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Halton Hills is 'out of business' if Region plan passes

A public meeting is being held today, (Wednesday) at 9:30 a.m. at the Halton Regional Centre on the Region of Halton Development Charges background study for water, wastewater, roads and general services's development charges (DCs). DCs help municipalities and schools boards pay for capital projects like roads, schools, recreation facilities and water/wastewater system improvements.

The existing DCs in Halton region are the highest of any municipalities in Ontario, stated the Town's Economic Development Officer Allan O'Neill in a report to council.

But in preparation for future growth and the resultant capital costs, Region staff is proposing a full-cost recovery increase to development charges for industrial projects. That could see region DCs for such projects more than double from approximately \$8.71 to \$18.59 per sq. ft. starting in August. Adding on the Town and education DCs, the charge would be \$21.58.

The Region already collects full-cost recovery DCs for retail and office uses but the Region will now increase them from approximately \$12 to \$18.59. With Town and education DCs added on, the DC charge would be \$24.50.

According to O'Neill, "the impact of higher development charges on retail uses is likely less than on industrial uses but the impact of very significant development charges for retail uses at over \$24.50 is not known and may prove to be a barrier attracting commercial/retail/office uses in the future."

Already a long list of developers, Realtors and chamber representatives have signed up to protest the Region proposal at today's meeting.

Everyone should be concerned about this, said Bonnette Monday night, calling it a quality of life issue. He pointed out that industry is needed to take the pressure off the residential tax base.

"You want to bring in manufacturers so they create jobs so people can live and work in their own community ... but this sends out the message, 'don't invest in Halton Region'", the mayor said. It will take, he



There is plenty of space along the 401 Corridor in Halton Hills for development but few developers willing to build. A Region proposal to increase development charges will make it next to impossible to attract business charge Town councillors.

Photo by Ted Brown

said, the combined strength of Milton and Halton Hills representatives to persuade their Oakville and Burlington colleagues not to go through with this proposal. He noted that south Halton's industrial capacity is pretty much built out.

According to O'Neill, a survey of Realtors and developers has revealed that if the Region goes ahead with

its full-cost recovery DCs:

- Realtors have advised that companies looking for industrial sites have simply taken Halton Region off their list of projects— including one that would have exceeded 500,000 sq. ft. in size.

- A major industrial developer has suspended negotiations to acquire a large land holding in the Corridor.

What do you think?

Do you support the Region's plan to hike development charges?
Cast your vote online at www.independentfreepress.com

- A longtime 401 Corridor property owner with a proposed 100,000 sq. ft. project, says rents could not justify the costs of building if DCs are factored in— his project will not proceed.

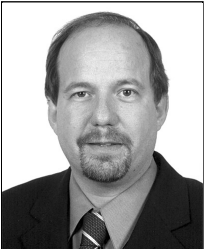
- First Gulf is negotiating with a major industrial user on a 20-acre parcel of land on Fifth Line. If the building permit is not obtained before the August deadline, the project will not proceed.

- Higgins Group has said if the DCs had been in place at the time it had built its Steeles Ave. industrial condominium project, they would not have gone ahead. They added that another 300,000 sq. ft. facility proposed on Steeles Ave. would not go ahead unless a building permit could be obtained before the August deadline.

- Realtors are warning that if the DCs proposal goes ahead there will be no new development in Halton.

Council voted unanimously to send a resolution to Halton Region asking that the DCs for industrial users be set at 50 per cent of those for retail and office uses. Further, the Town asked that the new DCs do not apply to any project that has applied for a building permit before the August 18 DC implementation date, and gets that building permit issued before January 2009.

Regional council will vote on the full-recovery DCs proposal at meetings in late April and May.



"This sends out the message, 'don't invest in Halton Region.'"

— HALTON HILLS MAYOR RICK BONNETTE

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

Firefighter, 44, killed in head-on collision

LISA TALLYN
Staff Writer

A head-on crash on Ninth Line Sunday evening has claimed the life of a Georgetown man and left another area resident in hospital with serious injuries.

Bob Thomas, 44, a former volunteer/part-time Halton Hills firefighter, was pronounced dead at the scene, north of Five Sideroad. Thomas was the passenger in a Chevrolet driven by his friend Kellie Thompson, 35, also of Georgetown.

Thompson suffered serious injuries and was airlifted to St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto where at press time she was still an in-patient.

Halton Police say the collision occurred shortly after 9:15 p.m. when a southbound Honda driven by Kristie Johnson, 21, of Mississauga crossed the centre line and struck the northbound vehicle Thomas and Thompson were in.

Johnson suffered non-life threatening injuries and was taken to hospital. She has since been released.

Police say alcohol was not a factor in the crash that resulted in the closure of Ninth Line for several hours.

At press time, no charges had been laid.

Thomas, a volunteer with Halton Hills Fire Protection and Prevention Services for 12 years until he retired from the department in 2004, had been a full-time firefighter for the City of Vaughan since Oct. 1998.

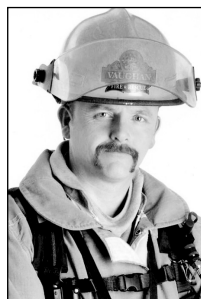
"He was a very quiet, diligent, unassuming person, always smiling, very good to work with, just a solid team player and liked by everybody," said Halton Hills Fire Chief Brent Marshall.

Vaughan Deputy Chief Glenn Duncan also remembers Thomas' smile, and his "great sense of humour."

"Our highest compliment is to say someone is a good firefighter, and Bob was a good firefighter," said Duncan.

For the firefighters on Thomas' crew, "it's a lot like losing a brother," said Duncan.

He said Thomas had developed a specialty in hazardous



ROBERT THOMAS

material response and was focused on the maintenance of the equipment.

"Bob loved being a firefighter. It was a life dream and his passion," said a family friend who didn't want her name published. She said Bob and Jackie had been married 12 years.

He was involved with the Canadian Vintage Motorcycle Group and owned a vintage Norton motorcycle and a Harley-Davidson.

He was born in Liverpool, England, the friend said, and before becoming a firefighter Thomas worked as a helicopter mechanic with the Canadian Air Force, then as a machinist in Mississauga and Woodbridge.

The friend said Thomas was "returning home from a day out" when the collision occurred.

Police are still investigating and anyone with information is asked to call Det. Const. Steve Anderson at 905-878-5511 ext. 2380.

Thomas is survived by his wife Jackie and brother Bill. Visitation will be from 7 to 9 p.m. today (Wednesday) at J.S. Jones & Son Funeral Home. The funeral will be Thursday at 11 a.m. in the funeral home chapel.

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New Studio Open House
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This Saturday March 22, 12-5 pm
66 Main Street South
Downtown Georgetown
I look forward to seeing you!