

Exactly what's in store for our historical downtown?

Town, Chamber, and merchants planning ways to keep core alive

By IRENE GENTLE

The Champion

Ask a Main Street retailer what they'd like for Christmas this year and they just might say a booming downtown core that'll keep sizzling long after Milton's upcoming growth spurt nearly triples the current population.

And playing the role of Santa this year is the Town, which is busily planning ways to keep the downtown alive.

To accommodate the impending growth spurt, almost a million square feet of additional retail space will be needed.

That's more than double the 800,000 square feet already in existence.

The new retailers will run along an expanded downtown core, stretching from Bronte Street in the west to Thompson Road in the east.

To keep it hot, the Town has

"I think everyone looks to downtown Oakville, and I don't think it's outside the bounds of possibility or reality."

SANDY MARTIN

completed a Central District Business (CBD) plan, which outlines guidelines for growth in the area.

And currently in the works is a streetscape study, aimed at dealing with both the infrastructure and aesthetic needs of the retail strip.

Downtown retailers, building owners and Chamber of Commerce representatives have participated in the process, and if their input could be summed up in one word, it would be "parking," said Milton Chamber Executive Director Sandy Martin.

"And it was ever thus," she said. "The primary concern is parking."

Though placing a parking garage near Main or Mill streets has been suggested, the project would require mammoth amounts of cash that couldn't easily be recouped, said the Town's streetscape Project

Manager Ken McAlpine.

Parking discussions have also revolved around the best delivery of on-street parking, which involves taking a deeper look at the current sidewalk configurations.

Creating consistency between the historic Main Street retail strip and that which will spring up east of Ontario Street in the future is also a challenge.

Building height restrictions, currently at between two and four storeys in the historic area and set for no more than seven in the stretch east of Ontario, will help.

"I think the idea is to get commercial on the ground floor and office or even residential above it as you get further away," said Mr. McAlpine.

"It's a mix."

Streetscaping efforts such as tree-planting, benches and lighting will also aim for a compatible atmosphere.

"I think you have to have, as much as possible, a cohesive look," said Ms Martin.

But developers tackling the area will require some flexibility, and perfect matches won't likely occur.

"I'm sure the historic core will always maintain a separate identity," said Ms Martin.

"But that can enhance and complement."

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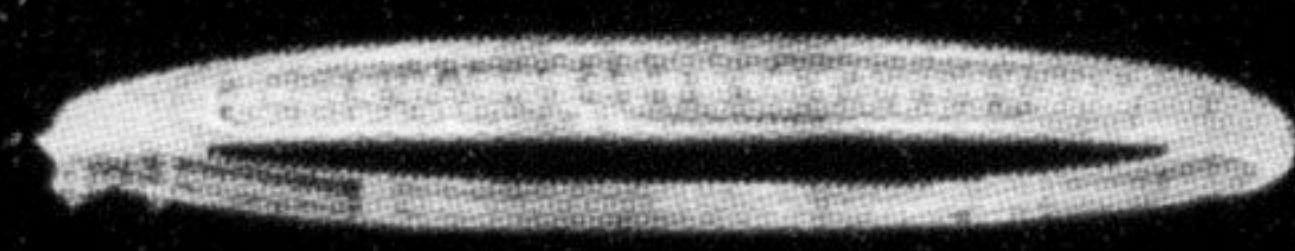
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