



GOING GREEN: Staff and members McKenzie Smith Bennett's school council were in attendance on Sunday morning to do some planting. MSB received a grant of \$1,000 as part of the Eco-School program. Green thumbs include, from left: Principal Sharon French, Vice-Principal Erin Bedard, Vice-Principal Dan Albrecht, Bill French, Keith Rupp, Tay King and (front) David Bedard. — *Denise Paulsen photo*

Talk the Walk

Older adults and people with disabilities invited to help shape walkable communities

Many communities in Ontario are looking to become age-friendly, and one way to do that is to ensure communities are built so older adults can safely and easily walk to the places they want to go. The Seniors West Planning and Education Advisory group and the North Halton Injury Prevention group are co-hosting a workshop designed as a first step to creating a more walkable Acton for older adults who may or may not use mobility devices such as wheelchairs, canes, and scooters.

The Halton Region Health Department delivers a community-based program called walkON, which educates the public about walkable communities and supports communities that want to take action towards becoming more walkable. The two groups contacted the Health Department for support in the delivery of the walkability workshop. Since then, the Town of Halton Hills, Links2Care,

and the Halton Regional Police have also partnered for this workshop.

"We're happy to be working with residents to identify and address local issues that may prevent people from walking, cycling and using our trails," said Matt Roj, Traffic Coordinator at the Town of Halton Hills. "This is perfect timing for the Town to hear from this demographic about what the priorities are. This way we can incorporate the feedback into our plans." Roj added. "We hope to repeat this workshop for Georgetown. We see Acton as phase one and Georgetown as phase two."

All Acton residents are invited to attend the workshop and consider a number of factors that affect their ability to get around without driving. For example, the condition of local sidewalks, whether there are local destinations such as shops nearby, and how to make routes safer and more pleasant for walking.

"I've been learning a lot about walkable communities and I see many benefits for seniors," explained Shirley Broostad of the Seniors West Planning and Education Advisory. "It's about safety, and it's about being able to get to the doctor's office, Giant Tiger, and recreation facilities," she said. "Walkable communities don't isolate seniors, they connect them because people are more likely to be out and recognize and meet others. It's really about our quality of life."

All Acton residents are invited to attend the workshop on Thursday June 10 at the Trinity United Church on 70 Mill Street East, Acton from 9:30 a.m. to 3:45 p.m.

Future commercial and retail needs studied

Acton's retail sector performs as a "slowly maturing service centre tributary" to the larger Georgetown market, with spending limited to convenience categories including drugs/personal care, general merchandise, pet supply, hardware and grocery.

The updated shopping information was presented to Town councillors last week by consultant Scott Morgan, whose retail commercial demand study of the Acton and Georgetown trade areas will help local politicians determine how much additional commercial floorspace is needed in light of plans for Halton Hills to grow by 20,000 people by 2031.

The study found that Acton has 349,497-square-feet of retail/commercial floorspace – an increase of 100,000-square-feet since the last study in 2001 – with most of the increase concentrated in the services, food stores, general merchandise, apparel, furniture and pharmacies and personal care stores.

A telephone survey of 165 Acton households produced information on spending patterns, local capture rates – how much Acton money is spent in Acton and out of town – and spending destinations.

The study found that:

- the average per capita household income in

urban Acton is 3.6 per cent below the provincial average, and in rural Acton, it is 11.3 per cent above the provincial average, a decline from 14 per cent above the provincial average in 2001

- Acton vacancies are very low – 2,230-square-foot – down about 70 per cent (or 5,200-square-foot) since 2001.

- while 90-plus per cent of money Acton residents spend on drugs/personal care and general merchandise is spent in town, only between five and 15 per cent of money spent for furniture/appliances, gifts, cards and novelty supplies is spent in town

- all of the money spent by Acton residents for 23 categories – everything from department store purchases to shoes, jewelry, electronics, art and sporting goods – is spent out of town

- Acton will need between five and 7.3-acres of new commercial land by 2031 – modest require-

ments that will not warrant designating more land at this time

As for Georgetown, Morgan said the existing Wal-Mart is undersized, and since on-site expansion is not possible, the long-term plan could include relocation, possibly in connection with another grocery store. There is also potential for a big box store in the Highway 401-James Snow Parkway area.

Acton Councillor Mike O'Leary asked staff what weight would be given to Morgan's report when it came to designating commercial/retail land in the Official Plan, expressing concerns that the study be used for background information and not be a "boiler plate."

Planning Director Bruce MacLean assured councillors that the updated information would be used as a point of discussion so the study could be implemented to meet future needs.

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