

Region against 'Transparency in Public Matters Act' proposal

Savoline calls it 'excessive measure'

By MELANIE HENNESSEY
The Champion

The Province's proposed 'Transparency in Public Matters Act' has ruffled some feathers at the Region, with the chairman deeming the bill to be an "excessive measure."

Now, Halton is letting the Province know it doesn't support the proposed legislation.

At its meeting Wednesday, regional council approved a resolution endorsing the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) position against the private member's bill that would, among other things, place additional restrictions on holding closed meetings and require all comments made in council to be recorded in the minutes.

"It (the bill) is trying to add even more transparency and even more public to our process. But I believe we are as public and transparent as we possibly can be," Regional Chairman Joyce Savoline said.

"We don't need these excessive measures to make us behave. I'm hoping that this fails in a very big way."

Ms Savoline also took exception to the fact the proposed bill doesn't apply to the other levels of government.

She noted while council sometimes has to go in camera, or meet behind closed doors, it's not because the Region is trying to hide something.

Oakville Mayor Ann Mulvale pointed out it's provincial legislation that sets out when municipalities are supposed to meet in camera, such as for human resource or property matters.

It was speculated at the council table that the bill has been brought forward due to an issue the Province may have with one municipality.

Ms Mulvale said if that's the case, the Province "already has more than adequate tools to deal with those issues."

While Oakville Councillor Fred Oliver said some municipalities used to operate behind closed doors from time to time, he doesn't think the legislation is necessary today.

"This, in my opinion, is 50 years too late," he said.

An alert issued by the AMO indicates it

feels if the bill passed, it would create conflicts with the Municipal Act.

It gives several examples, such as the definitions of meetings in the bill differ from the current act municipalities follow.

It also says, "Notice provisions in Bill 123 are much more prescriptive than what is being advocated for in the Municipal Act. The AMO and others have sought more flexibility for municipalities to determine when and how they give notice to best meet the needs of their residents. This could have resource implications for municipalities."

The alert notes that while the AMO supports the principles of open, transparent and accountable municipal governments, it's not in favour of the proposed legislation.

In addition to supporting the AMO's position against the bill, the resolution approved by regional council calls for a copy of a staff report on the issue to be forwarded to the four local municipalities for endorsement.

Melanie Hennessey can be reached at mhennessey@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

Tree bylaw open house Jan. 31

Wondering how Halton's new tree bylaw may affect you and your property?

Find out at two upcoming open houses the Region is holding on the issue.

The first session will take place next Tuesday from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Halton Regional Centre in the north auditorium, located at 1151 Bronte Rd., in Oakville.

Then, there'll be an open house at the Milton Sports Centre on Santa Maria Boulevard February 2, which will also run from 6 to 9 p.m.

The informal drop-in sessions will give those interested a chance to learn more about the bylaw and how it could impact

them.

A registered professional forester and Region staff will be on hand to answer questions.

Information packages on good forestry practices and sustainable woodlot management will also be available at the session. They'll contain brochures, guides and booklets prepared by the Region, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ontario Woodlot Association and other forestry and conservation organizations.

Regional council passed the tree bylaw — which is designed to protect local trees and prevent clear cutting or object destruc-

tion of these resources — in October after much public consultation.

It applies to all woodlands that are 5 hectares or larger and greenlands outside those woodlands.

Slots pay off for Town

The Town of Milton hit the jackpot with Slots at Mohawk Friday, receiving its quarterly installment of more than \$1.4 million in slots revenue.

The money comes from the local gambling facility as payment to the Town for hosting slots in the municipality.

To date, Milton has received more than \$38.5 million in non-tax gaming revenue from Mohawk. Payments are made on a quarterly basis according to the government fiscal year, which runs from April to March, and are distributed by the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation.

The slots at Mohawk opened August 10, 1999 and have since attracted more than 8.81 million visitors, averaging about 3,786 patrons daily.

Across the province, 22 communities play host to slots at racetracks and charity casinos.

So far, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation has distributed more than \$380 million in gaming revenue to these communities.

The payments make up five per cent of the gambling establishment's gross slot machine revenues for the first 450 machines and two per cent for machines over that number.

A portion of the annual gross revenue from slots at racetracks and charity casinos goes to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care for problem gambling research, treatment, prevention and public awareness.

That amount for the 2005-06 fiscal year is estimated at \$36 million. Also, \$100 million annually goes to charities throughout Ontario, distributed through the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Habitat volunteers sought to help build new house

Residents interested in getting involved with a Habitat for Humanity Halton build in Georgetown are invited to an information meeting Thursday.

The meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. at the Salvation Army Community Church,

271 Mountainview Rd. S., in Georgetown.

The information session, sponsored by the Georgetown Rotary Club, is designed for people who want to learn more about the project or who are interested in volunteering on the build.



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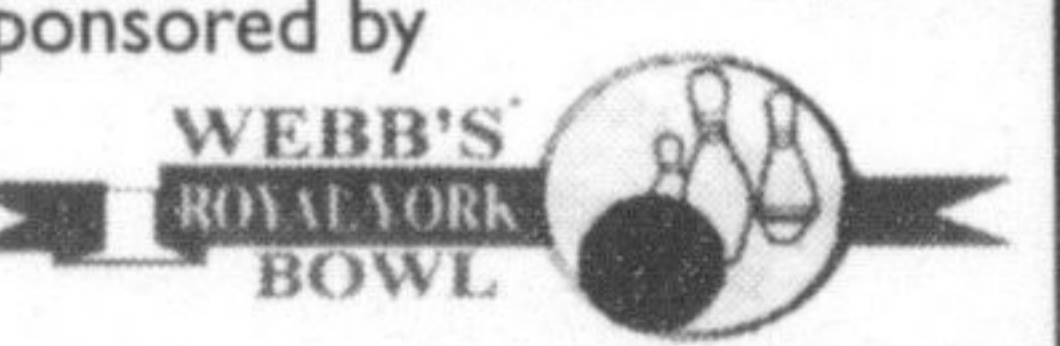
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