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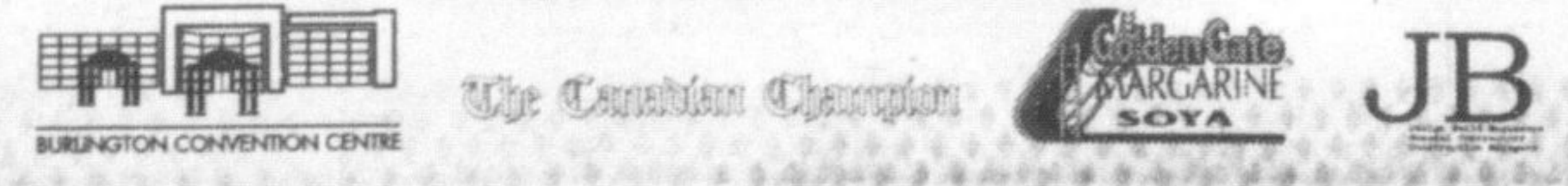
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Residents oppose radio towers

By Melanie Hennessey
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Local residents are rallying against the Region's proposal to install three 73-foot-tall radio communication towers on the Niagara Escarpment in rural Milton.

The structures, which would be part of an updated communication network used to monitor/control water plants, wells, reservoirs, pumping stations and towers from a remote location, are proposed for current Region water production sites on Walker's Line, No. 14 Sideroad and No. 12 Sideroad.

Two other sites in Milton — the water tower on Steeles Avenue and the landfill on Regional Road 25 — are also proposed to be locations for towers, which may be shorter than the others.

The potential towers on the escarpment have the Milton Rural Residents Association (MRRA) calling for the whole concept to be stopped in its tracks and put through a comprehensive public consultation process.

"The MRRA has voiced its concern to the Region that its Guiding Principles for Public Consultation were

not followed, and the Region provided no direct notice or opportunity for residents' involvement in this important issue," the citizens' group stated in a press release.

Many local residents recently became aware of the proposal after receiving a notice from the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC).

Halton Director of Engineering Services Tim Dennis explained the Region didn't know the NEC was going to be contacting property owners directly. "Unfortunately, our communication was preceded by communication from the Niagara Escarpment Commission," he said. "It was and it still is our intention to discuss these proposals with local residents."

He emphasized that the Region will also be consulting with residents around the two proposed locations that aren't on the escarpment.

While he said general public meetings on the issue aren't anticipated, he noted there could be joint meetings set up with the affected residents.

In addition to public consultation issues, the MRRA is worried that the towers would set an "unwanted" prece-

dent, potentially opening the door to a flood of communication towers on the escarpment.

Local resident Colin Catherwood, whose property abuts the proposed No. 12 Sideroad location, shared similar sentiments. "If you put up a tower there, what's to say you're going to stop Bell or Telus from putting up a cell tower?" he speculated. "It's the beginning of the end for that area."

Catherwood noted he also thinks that the 'hard wire' phone line system the Region currently uses to relay its water information is more reliable than a radio tower network.

"There's got to be a better way of doing this," he said. "At the end of the day, I think it's poor placement for a radio tower."

No. 14 Sideroad resident David Franklin, who has launched a petition against the towers and garnered about 80 signatures so far, said he's concerned the towers could impact the value of properties surrounding them, such as his. But the question weighing on Franklin's mind is why the Region is proposing to fix a system that he doesn't believe is broken.

Dennis explained the upgrades are required to enable the Region to effectively monitor and control the local water facilities, and also to meet Ministry of the Environment requirements regarding data acquisition.

He noted that AWS Engineers and Planners, which was hired by the Region to evaluate options for the network and undertake the design and construction of the project, recommended the towers based on reliable results seen in numerous other systems.

A letter to the NEC from AWS explains Halton currently communicates with its water monitoring network through leased telephone lines.

"Over time, these phone lines have become unreliable with on-going and expensive costs to the Region of Halton," the letter says. "With ever increasing stringent water quality demands and requirements the radio network for this area is a necessity."

It goes on to explain that newer and faster phone line services were investigated for the network, but were found to be "too costly."

The Region has also indicated that it's ensuring the towers are not attractive to third-party users, like cell phone companies. Dennis described the proposed towers as narrow metallic poles, almost like streetlights, with nothing attached to the top.

The Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) will soon decide if it's going to allow the towers to go ahead, with staff tentatively indicating it'll be on the agenda at its March 16 meeting. NEC Planner David Johnston told The Champion that staff hasn't come to a conclusion yet as to whether it'll recommend the commission approve or deny the tower proposal.

He said he has heard from a number of residents and the MRRA on the issue, noting their comments will be taken into consideration as the process goes forward.

Dennis said regardless of which system the Region adopts — either radio towers or dedicated phone lines — the upgrades are expected to be complete this year.

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