

# Chief says he needs more to sign provincial deal

"I hope as our municipality grows we'll become more and more able to meet this. Until then, I think we'd be suggesting a level of comfort that we're not prepared to meet."

CINDY LUNAU



By IRENE GENTLE  
The Champion

The Milton Fire Department should refuse to sign on the dotted line, said Fire Chief Harold Penson.

At least for now.

Until the Milton department plumps up its full-time staff, it can't afford to sign a letter of agreement with the provincial government, Chief Penson told the Town's community services committee recently.

Queen's Park has been urging the Milton department to join in a tiered response program with ambulance services for some time, he explained.

Tiered response means the fire department would be routinely dispatched along with ambulance services in order to perform medical assists.

This would likely happen in cases where there is a difficulty or absence of breathing, unconsciousness, severe bleeding or heart attack.

The fire department would also be sent out to assist at vehicle collisions.

Even without an agreement, the Milton Fire Department has been rushing to emergency sites whenever there is a known delay in ambulance response time.

Lately the pressure to make a deal has become more formal, with the Ministry of Health issuing a letter of agreement for the department to sign.

Trouble is, it is unlikely the Milton department would be able to keep up its side of the bargain, said Chief Penson.

The reason is staffing. Ensuring speedy

response times means there has to be 24-hour complement ready to hit the road.

Currently, the Milton force has only seven full-time firefighters. All of them work the day shift.

The night hours are covered by 45 part-timers. That means when a call comes in, they respond from their homes.

Adverse weather conditions and the drive to the station can seriously handicap the department's race against the clock during emergency calls.

"There's a delay when staff have to come to the fire hall and put on their gear," Chief Penson said.

Under those circumstances, Chief Penson said he believes the department should not sign the provincial offer.

He has handed the matter over to the Town's solicitor for further study.

That move sat well with Councillor Cindy Lunau, who didn't want the department taking on more than it could reasonably handle.

"I hope as our municipality grows we'll

• see DEAL on page 9

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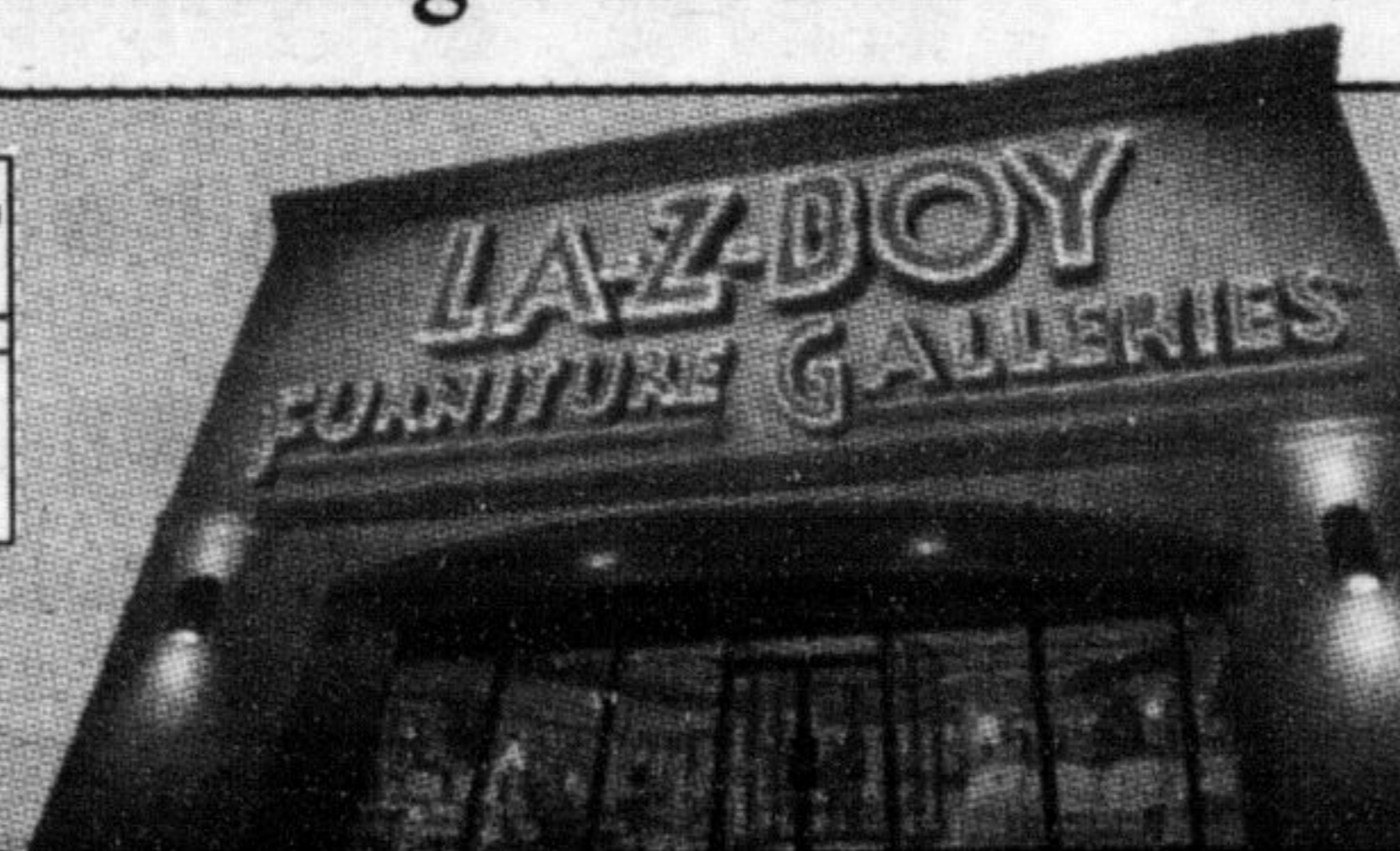
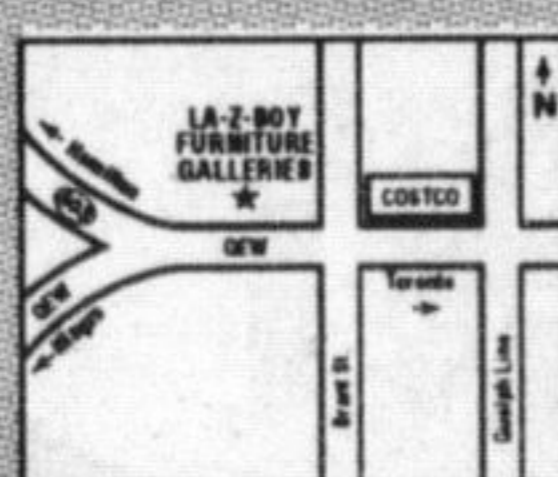
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