

Sludge quality approved for use as fertilizer

By ROB KELLY

Councillor Bruce Attenborough got some bad news Monday night.

He was told his cigars smell worse than Halton's fertilizer, which is made out of processed sewage waste.

Worse yet, it was his fellow rural councillor Barry Lee who told him so.

While some politicians gently poked fun at Mr. Attenborough during Monday night's council meeting, it was an isolated incident in a more serious debate; councillors were worried about the effects of spreading the fertilizer on farm fields along Derry Rd. near residential subdivisions.

Last week Milton's general committee rejected the idea. Councillor Brian Penman led the charge against the concept. But this

week Halton sent a process engineer, Julie MacDonald, to defend the program. She succeeded and the spreading will take place.

The region's recycled sewage waste is known as sludge. Usually it's grey goo, injected into the land so as to minimize any odor problems.

In this case, however, the sludge is too thick to be injected. Also, it comes from Burlington's Skyway water pollution control plant, which has had its sludge rejected for farm use in the past because of a high concentration of heavy metals.

Ms MacDonald assured councillors the Burlington plant "is presently meeting the guidelines" for farm use. She also said "there is no odor to this sludge. No odor at all."

"I can vouch for the fact there are no

odours," councillor Attenborough said. He and councillor Lee witnessed a recent application of the product on a rural property.

"I spent all day at a sludge site," Mr. Lee noted. "Councillor Attenborough and I stood by an open tank full of 7,000 gallons of Milton's finest and all I could smell was his cigar."

Mr. Penman was not only worried about odors, although that had been the main concern expressed in a Milton town staff report recommending councillors reject the proposal.

The Ward 1 councillor was concerned that testing of Burlington sludge had been done on an average-weighted basis, which allows for exceptions in which sludge contaminants could be higher. Also, he criticized the region for "reckless, wanton," application of the material.

In Burlington and Oakville sludge had been poured on ground just prior to the construction of residential subdivisions, Mr. Penman said, in what appeared to be merely an effort to get rid of the stuff.

"I have seen wanton misapplication of this program. I have seen it (sludge) work its way into watercourses, effect people's lifestyles." Speaking of applying sludge so close to subdivisions, he added, "it's folly to mix these two conditions."

Regional staff agreed there were problems with application in the distant past, but maintained Halton's record has been unblemished for nine years. Halton staff also said they can't be responsible for the conduct of private individuals who get sludge elsewhere.

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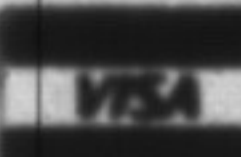
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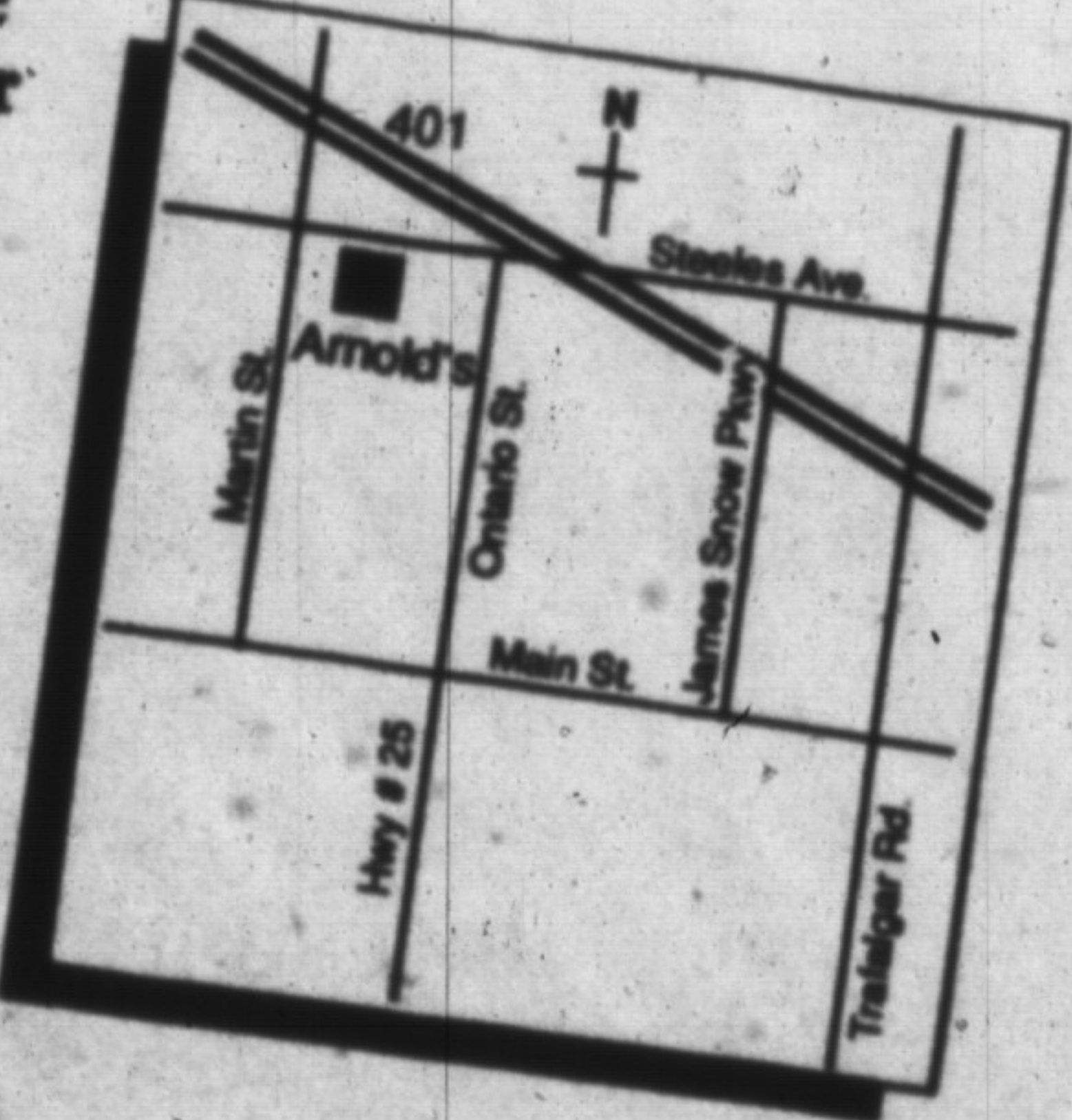
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