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# Region gives green light to deaf day program and driving range

By IRENE GENTLE  
The Champion

The first pull in a tug of war between prime agricultural land and a program for deaf adults with special needs ended with the deaf community still standing.

The Region's planning committee voted to expand a day facility run by Bob Rumball Associations for the Deaf (BRAD) near Campbellville Road and Regional Road 25 October 4.

But it also approved the construction of a driving range on 22 acres of what some consider to be choice agricultural land. The range would be used to raise revenue for BRAD programs.

The proposal was approved by Council Wednesday. Further approvals are needed from the Town of Halton Hills.

Since nearby golf courses don't offer public driving ranges, getting into that business seemed appropriate, said BRAD representative Brad Saunders.

"The day program isn't viable for us without significant additional funding," he

said. "Taking care of an existing need right on our doorstep made sense to us. We saw this proposal as adding value to our neighbourhood."

The proponent contended the driving range would be placed on land too wet to be prime, and that the proposal wouldn't seriously impact agriculture in the area.

Jim Marshall, a tenant farmer on the land, said damp conditions have prevented him from planting in about three of the last 12 years.

### Loss of farm land feared

The site is also near an industrial zone, housing establishments such as the Hardball Cafe. But farm land will be lost in this proposal, said Burlington Councillor John Taylor. "What you're doing is essentially expanding the industrial boundary," he said. "You're compounding the loss of farm land."

Ed Fothergill, a planner for the applicant, asked committee to weigh that loss with the gain the project would bring to the community.

"We appreciate there's a trade-off to be made. There will be some loss of agricultural land," he said. "We've tried to minimize that. We feel it's a worthwhile project."

Halton staff recommended that the driving range portion of the proposal be denied, noting the proponents didn't look hard enough for a more suitable location.

"They've limited their study area to a two kilometre area," said Halton senior planner Steve Stone.

But exceptions sometimes have to be made, said Halton Chair Joyce Savoline.

She complimented staff on their work, then brought the driving range back into

the game.

"I don't buy the argument that this land isn't good or usable. It is good and that makes it an even more difficult issue for me," said Ms Savoline. "But this is one of those times where I have to bow to balance."

Burlington Councillor Joan Lougheed agreed. "This case is clearly a unique situation. I think they've come up with a really creative idea."

But the worthiness of the proposal shouldn't impact what is a basic planning issue, countered Milton Councillor Barry Lee.

"I have difficulty looking at an application based on who the applicant is when in all probability, we wouldn't be recommending it if it was someone else," he said.

The driving range should be denied at least until the applicant takes a serious look elsewhere, agreed Oakville Councillor Rajneesh Sharda.

"I have to look at this as a planning issue and it seems to me there are options that should be explored," he said.

But councillors sometimes have to go outside of planning parameters to do the right thing, said Halton Hills Councillor Rick Bonnette.

"It's a planning issue, but once in a while you have to make it political as well," he said.

The Town of Halton Hills came under some fire during the debate, with Burlington Councillor Mike Wallace saying it should have made a decision on the application the Region did. "We're doing it backwards, in my opinion, and I'd like that not to happen again," he said. "I don't think they handled this very well."

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