

School development fees lower than usual

By DENNIS SMITH

Special to The Champion

Development charges used to fund new school sites have been approved at lower rates than originally proposed.

Halton's public and Catholic boards approved new Education Development Charges (EDC) bylaws recently.

The new bylaws will be in effect for 15 years, with a rate structure set for five years.

The lawyer reporting to school boards on the matter described the final agreement as a reasonable compromise.

"This addresses many, but not all, of the issues and there was a certain give and take," said Brad Teichman.

"The lion's share of sectors are satisfied."

He noted the Urban Development Institute of Halton and the Greater Toronto Homebuilders Association had agreed not to appeal the bylaw.

And since the bylaw changes were favourable to parties who expressed concerns earlier, Mr. Teichman suggested no further public meetings would be necessary.

The EDCs approved are \$874 per residential unit for the Halton District School Board and 15 cents per square foot of gross floor area for non-residential developments. For the Catholic board the charges are \$689 per residential unit and 19 cents per square foot for non-residential developments.

Board members were told educational development charges were reduced because school capacity numbers did not match actual inventories and because larger schools are being built on new land sites.

Overall EDC rates were reduced \$113 per unit for the public school board and \$225 per unit for the Catholic school board.

Residential developers will bear 85 per cent of EDCs, while non-residential developers will assume 15 per cent. The previous ratio was 75-25.

The ratio does not affect the dollars school boards will have to purchase properties, but it is an issue for developers, said Lynda Townsend, lawyer for UDI Halton and Greater Toronto Homebuilders.

She said the 10-15 per cent range is the compromise area. Ms Townsend said attaching the charge to residential units is a good approach because if construction slumps, there will be less need for schools anyway.

The lawyer said there were intense negotiations and parties involved wanted to meet the provincial government's August 31 deadline for the bylaw, without resorting to appeals.

"It's better to compromise than fight," said Ms Townsend. "The development community is very supportive of schools being built. A community is not complete unless there are schools."

Concern over credit provided for redevelopment of burnt or demolished buildings was expressed by Karl Gonnens of the Hamilton-Halton Home Builders Association.

He said more than the two-year time limit is needed for the redevelopment credit.

Mr. Teichman noted the limits are two years for residential redevelopment but five years for non-residential redevelopment.

The public school board made one amendment to its bylaw — it will no longer exempt non-profit alterna-

tive schools from Education Development Charges.

Burlington Trustee David Bird said he proposed the amendment because of the provincial funding formula, which provides grants on a per pupil basis.

"Should parents pay taxes and have students in other forms of education, that's fine," said Mr. Bird. "But looking at it as a business, by pulling students out, that's costing us money."

Oakville Trustee Marianne Hawthorne said it would be mean-spirited to remove the exemption.

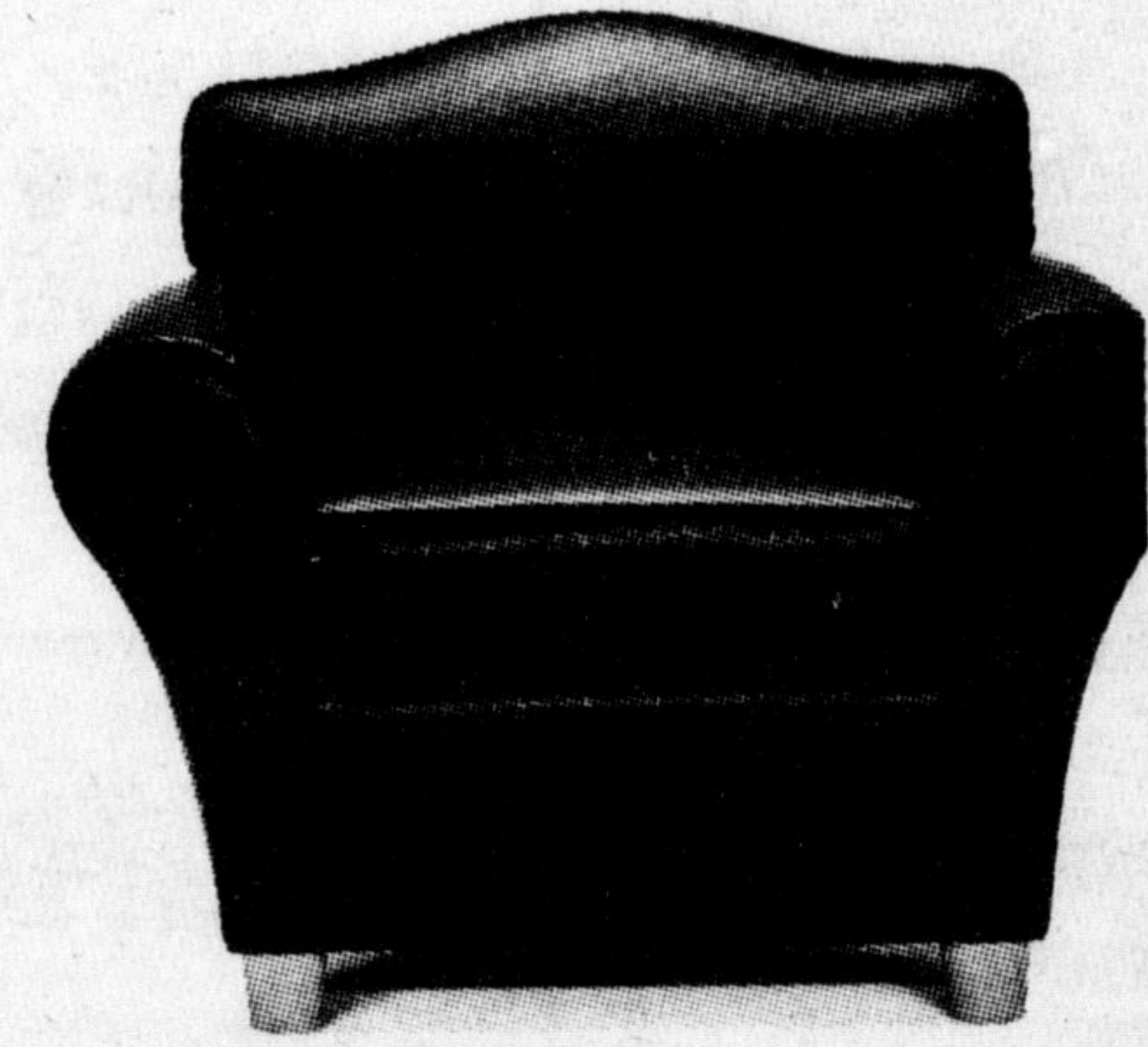
"We've benefited in the past from these schools through taxes paid (by parents)," she said. "I don't feel it's the right thing to do. They're providing alternatives in education."

The board voted in favour of the amendment, with Ms Hawthorne being the lone dissenter.

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