

Region to leave NEC alone for now

Opt to wait until February before making a decision

By ROB KELLY
The Champion

Halton regional council voted Wednesday to delay a controversial decision on how it views the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC). That led the two factions arguing before council to both claim a victory.

The Niagara Escarpment Land-owners Coalition (NELC), which wants to see NEC land development authority transferred to regions and counties along the escarpment, squared off against NEC backers for the fourth time in recent weeks Wednesday.

But the difference on this occasion was that council, in a 12-11 vote, opted to defer the issue pending more information.

"I think council made the correct decision," said Nars Borodczak, the chief administrative officer of the NEC. Mr. Borodczak charged that the NELC wants to dismantle the

NEC in order to make it easier for developers to exploit real estate opportunities on the picturesque cliff range.

Herman Tursktra, a lawyer for the NELC, downplayed the fact that his group, which was twice supported at the committee level by councillors, lost some momentum Wednesday.

Information

"I don't think it's a setback," Mr. Tursktra said. He felt Wednesday's delay represented "the high point of the NEC case."

"While some politicians want more information, 'very clearly the majority of council supports delegation' of NEC powers to Halton, he added.

Halton Hills councillor Marilyn Serjeantson was the prime mover behind the push to defer the matter until February. She cited a list of concerns relating to Halton assuming a large part of the NEC mandate. Most of them involve potential costs

— for staff, conducting hearings, fighting appeals.

Also, Ms Serjeantson said she wants to see the recently completed five-year review of the NEC prior to making any decision. That text is expected to be available later this month.

Wednesday marked the first time the NEC took centre stage in its own defence. When the NELC initially gained Halton's endorsement at the committee level, no one appeared for the other side.

The NELC opponents, apparently taken by surprise initially, protested the next week, so regional council kicked the matter back to its planning and public works committee.

Again last week, the committee reaffirmed its support for the NELC. But Wednesday Mr. Borodczak came prepared with a spirited defence of his organization, and an attack on the NELC.

"You have been lobbied by the NELC, an agency whose main raison d'être is to disband the NEC, simply because they want to develop lands on the escarpment," Mr. Borodczak told council.

The NELC is also attempting to have the United Nations biosphere designation bestowed on the Niagara Escarpment suspended, Mr. Borodczak pointed out. "This agency is trying to remove this source of

pride. I think it's shameful."

The NEC is already "very successful" in balancing escarpment preservation with development, Mr. Borodczak said. "I know we have done our job well." Of the average 1,000 applications for various types of development received yearly, 900 are approved, he pointed out.

Enforcing rules

From a financial perspective, "it's highly unrealistic that the province will provide you with financial assistance" in the manner it currently funds the NEC, Mr. Borodczak warned. The NEC budget is approximately \$3 million annually.

Mr. Tursktra said the debate is "not about escarpment protection." The NELC does not want to change the rules regarding development, he said, just who enforces them. The NELC would rather "open, responsible regional government" is charged with that task.

It's preferable to have regional government enforce land use rules because of the "inconsistencies in the decisions of the Niagara Escarpment Commission," he added.

The NELC hopes to gather support from various municipal governments along the Niagara Escarpment. Then it will approach the province in a bid to substantially reduce the influence of the NEC.

Burlington woman missing

Halton police are asking for the public's help in locating a missing 38-year-old Burlington woman.

Caroline Ladouceur of Holt Drive has not been seen by her family since the morning of Dec. 9.

Mrs. Ladouceur walked her six-year-old daughter to school at King and Plains roads in Burlington, and was seen later at 9:30 a.m. in the downtown area of Brant and Caroline streets.

She has not been heard from since, said Sgt. Joe Martin, of Halton Regional Police.

"The missing woman is a very responsible person and this is totally out of character for her," he said. "There has been nothing extraordinary in her life that would account for her leaving her family without an explanation."

While police have no evidence of foul play, it hasn't been ruled out.

"Detectives are very concerned about the circumstances of her disappearance," said Sgt. Martin. "All avenues of investigation have been exhausted and it appears she just vanished in the area of downtown Burlington."

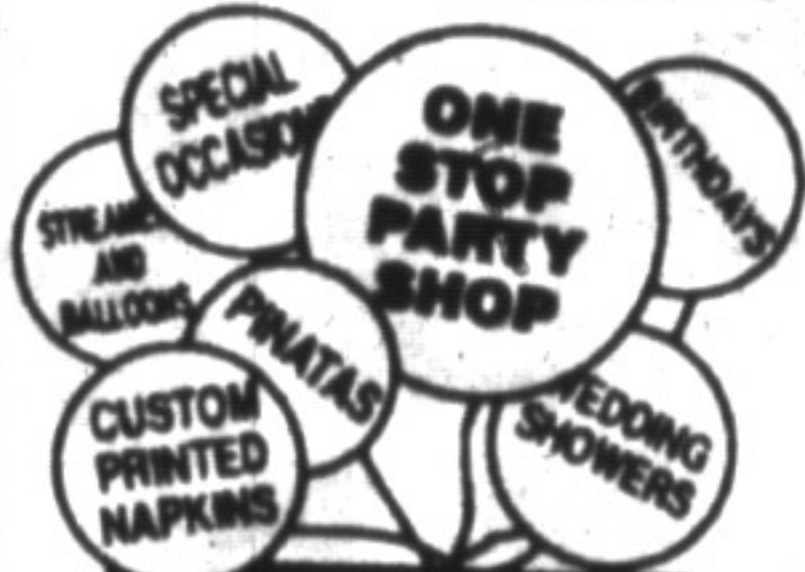
Mrs. Ladouceur is described as white, 5'6", 140 lb., and a medium build, with light brown straight hair, green eyes, and a clear complexion.

She was wearing a three-quarter length artificial suede black coat, heavy dress pants or blue jeans, and boots.

The woman may also be wearing octagon-shaped glasses, grey with thick lenses, or contact lenses.

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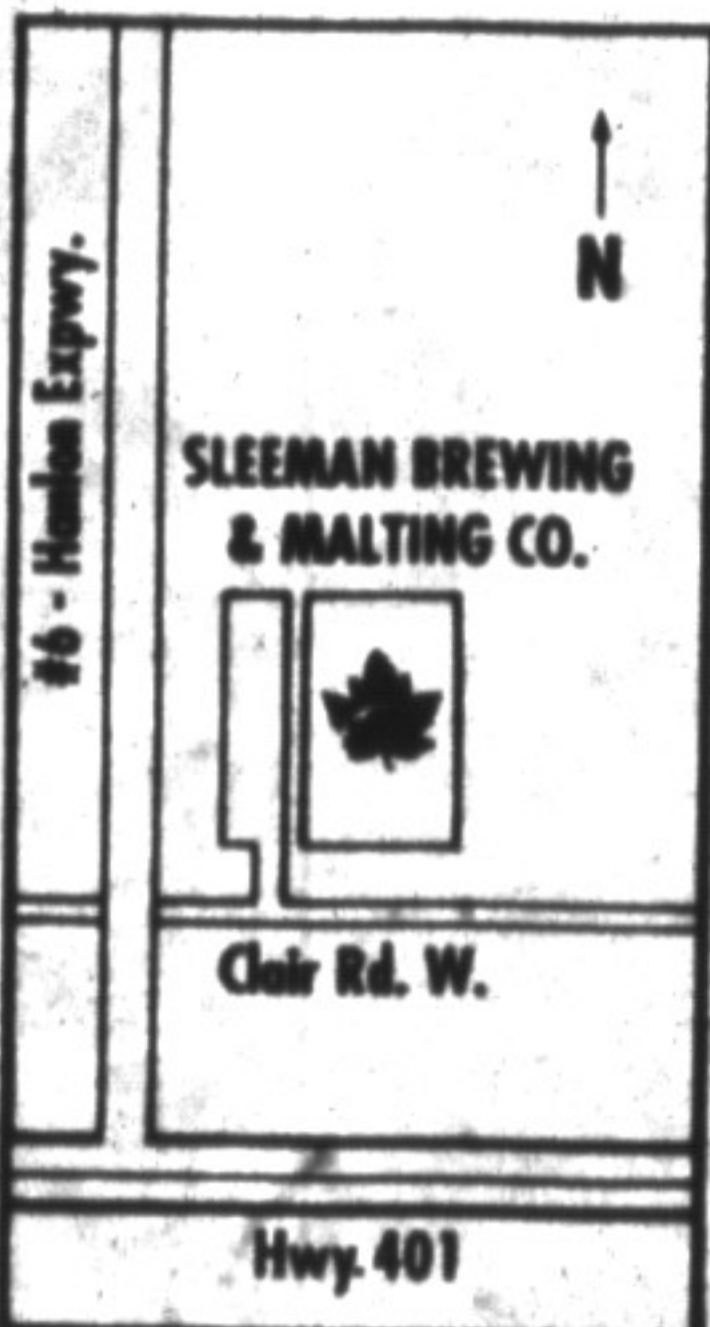
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