

# Local councillors wanted charges to be region-wide New area-specific DCs approved

**MELANIE HENNESSEY**  
Special to The IFP

After several hours of debate and many failed motions, Halton Regional Council approved a new batch of development charges (DCs) for Halton and discounts for some of the fees.

At its meeting last Wednesday, council endorsed charging area-specific DCs— staff had recommended region-wide— that bring about double-digit percentage increases for most of the rates.

It also supported giving DC discounts of about 30 per cent to manufacturing, office and warehouse developments.

The lost revenues from the new discount will add about \$10 onto the typical tax bill. Combine that with the mandatory DC exemptions the Region must grant under the Province's Development Charges Act and the discretionary exemptions already made for things like agriculture uses and it equates to around \$70 for the average household based on a \$300,000 assessment. This is up from the \$53.60 the typical homeowner has paid over the past several years to cover DC discounts.

Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette said he was "disappointed" with the decision on the DCs.

Bonnette said Halton Hills councillors were supporting a region-wide rate.

"We (Halton Hills) have the lowest industrial/residential ratio in Halton. This isn't going to help it at all."

The mayor said he was "concerned we may have just priced ourselves out of the market," and keeping incentives for the whole period would have encouraged people to invest here.

Halton Hills Regional Councillor Jane Fogal said she believes the discount should have been kept in place for the entire two-year period "in order to be competitive and attract industrial development to the 401 Corridor."

"Even discounted, our DCs would be the highest in the GTA," said Fogal.

She believes the process at the Region was "hijacked by Oakvillegreen who settled on the mantra that development should pay for itself."

"In my opinion these folks are killing the goose that laid the golden egg. When business investment dries up and they are wondering where their kids are going to work, maybe they will come around."

Halton Hills Regional Councillor Clark Somerville said the new DCs are "not perfect."

*'In my opinion these folks are killing the goose that laid the golden egg.'*

—**HALTON HILLS WARDS 3/4 REGIONAL COUNCILLOR JANE FOGAL**



"We're still going to have a lot of challenges," said Somerville. "I would like to have seen us be more competitive to make Halton the destination of choice for all kinds of commercial and industrial development."

Halton residents turned out in full force at a Region meeting earlier to voice their dissatisfaction with how the discounts will affect their taxes.

While only a small handful of citizens spoke at Wednesday's meeting, both Kurt Koster of Burlingtongreen and Burlington resident Tom Muir urged council to defer the DCs by one month to hold further public meetings for residents on the issue.

"The whole process has been dominated by the development industry," contended Koster, who noted the request was also supported by Oakvillegreen.

Commissioner of Corporate Services and Treasurer Jane MacCaskill said it's important for the process to proceed, since the current DC bylaw will expire in August and it's preferable to have the new bylaw passed before then.

She also noted that a public workshop and public meetings have already been held on the issue, in addition to 14 stakeholder meetings.

"We conducted the process openly and transparently," she emphasized.

Oakville resident Brian Burton also spoke and claimed that Region staff was "beat up" and "overwhelmed" by developers' lobbying during the DC process.

Halton CAO Pat Moyle defended his staff, saying that the finance department "cannot be overwhelmed."

"They are extremely professional, very competent and very diligent," he said.

Council heard once again from the

development community and local chambers of commerce.

Lyn Townsend, who represents the Halton Industrial Development Group, asked council to extend the 30 per cent discount to March 31, 2010. The discount is slated to be partially phased out by next April and then fully phased out in 2010.

Both the Oakville and Milton chambers of commerce asked for the same extension.

Townsend reiterated the development community's position that the high DCs will act as a deterrent for businesses looking to set up shop in Halton.

After hearing from the delegates, regional councillors went on to make a series of motions about the DCs, most of which were defeated.

Council ultimately supported the area-specific DCs and the discounts that'll be phased out.

DCs are levied by municipalities to recover growth-related costs associated with things like roads, water and sewer infrastructure needed to service new development.

The new DCs are expected to cover 78 per cent of development costs, or \$56 million per year, leaving 22 per cent to be paid by the taxpayers, or \$15 million.

Currently the Region charges Halton-wide DCs for roads and general services and area-specific DCs for water and wastewater, with the latter fees being higher in Halton Urban Structure Plan (HUSP) areas where rapid development is taking place, like the 401 Corridor.

Now that the area-specific charges are continuing, the cost to develop a home in a HUSP area will go from \$22,752 to \$28,864 and from \$13,677 in a non-HUSP area to \$23,764.

The price for a retail development in a HUSP area will rise from \$12.09 per square foot to \$14.79, while non-HUSP retail will pay \$11.23 per square foot, up from the current \$10.36.

Manufacturing, office and warehousing businesses will have to fork over a discounted rate of \$10.74 per square foot in HUSP areas, up from \$9.59, and \$7.18 per square foot in non-HUSP areas, which is down slightly from the current \$7.85. Once the discounts are phased out though, these fees will be the same as those for retail developments.

The new DC bylaw comes into effect on August 18.

—With files from Lisa Tallyn, staff writer

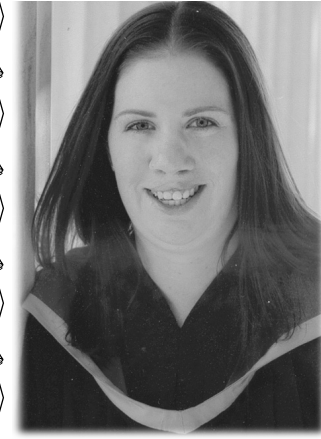


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