

Rec fee help may be hiked

By Tim Foran
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Town staff are recommending an increased budget, but with a cap on participants, to the municipality's fee assistance program for recreational and leisure activities.

Beginning next year, the municipality would allow a maximum of 125 low-income individuals to receive up to \$200 each, for a total \$25,000 budget, to participate in Town-provided programs, according to a new fee assistance program policy proposed by staff.

Council can ratify the recommended policy at its meeting Monday night.

The proposed maximum budget is only slightly more than the amount the municipality is likely to spend on the fee assistance program this year. For the first nine months of 2009, the Town has provided an average of \$188 assistance to 93 individuals, belonging to 57 families.

The Town has maintained the fee assistance program since 1994, but a policy outlining the maximum number of participants and eligibility criteria is now necessary due to the increasing number of low-income individuals and families requesting financial assistance, according to a staff report reviewed by the community services committee last week.

If take-up of the program continues to increase at the rate seen over the past three years, the municipality would likely receive applications for more than 125 applicants next year. If that happened, the municipality

would begin a waitlist and review its policy, according to the staff report.

Eligibility criteria in the proposed policy include:

- Fee assistance would be open to residents of Milton and only for regular recreational or leisure programs — not drop-in programs, private or semi-private lessons, or annual fitness passes.

- Assistance wouldn't be eligible for seniors' programs as the Milton Seniors' Activity Centre already administers a separate fee assistance program for its members.

- Applicants would have to fall below the Low Income Cut-off (LICO), an income threshold compiled by Statistics Canada on an annual basis. The 2008 maximum individual income, or LICO, is \$18,946.

The median household income before tax in 2006 in Milton was \$87,739, about \$20,000 more than the provincial average, but the number of families living below the LICO in the municipality increased by 138 per cent from 2001 to 2006, according to the staff report.

Statistics Canada does not differentiate LICOs by province, therefore variations in minimum wages are not taken into account. Ontario currently has a minimum wage of \$9.50 per hour, second highest to Nunavut. An individual earning that amount and working 40 hours a week would be earning too much to qualify for fee assistance from Milton.

Tim Foran can be reached at tforan@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

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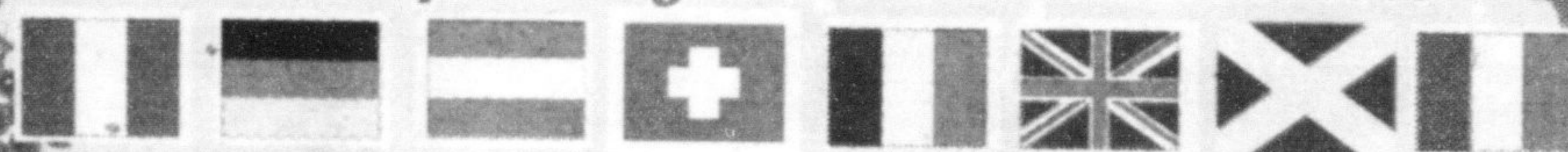


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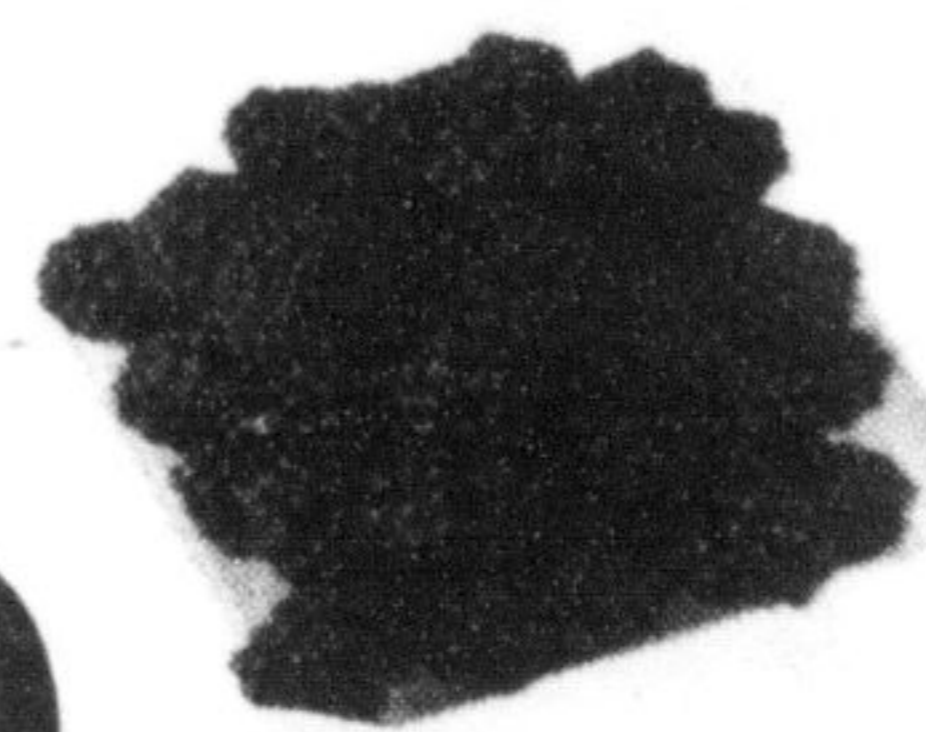
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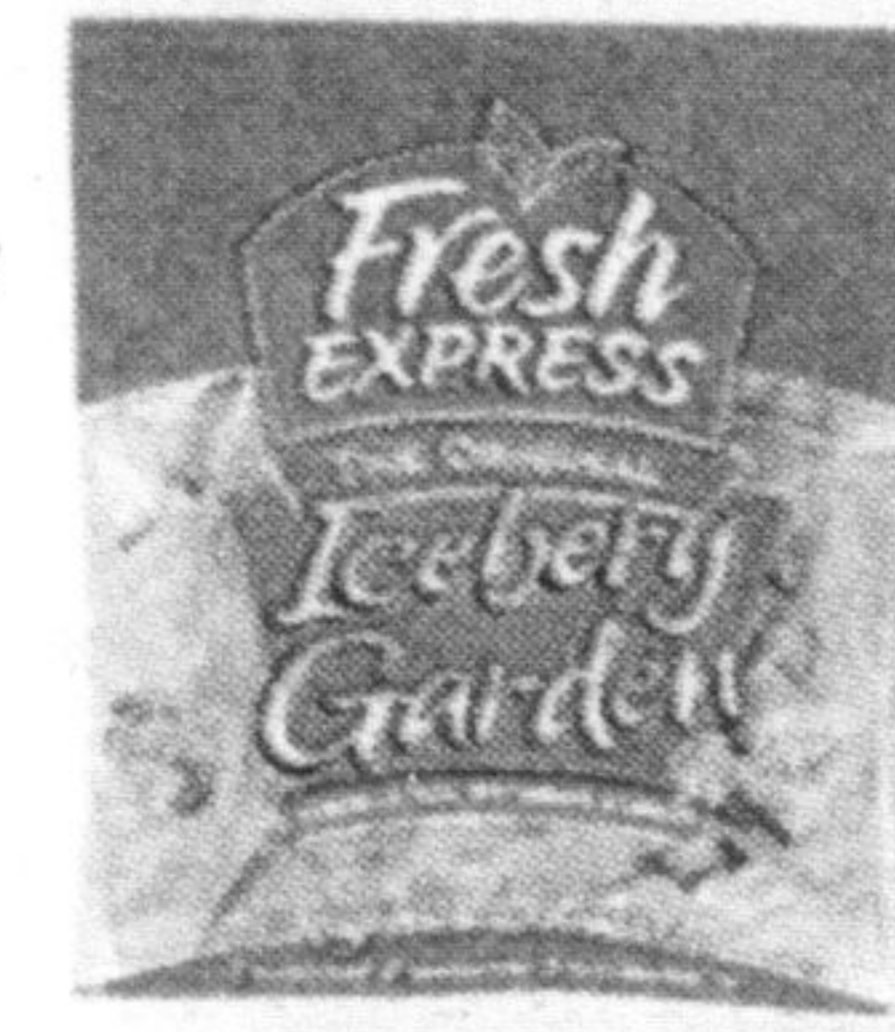
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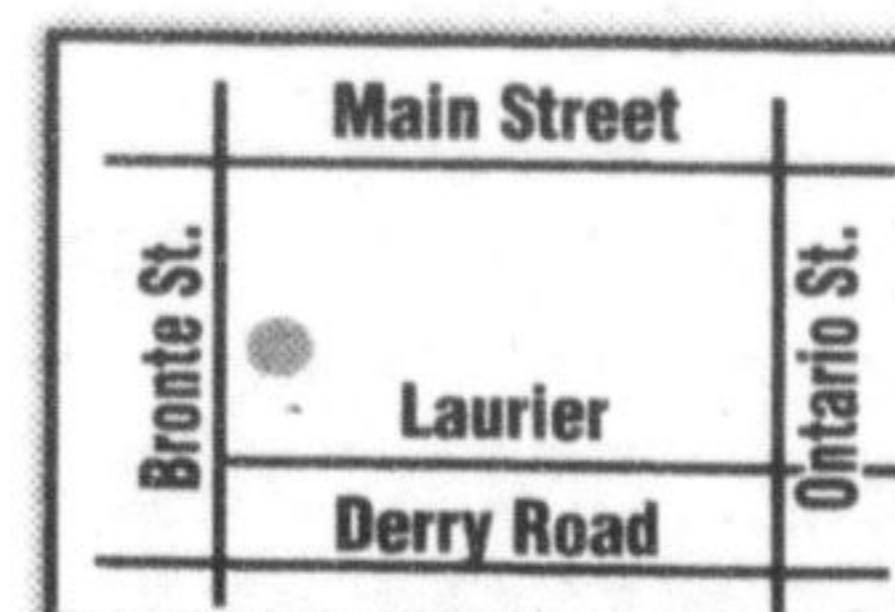
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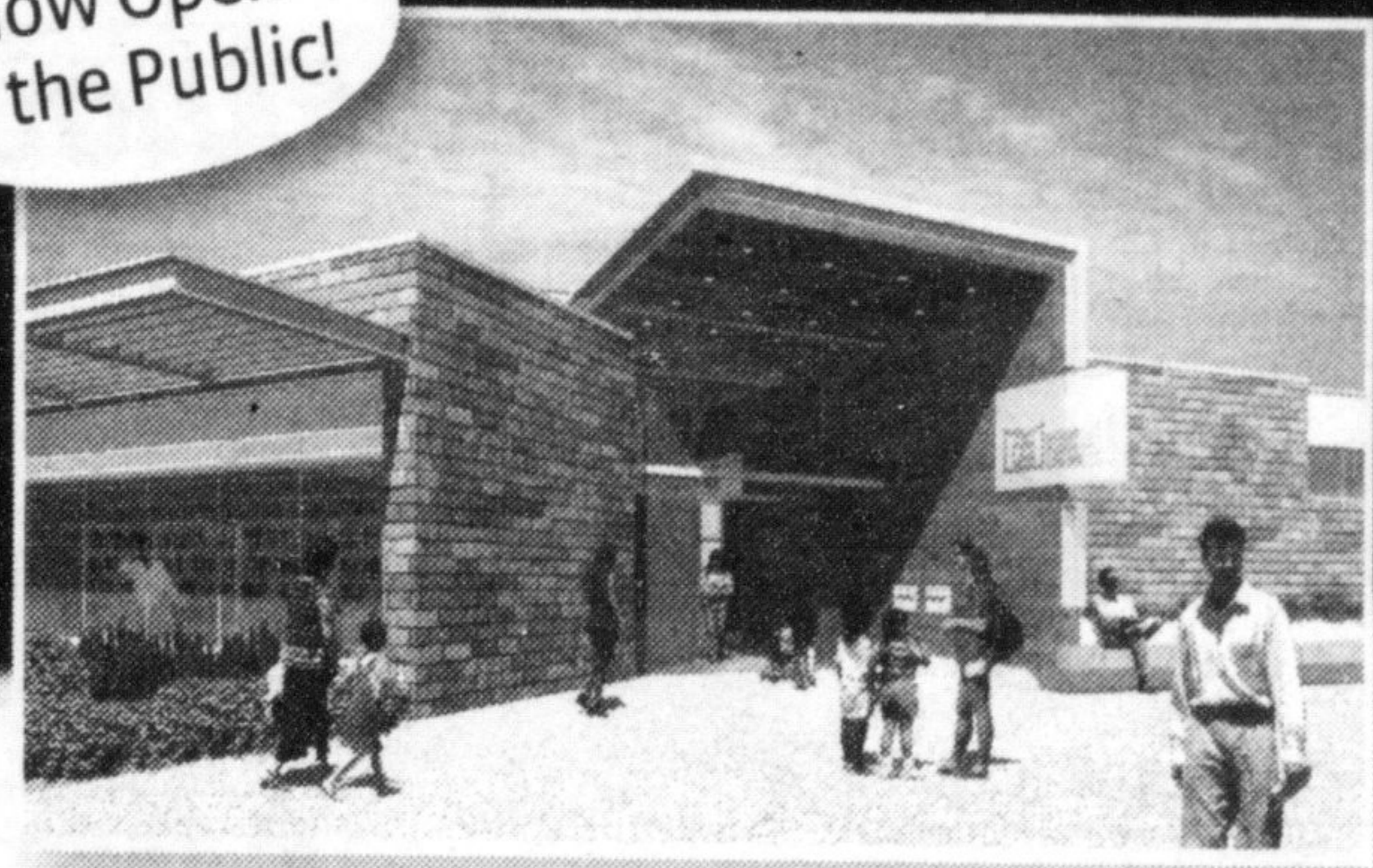
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