

Residents with well problems push for connection to main water line

By **JASON MISNER**
The Champion

Frustrated residents are clamouring for Halton Region to hook them up to the lake-based regional water supply because the 'Big Pipe' has either contaminated their private wells or caused a major water shortage.

But that would be difficult to do, they were told by regional staff at a public meeting Tuesday night.

About 50 residents living along Regional Road 25 piled into Town Hall's Council Chambers to air concerns that their well water has been compromised since the massive 'Big Pipe' — which draws water from Lake Ontario to service Milton's new development areas — came on line in 2000.

Homeowners talked of how their water has been deemed undrinkable by the Region's health department, and that it's sandy, murky or smells bad.

Some people said they only use their well water to do basic things like washing clothes, and that they buy drinking water daily at filling stations in Milton. Jack DeGroot, who has lived at the corner of Regional Road and Henderson Road for 14 years, said he wants to be connected to the main water line.

"The water is going past our doors and we want to be hooked up. This is ridiculous," he said to loud applause.

John Vitetta, who organized the meeting, which was co-chaired by Mayor Gord Krantz and Ward 1 Councillor Rick Day, said residents "along Hwy. 25 are taking the blunt impact for growth and nobody is helping us out. But we don't want to blame anybody."

In an earlier interview, Patrick Murphy, Halton's commissioner of planning and public works, said the Region has recognized construction of the Big Pipe disrupted private wells.

Over the last two or so years, six property owners have called the Region about well problems. Wells were replaced and new treatment systems added. It cost the Region about \$50,000.

The biggest problem the pipe caused was the water shortage, he said. That happened because when the trench was built for the pipe, it "intercepted" the aquifer and drew water away from some wells. The idea was the water would rebound back to normal levels once the trench was filled.

Residents said at the meeting that didn't happen and they think the pipe has affected water quality. "Our objective is to solve these problems and from the work we're doing, we're not shying away from our responsibility," Mr. Murphy said.

Regional staff weren't invited to Tuesday's meeting because it was intended to get people to express their concerns and not to get into a blame-game with the Region. But Doug Inouye, Halton's acting director of engineering services, attended the meeting at the request of Halton Chair Joyce Savoline.

Ms Savoline said in an interview she asked staff to attend the meeting after reading an article about it in Tuesday's Champion. "It's always important to have staff present that have the expertise."

Mr. Inouye's presence proved fruitful since he was asked many questions. He took down everybody's names and phone numbers to follow up with over the next couple of weeks to pinpoint problems and causes.

The crowd was told the issue of connecting residents along Regional Road to the main water system isn't easy.

Mr. Inouye said the area of Regional Road 25 in Milton, between Burnhamthorpe and Derry roads, falls outside the urban boundary, and that means those rural areas aren't eligible for municipal water hook-ups.

That was determined through planning policies some years ago to prevent urban sprawl.

To reverse that, Halton council would have to make legislative changes to allow for lake-based water servicing into the area, Mr. Inouye said.

He said after the meeting the number of residents with well problems was "a total surprise to us." He said they knew of the six individuals who contacted the Region with well problems.

He said public works staff will be made aware of the concerns brought up at the meeting to see what can be done.

He noted it would be a lot of money to replace all of the wells if that was to be the solution. It costs about \$30 for every foot of new well drilled and a typical well is between 50 and 100 feet deep.

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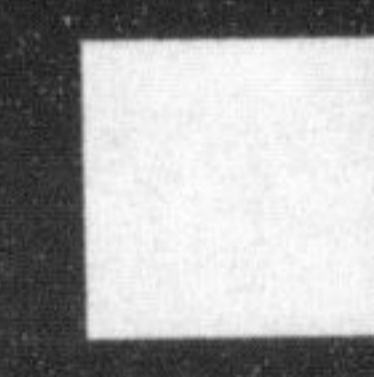
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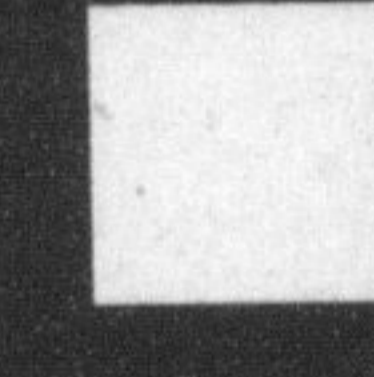
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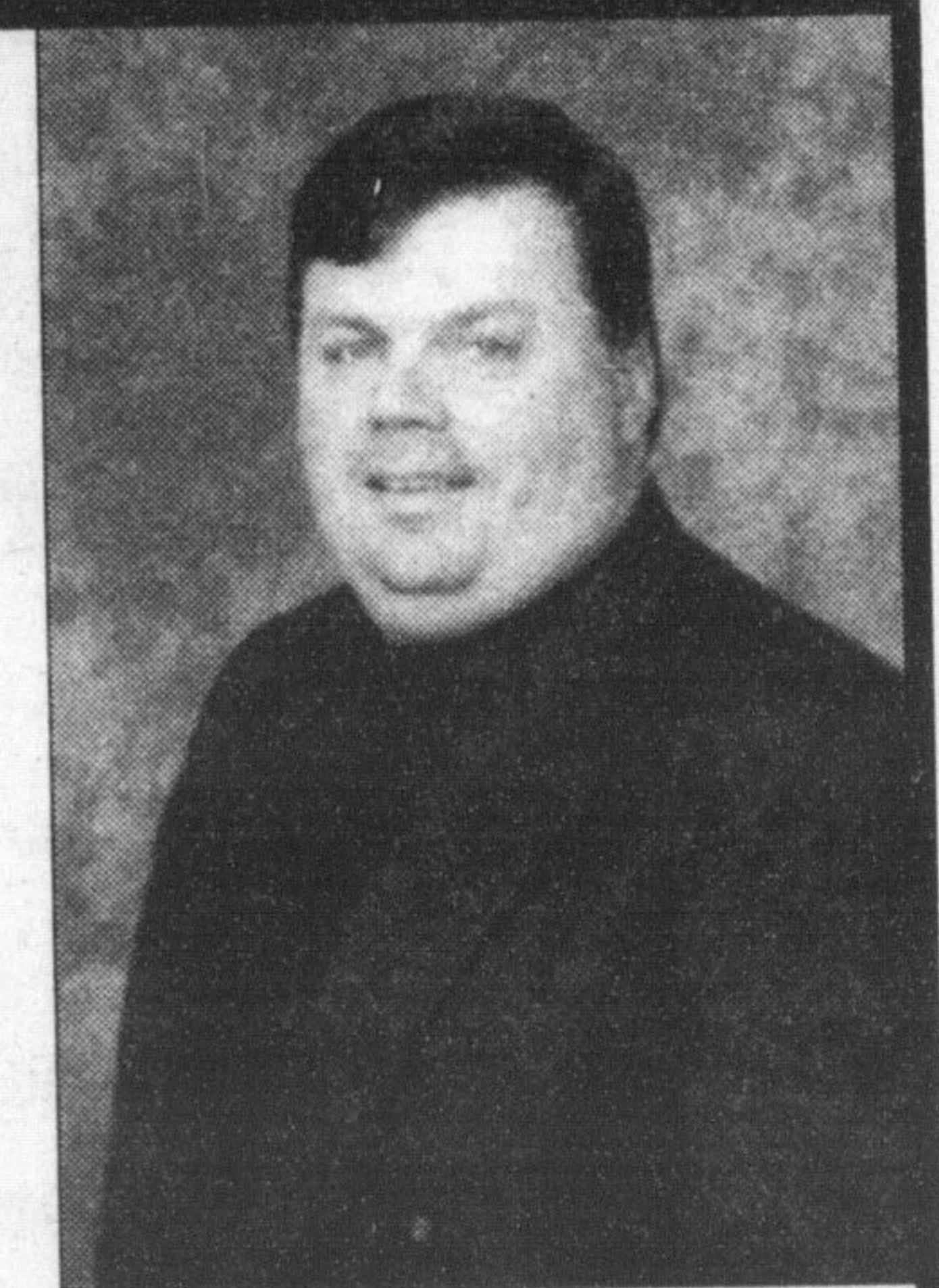
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