

# Tax fighters will continue to battle against unfair assessments, taxes

By FRANCES NIBLOCK  
The New Tanner

Armed with scathing proof that Ontario's assessment corporation makes mistakes, a group of Acton tax fighters will continue to battle for municipal property tax fairness.

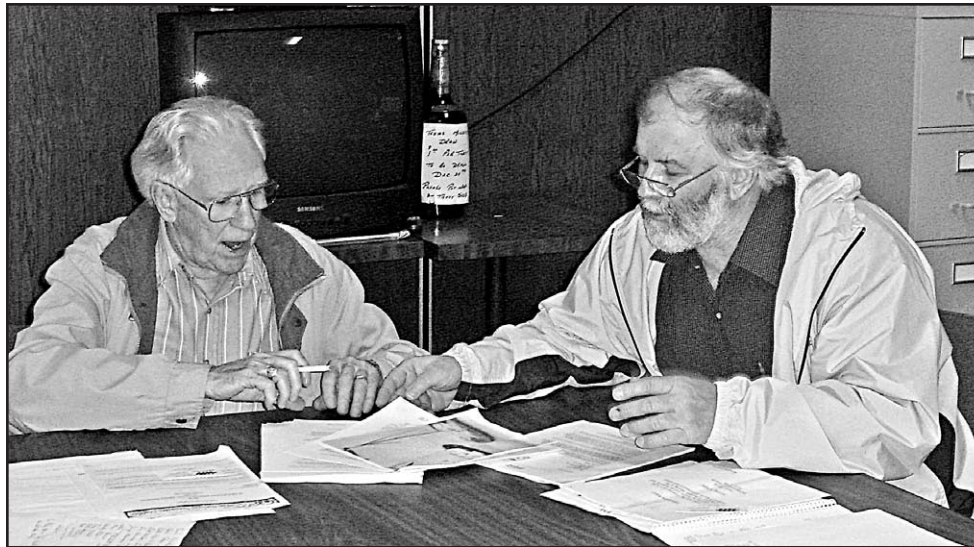
While members of the Halton Hills Homeowners Assessment Association should be happy with a recent Ombudsman's report calling for a massive overhaul in the way the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) assesses property values, assessment expert John Hogg said they are still facing a system "that doesn't work."

The assessment value given a property by MPAC is combined with the municipal tax rate to determine how much is owned in property taxes, and the perceived unfairness of the system led to formation of the local tax group, whose concerns were verified by the Ombudsman's report.

MPAC attempts to come up with an assessment that shows what a willing seller would pay to a willing buyer – pricing a property at its current market value, using computer models and comparing sales prices of similar properties and adjusting for differences like location, upgrades and size.

Hogg told the 20 people who attended last Thursday's Association meeting at the Acton Legion that they must "hold the government's feet to the fire" to make sure MPAC doesn't continue with the culture that allowed the "cloak and dagger behaviour" and "cutthroat manoeuvring around property owners" identified in the Ombudsman's report.

Hogg stressed that since the Ombudsman said it was Queen's Park's job to decide if MPAC was the best way to value proper-



**ASSESSMENT FIGHTERS:** At a meeting last Thursday at the Acton Legion, members of the Halton Hills Homeowners Assessment Association, including founder Mac Sprowl (left) and expert John Hogg, said they are determined to use a recent scathing Ombudsman's report to force changes in the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation that values properties determine taxes in Ontario. – Frances Niblock photo

ties, they must "invoke our views" on the appropriate politicians.

"I would suggest that what we really need to do is to get a groundswell right across this province to have the legislators change the system to what we want and to have it operate as we think it should, as citizens of this province," said Hogg, who works for a private property assessment company.

"I think we really ought to put MPAC's feet to the fire. I think they ought to have competition and municipalities should be able to pick and choose who does assessment for them," Hogg said, noting that Halton Region pays MPAC over \$6-million annually to supply it with the assessment data needed to calculate tax bills.

The Ombudsman made 22 recommenda-

tions and MPAC agreed to immediately apply 18 of them leaving four for further review, including the biggest one, according to Hogg, that would switch the onus from the property owner to MPAC to prove the value of a property.

"That would make a much better, fairer system," he said.

Acton Councillor Mike O'Leary, who said he was personally looking for substantial changes in MPAC that he doesn't see coming from the Ombudsman's report, urged the group to keep the momentum with a resolution to Town Council and a public relations campaign, including letters to editors of major newspapers.

"We have an (provincial) election coming in October, and the time to do something is

right now... it's not too soon to start writing to the candidates..." O'Leary said, reminding the group they have "very responsive" Town and Regional Councils and if the committee feels that municipalities should take back the job of assessing properties, that's what the group should say in a delegation to both councils.

Nassagaweya resident Jennifer Minogue came to the meeting looking for advice after MPAC's assessed value of her 20-acre rural property with a house jumped by 37 per cent, much higher than nicer neighbouring properties.

She ended up getting the name of a private tax assessment company that, for one-half of any eventual tax savings would take on appeals with the Assessment Review Board on behalf of homeowners.

After losing two assessment appeals in attempts to handle his case himself, Association member Ron Trimble used the private company twice, successfully appealing the taxes on his 10-acres of land in rural Halton Hills, saving \$1,800 in taxes.

When Nina and Steve Palichuk moved to their rural Acton property they were paying several hundred dollars in taxes – their latest assessment pushed their tax bill to \$4,000.

"All of my pension is going to pay the taxes – there will be people who will not be able to afford their homes if something is not done," Mrs. Palichuk said, adding they successfully appealed their assessment twice, but it was "very hard on the nerves," her husband Steve said.

The Halton Hills Homeowners Assessment Association hopes to make a presentation – with a proposed resolution calling for action – at the May 9 Town Council meeting.

## Nine new Halton police officers are welcomed

Nine new police officers were welcomed to the Halton Regional Police Service at an impressive ceremony at Halton Region council chambers on Thursday, April 13. Three of the new officers have been assigned to No. 1 District, Georgetown and Acton, while the remainder have been assigned to Oakville and Burlington, including Constable Derek Andrews of Acton.

Local officers include:

**Constable David Evans** who was raised in Brampton, earned his Bachelor's Degree from the University of Toronto, in Geography with a minor in Physical Anthropology. David is an active volunteer with the Canadian Cancer Society and has been with Big Brothers and Sisters of Peel for six years.

**Constable Patricia Ross** was born and raised in Kincardine. She attended



**Chief Alger welcomed new officers to service**

Conestoga College in 2001, graduating from the Police Foundations program with Honours in April 2003. She previously worked at Bruce Power near Kincardine on the Nuclear Response Team. While there, Patricia spent two months training in various firearms and special tactic with members of the OPP Tactical Response Unit.

**Constable Tom Hockney** was born and raised in Ham-

ilton. In 1998 he attended Mohawk College enrolled in the Law and Security Administration program where he graduated with Honours. Tom is currently enrolled at McMaster University as a part-time student where he is finishing a History degree. He has four years prior policing experience with the Metro Toronto Police Service.

**Constable Derek Andrews** is assigned to Burlington. Derek was raised in Acton. During his high school years he was involved in the Air Cadet program where he attained the rank of Warrant Officer Second Class. He attended Confederation College in Thunder Bay, graduating with a diploma in Aircraft Maintenance Technology. He achieved his M1 Category Aircraft Maintenance Engineers Licence.



**HORN OF PLENTY:** An item of non-perishable food or a free-will cash donation to help Acton's FoodShare foodbank buy food is the price to hear the Acton Citizens Band, including Hayley Burgess, perform a concert at the Christian Reformed Church at 2 p.m. on Sunday. – Frances Niblock photo