

MPAC offers little solace to land owners

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Property owners affected by rapidly changing land conditions in Halton Hills are unlikely to get any immediate help from the tax assessment agency, MPAC.

Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) spokesperson Greg Baxter told Halton Hills council at a recent meeting that the agency, which sets the current market value assessment on all properties in Ontario, cannot alter an assessment until a change actually occurs.

He answered questions from councillors on a variety of issues facing Halton Hills property owners.

Rural Councillor Bryan Lewis said the planned twinning of the hydro corridor has already had an impact on land values.

"The land values of all those people from 32 Sideroad right down to the 401 is obviously being suppressed today, immediately," he said, adding that two homeowners have already approached him about the new hydro tower line coming over their homes.

"I think it would be important that MPAC will address these people proactively and not after the fact, because anyone can realize the suppressed values of their properties today."

"MPAC will react immediately," said Baxter, "once the deed has been registered with the land registry office and the parcels have been moved over to be part of the corridor. We take that information and immediately update our site information, which will likely adjust the value of those properties."

He added MPAC plans to also analyze land sales to determine the effect on abutting properties as well.

"But the impact is upon those people today," said a frustrated Lewis. "And we're still saying to them (whether they're in the hydro corridor or beside the power plant) you must continue to pay today at the higher price."

"You have to stand there and listen to (a local resident) as she was saying the other day, 'I give up. My house is for sale. I want out of here. I can't take this anymore' and then talk about the value that won't be there," the rural councillor explained. He suggested that MPAC talk to real estate agents today about land values, not after the deed is signed.

"It's very unfair to the residents in both those examples."

Baxter suggested MPAC could perhaps take a look at similar situations in other communities to see what impact abutting a hydro corridor would have on market values.

Some property owners also have raised a red flag on land values due to the location of the new power plant in the 401 Corridor, Lewis said.

Baxter said sales would be reviewed, adding that's the benefit of annual reassessments (which will start again in 2008) that "we'll be able to clearly identify if there are impacts directly associated with that property, to not only identify if there is an impact but to quantify what that adjustment should be."

Lewis questioned why MPAC does not give an automatic reduced assess-

ment to homes bordering quarries. Ward 1&2 Regional Councillor Clark Somerville wondered about the impact on farmers' assessments when surrounding land is bought by developers— as is happening in the Georgetown South area.

Baxter said there is legislation which determines how MPAC can assess farm properties— if a farm continues to be farmed, the land will not be valued for its potential for redevelopment. Land sales from farmer to farmer would be used in establishing the assessment.

Baxter confirmed that speculators, while waiting for future development to occur and still farm the land, would benefit from a farm assessment. Once land is being used for development, then MPAC will re-evaluate the property.

MPAC assesses more than 19,000 properties in Halton Hills and in 2006 received 314 complaints about tax assessments. Baxter said the trend has been that roughly half have resulted in an adjustment to the tax assessment.

MPAC has made a number of improvements to its services, he said,

including giving greater weight to the selling price of a property, increasing the number of free detailed assessment reports on neighbouring or similar homes to 12, offering settlements in disputes at least seven days prior to the hearing and providing more information to the property owner on how assessments were determined.

Assessments are currently made using the January 1, 2005 market value and starting in 2009 will be done using the January 1, 2008 market value. Current value is determined as the price a property could be reasonably expected to sell for in its current condition.

For more information about MPAC, go to www.mpac.ca

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—Ward 2 Councillor Bryan Lewis



Run for all

Power Zone fitness club members held a St. Patrick's Day fun run for family members (and pets) with the proceeds going to the Georgetown Bread Basket. Among the approximately 30 runners taking part were Kim Robertson, her niece Lindsay Quinn and family pooch Brandy.

Photo by Shawn McAlpine

Conservation award deadline nears

Conservation Halton (CH) wants to know about any good deeds that have enhanced the natural environment during 2006.

Until March 31, CH is accepting nominations for its conservation awards, which will be distributed May 23 at its administration centre in Burlington.

There are six categories— citizen, community, education, stewardship, corporate and the conservation honour roll award for long time dedication to environmental protection. The winners' names will be placed on a plaque that's displayed in CH's head office. Individual plaques will be presented to recipients.

The awards have been given out since 1982. Past nominees have included teacher associations and federations, scout and guide groups, naturalist clubs, corporations, government agencies and private landowners. Projects have included tree planting, stream rehabilitation and clean-up, schoolyard naturalization, environmental education, wildlife improvement and fundraising for conservation.

For more information on the awards and how to apply, call CH at 905-336-1158 or visit www.conservationhalton.on.ca.

MPAC working to correct election list foul-up

Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette also questioned MPAC spokesperson Greg Baxter on the voter's list foul-up created during last year's municipal election.

MPAC is responsible for preparing a preliminary enumeration list for municipal clerks, but last year, thousands of voters in Town were forced to declare themselves Canadian citizens— even though some had voted in this community for more than 30 years— because MPAC could not con-

firm their nationality.

Baxter said MPAC is working on this matter with municipal clerks and expects improvement by the next election. He said part of the problem is attributed to the low return rate (40 per cent) of occupancy and municipal enumeration forms that MPAC sent to all properties.

Residents are currently not legally required to send the information back, but that may be reviewed in the future, Baxter said.



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