

Trustee Candidates have their say

After the October 25 municipal election, there will be one, not two trustees representing Georgetown and Acton students, schools and parents at the Halton District School Board, where a distribution based on population cost Halton Hills a seat.

Both incumbents – Gerry Ockenden of Acton, who

was recently appointed school board chair until the election, and Gillian Tuck Kutarna of Georgetown, want reelection. They are challenged by Mandy Kerfoot of rural Acton, who runs a distribution company with her mother, and sits on the parent council at Limehouse Public School.

The Halton Board has almost 50,000 students at 79 elementary and 16 secondary schools. The Halton Hills trustee will be responsible for 15 local schools.

We asked the candidates the following questions:

CANDIDATE	#1 - Faced with another staff recommendation to sell more school land, like the recent sale at McKenzie-Smith Bennett School, what would you do?	#2 - Many Acton parents feel the Board did not listen to their concerns with the recent MSB land sale. How would you ensure they have a voice?	#3 - What should voters know about you? What skills do you bring to the table to advocate for Acton students and parents?	#4 - What is your vision to ensure Acton students continue to receive the skills they need in a rapidly changing world?	#5 - If elected, you have four years. What do you want to accomplish?
<p>Mandy Kerfoot</p> 	<p>I would exhaust all other possibilities first, or see what kind of compromises could be arranged with the powers that be to ensure much needed green space around the schools is not sacrificed for the future, for a few dollars for today. With growth, it makes no sense to sell any lands with active schools, as it would cost the school board even more money if they had to buy new property to build a new school, instead of expanding an existing school on existing lands.</p>	<p>I would be in contact with school officials and the parent council as well as anyone else that requested information on such serious issues. I have started a facebook page under smcmandy@yahoo.ca for anyone to communicate with me online. Information is knowledge, which is why I am still baffled that the current school trustees ignored a 5,000-name petition to save the MSB lands. Acton is just as important as Georgetown Milton, Oakville and Burlington.</p>	<p>I am a passionate parent of three beautiful little girls with a direct stake in decisions made at the Halton Public School Board. I currently sit on Limehouse parent council; orchestrate the popular special lunch program. I sat on a non-profit gymnastic board with 1,000 members. I was not afraid to speak up and fight for what was right. Those that know me know I am persistent and can get the job done quickly, efficiently and am very resourceful.</p>	<p>What do the students need to succeed in school that they do not already have? That is something I am willing to find out by communicating with the schools and families. Our taxes contribute to the same things as the larger communities so we should be allowed equal access to all programs.</p>	<p>I would create a positive relationship with the schools and their families to rebuild lost trust from the recent MSB land sale. I would minimize stresses on school administrators so they can focus on enjoying and running an efficiently successful school instead of having to worry about red tape. Having open communication with parent councils and the community would certainly be a priority.</p>
<p>Gerry Ockenden</p> 	<p>It is difficult to take one component out of an equation and expect it to make sense. Land sales are only one component of a larger picture-the ability of the Halton District School Board to meet student accommodation needs. The Ministry will provide some money for new schools, but the Board has a funding obligation and right now that's through sale of surplus lands. If land sales are not the public's preferred option, then other solutions have to be sought and negotiated with the province.</p>	<p>The Board was very aware of the viewpoints from Acton citizens, parents and students. Many parents, as well as the Mayor were invited to the Board to speak, and all 11 voting trustees heard the issues at many board and committee meetings. Halton District School Board Trustees are each elected within a specific riding, representing those constituents who elected them, but also maintaining a balance to meet the needs of the entire Board.</p>	<p>Being an advocate for students, focusing on student achievement, and ensuring our children are prepared for the future is the single-most important role of a trustee. That mandate is outlined in Bill 177, and is applicable to everyone who assumes the role of trustee for Halton students.</p>	<p>The Halton District School Board is a provincial leader in many areas affecting student achievement. Pathways is just one example, offering transition programs, Specialist High Skill Major training and five distinctive "pathways" to future success. Continuing to place priority on these and other successful student achievement initiatives is critical to ensure continued student success.</p>	<p>We are all life-long learners, I will continue to advocate for students, encourage student success and celebrate student achievement by recognizing all the partnerships that fuel these accomplishments. Working collaboratively with the other 10 elected trustees to further these goals will be our collective challenge for the next four years.</p>
<p>Gillian Tuck Kutarna</p> 	<p>I would urge that such a step not be taken. Effective representation means getting involved in an issue right from the beginning. A Trustee should build relationships with Board staff, so that when issues affecting their schools come up, they are consulted in the early stages, and continually throughout the process. Strong leadership would also include facilitating meaningful community consultation, and bringing that input to the prompt attention of staff and other Trustees.</p>	<p>The community's school board representative should be ready to take the lead on school board issues, and be a voice for their community. An experienced Trustee can also provide facts, context, and strategy, based on their knowledge of how decisions get made at the Board, so that involved parents target the right people with the right message.</p>	<p>For the last four years, I served as the Trustee for Halton Hills, Wards 3 and 4, and for two of those years, I was Chair of the Board. As an Education, Poverty and Family lawyer, I have made it my career to advocate for the rights of children and low-income families. I have fought for construction of Gardiner Public School in Georgetown South, renovations to the Georgetown District High School, the addition of the Field of Dreams, and the reduction of portables from 21 down to three.</p>	<p>I believe we need more on-line learning opportunities, to provide greater course options and more scheduling flexibility. The Board is expanding its Specialist High Skills Majors program, which allows students to focus their courses on specialized areas of study. It will be important to consider Acton as a centre for more of these certificate programs</p>	<p>Last year I brought forward a motion which asked the school board to eliminate course fees, and I would also like to see the Board review how extracurricular activities are funded. In the last term I called for the Board to take a leadership role on environmental issues, including building new schools to energy efficient standards. In the coming term I will advocate for retrofitting older schools to increase their water and energy efficiency.</p>