

Many farmers think golf course study for the birds

Some farmers fear restricting golf courses will lower their land values

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

Halton farmers took some swings at Halton's draft Golf Course Study at a statutory public meeting held at the Region earlier this month.

The plan aims to prevent golf courses from sprawling over prime agricultural land below the escarpment brow.

Instead, an amendment to the Regional Official Plan could direct new courses above the brow or to degraded lands such as brown fields, former landfill sites and abandoned quarries.

But some farmers feared that restricting golf courses would lower the price should they opt to sell their land upon retirement.

The farmers also blasted Halton's planning and public works committee January 10 for not sustaining local agriculture through planning initiatives such as adequate support services, including road shoulders wide enough to accommodate slow-moving farm vehicles.

Selling his land will likely be

more lucrative than keeping it, said Bob Merry of Merrybrooke Farms.

"It would make no sense for my son to even think about farming here," he said. "I feel you're saving the cart here and not worrying about the horse."

Some farmers talked about a future in which Canadians simply imported their food.

"The amount of food being produced is almost unbelievable," said Don Rowntree of Halton Hills. "We're more concerned with leaving the land the freedom that it has."

And Milton's Jack Proud said the land deemed prime in the study actually isn't.

"Anything in Halton I would have considered prime has been covered over," he said.

He objected to the report's endorsement by the Halton Agricultural Advisory Committee (HAAC).

"I'm here to tell you that HAAC in no way shape or form speak for me," he said. "I have no ill feelings about a golf course one way or another. People need recreation."

Mr. Proud also hinted that HAAC members rarely owned their own land or farmed large

parcels. That raised the hackles of HAAC Chair Jay Kitching, who supported the staff plan.

"I've just been told I'm a farmer of two or three acres who couldn't care less," he said angrily.

Mr. Kitching said he has trouble believing Halton could support an estimated demand for up to 42 new golf courses over the next 20 years, and noted that only golf courses are being restricted in the report.

"The only use it's limiting is golf courses in prime agricultural land," he said. "HAAC is of the belief we have to protect this agricultural land if we can."

Milton's Julie Barnes was another HAAC member who came out in support of the draft study.

"I think agricultural land should be protected. We can't rely on other countries for food," she told the committee. "That's all I have to say. Hooray. Go for it."

The meeting was for information only, so councillors weren't asked to make any decisions on what transpired.

Currently, there are 28 golf courses and five driving ranges in Halton, split equally between the rural and urban areas.

Of those, five are located above the escarpment brow.

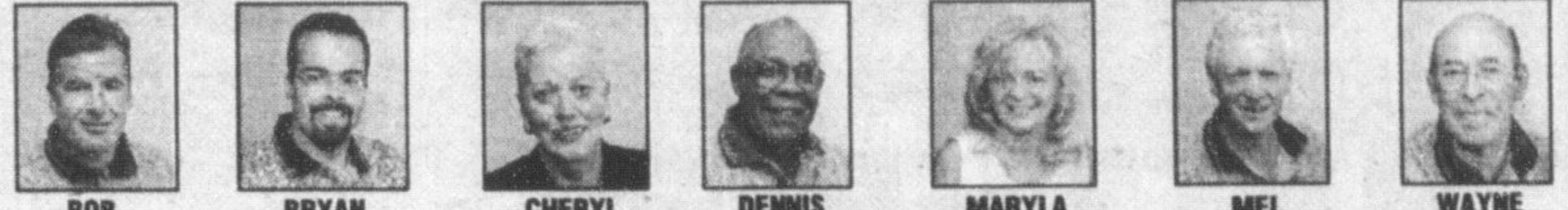
Another eight courses are currently proposed, six of which are slated for prime agricultural land.

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