

Halton councillors agree to review development fee

By ANGELA BLACKBURN
The Champion

Caught between encouraging business growth and breaking their new development charges bylaw, Halton regional councillors have loosened up repayment rules and agreed to

review the bylaw.

The recommendation reached at last week's administration and finance committee meeting was rubber stamped when it reached regional council Wednesday.

At the committee level, councillors for a second time heard a plea from a

Halton Hills man looking to buy and expand a defunct Halton Hills industrial site. Mark Shepherd wanted a waiver of \$203,000 in combined municipal/regional development charges on the expansion, or said he'd buy a site elsewhere.

Last summer the Region settled a

development industry challenge to its first development charges bylaw with passage of a new one. The charges are levied against new growth to pay for utility servicing and roads.

However the Region is still facing a line-up of complaints from existing businesses that expand and face the charges, with an exemption on only the first 5,000 sq. ft. of expansion. Ford of Canada Ltd. has launched a legal challenge of the \$2.1 million it had to pay for expanding its new paint facility in Oakville.

Auto parts company

Last week, Mr. Shepherd outlined \$17.7 million in investment his company — an auto parts shipping container manufacturer — could bring to Halton. The dollars would flow in the form of business and property taxes, payroll, local construction projects and local suppliers.

Oakville Councillor Kevin Flynn, however, said the funds weren't just benefiting the regional municipality. "I don't want anyone to leave here today with the impression that Halton Region just walked away from \$17.7 million," said Mr. Flynn.

Two Halton Hills regional councillors (Pam Johnston and Marilyn Serjeantson), currently embroiled in a mayoralty race in a town where unemployment is high, were pushing to have Mr. Shepherd's business exempted.

Regional lawyer Rebecca Bentham told councillors provincial legislation doesn't allow the bylaw to be amended without a lengthy public consultation process, and cautioned specific exemptions could be seen as "bonusing" under the Municipal Act, which is illegal.

Instead, after discussion and confidential legal advice, the committee opted to loosen its development charge repayment plan for industrial/commercial development and review the fairness of development charges against various development classes.

"If you give relief in some area, somebody else is going to pay," cautioned committee Chair Liz Behrens

Committee recommendations approved by council included the following:

- ◆ To extend the deferred payment of non-residential development charges from two to five years.
- ◆ To lower repayment interest rates to the prime interest rate.
- ◆ That payments can be made annually instead of quarterly, and a restriction requiring council approval on deferred payment for expansions over 40,000 sq. ft. be lifted.

of Oakville.

"What you have is a very sympathetic council," observed regional treasurer Joe Rinaldo, who cautioned the infrastructure price tag has to be paid by someone. Currently the Region finances infrastructure, specifically water and sewage treatment, through development charges and water user rates.

Exempt now

"You realize that if we exempt you, we'll be forced to exempt others?" asked Mr. Flynn. Mr. Shepherd responded, "If they delivered \$17.7 million in industrial benefits for \$200,000 worth of exemptions, I would say it's logical."

Mayor Gord Krantz, opposed to "bonusing" said "I want the Region of Halton to be competitive and I get the gut feeling in this instance that we're not, and I have to ask why not." Mr. Rinaldo countered that while Etobicoke for example, has no development charges, it has higher tax rates.

A review of the non-residential development charges should be done by late spring, Mr. Rinaldo said if Mr. Shepherd's operation was to defer expansion or the majority of it, it could be eligible for relief should the review end in a decision favourable to that stance.

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