member could declare a conflict, if he/she believes that they or a member of their family could benefit financially from a council decision. Once the declaration is made, a council member will not vote or participate in any council discussion on this issue. It is the responsibility of council members to investigate (often with their lawyer) whether an issue is a potential conflict and to declare it. Among the exceptions to declaration involves consideration of council salary or if the conflict is one, which is in common with the electors generally.

With four council meetings remaining in the term, Ward 4 Councillor Bob Inglis has announced the most number of conflicts, primarily in relation to the 401 Corridor.

Employed by Mold-Masters, which plans to build its headquarters in the 401 Corridor, Inglis has declared a pecuniary interest with respect to every issue involving the 401 Corridor.

"Mold-Masters is a driving force in the 401 Corridor being built out and they're also a dominant financial force in the built-out," said Inglis in an interview. "As an employee of Mold-Masters I declared everything in the Corridor. I want to be consistent, and I have been, so in event of any challenge for any reason, I'm protected legally."

Asked if he felt removing himself from all 401 Corridor discussion compromised his position as Ward 4's representative, Inglis replied the reverse would have been true—it would have been more vulnerable had he not made the declaration.

Inglis has also declared conflicts on improvement to Wildwood and Glen Williams roads, as he has had family members living there. Other conflicts he declared included discussion on property he owns for a water easement and a deferral in the farmland taxes because part of his property is assessed as farmland.

Mayor Rick Bonnette declared a conflict of interest on any issue involving the Acton Business Improvement Area (BIA) as his wife is its manager.

Ward 1 Councillor Jon Hurst, who owns a number of properties, declared conflicts in relation to the Mill St. resurfacing, leasing of his building to HHCSI, downtown Acton parking issues, and Dufferin Aggregates proposal to increase its tonnage limit at the Acton Quarry (which affects his 22 Sideroad property).

Ward 1 Councillor Michael O'Leary declared a conflict with respect to Sheridan Nurseries' application to build a subdivision in Glen Williams— his wife works at the company. For the same reason he announced a conflict during the Glen Williams Secondary Plan debate.

Ward 2 Councillor Bryan Lewis declared a conflict on the land swap between the Town

and the North Halton Golf and Country Club. Lewis is a NHGCC shareholder. Subsequently he also declared a conflict on the Arbor Glen development, which had become entangled in the controversy over the land swap.

Ward 3 Councillor Mike Davis declared a conflict on changes to the salvage yard by-law. As an environmental engineer, he was contracted by one of the salvage yard owners to do an assessment. When that job finished, he "undeclared" his conflict and commented freely on the bylaw changes.

Ward 3 Councillor Moya Johnson issued a conflict of interest declaration any time discussion revolved around funding to hospitals. Employed by the Child Health Network, which is funded by GTA hospitals, Johnson declared conflicts during debates on saving the Georgetown obstetrics unit, the reorganization of the health networks, funding for midwifery care in Halton-Peel and for hospitals in general, and the transfer of Georgetown hospital to Halton Healthcare Services.

Retiring Ward 4 Councillor Ron Chatten had one conflict of interest— on the proposed Upper Canada College development. He lives besides the proposal.

Wards 1 and 2 Regional Councillor Clark Somerville declared a conflict of interest on the Sobeys' construction of Price Chopper and improvements to Canadian Tire on Guelph St.— his employer at the time was

located across the street. He also declared a conflict with a Todd Rd. building, as the potential lessee was located beside his employer. Later in the term, when he changed jobs, now working for the olde Hide House, Somerville declared a conflict on the Eastern Ave. construction and the proposal to hold the Saturday Trunk Sale in the olde Hide House parking lot.

Somerville also declared a conflict on an issue involving a lawsuit with a local citizen, as he had already a private lawsuit with the same individual.

Wards 3 and 4 Regional Councillor Jane Fogal, a shareholder at North Halton Golf and Country Club, declared a conflict regarding the Town/golf course land swap, and also subsequently discussions involving the Arbor Glen subdivision.

She also announced a conflict with the debate over extending concessions to the Bennett Health Care Centre's proposal to build a seniors' apartment— she sits on the BHCC's board of directors. Fogal also had a conflict with the Glen Secondary Plan as she lives on property whose inclusion was being debated. As well, she declared a conflict when council voted to accept a Committee of Adjustment committee decision as it involved her property. Other conflicts included the final assumption of Dominion Gardens as her brother's company did the engineering work and the deferral of property taxes for farmers and part of her property is assessed as farmland.

All members of council have filed to seek re-election for their current positions in the November 13 municipal election— with the exception of Chatten who is retiring and Davis.

(Cynthia Gamble can be reached at cgamble@independentfreepress.com)

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— Ward 4 Councillor Bob Inglis



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