

Compromise on Official plan pleases most local councillors

By Frances Niblock

A compromise offered by Halton Hills resulted in unanimous approval of the Regional Official Plan Amendment No. 38, also known as ROPA 38, last Wednesday at Halton Council. The updated Official Plan will be the blueprint for growth and development until 2031, when Halton will grow to 780,000 people, a two-thirds increase.

In response to the province's Places to Grow and Greenbelt legislation, ROPA 38 integrates sustainable growth in Halton's blueprint for the future by planning for healthy and complete communities, creating a natural heritage system and supporting agriculture while limiting urban sprawl and making growth pay for itself.

The concept of the natural heritage system caused a lot of angry debate and frustration among Halton Hills politicians and some rural landowners. The natural heritage system was initially proposed as an overlay on a map, but at the committee level the move was to designate the natural heritage system – putting restrictions on 36 per cent of Halton's land that was not part of the protected

green belt of the Niagara Escarpment Area.

Local farmers were worried the natural heritage designation would add another layer of unnecessary bureaucracy on their land and developers who have bought prime agricultural land were worried their plans to build would have to be scrapped.

The compromise accepted by Halton Council was one offered two weeks ago by Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette who was glad that the Town was able to get its point across to other Halton councillors.

"We had three votes going into the meeting and the vote ended up 21-0. We went in as underdogs, so we are very pleased with the outcome," Bonnette said on Saturday.

He said the opposition to the Town's position on the natural heritage stemmed from bad past history in Oakville.

"Quite frankly, when Oakville developed in the 1990's they never had a natural heritage system so they lost it all. They thought that we were trying to abolish the natural heritage system, but when they really understood what we were trying to do, they could support it," Bonnette said.

Following acrimonious debate at the Halton committee level where Bonnette said their common sense resolutions were "laughed at" and then a press release from Burlington's mayor accusing Halton Hills of not wanting to protect the environment followed by a blast of e-mails stating the same information, Bonnette was left wondering what the Town's role in the Region is.

He said that issue has been resolved in his mind.

"We've come together and they (Halton Council) listened. The rift is settled and the environment is protected."

During Council debate last Wednesday, Bonnette said that it had been a long journey and an emotional one.

"It was almost like a great divide between the north and the south (of Halton). Maybe not everybody got everything but at least we're a lot closer than we were two weeks ago," Bonnette said.

Regional Acton Councillor Clark Somerville was a little more restrained.

"I'm not going to be



MUSICAL TREAT: That's the Acton Citizen's Band (On the Run), led by George Elliott, filling the Sobeys air with resounding joy, in second stop of last Wednesday night's Acton tour. – Charles Tysoe photo

the one to say, 'Let's hold hands and sing Kumbaya,' because I don't think we're there yet," Somerville said asking if they could have dialogue and stop the "schoolyard bullying."

It is anticipated that ROPA 38 will be challenged at the Ontario Municipal Board by developers worried that greenfield development on land zoned agricultural and rural in Milton and Georgetown and will be stalled by intensification guidelines and by environmentalists who are worried about urban

sprawl in greenfield development.

Under Halton's preferred growth options, Halton Hills is to be home to an additional 20,000 people by 2031, and lo-

cal environmentalists are worried they won't be able to be serviced by well water, opening the door to the so-called big pipe, or water from Lake Ontario.

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