

MPP Young blasts Halton board for over-reacting

The issuing of 1,501 layoff notices by the Halton Board of Education last week was both premature and unnecessary, says Halton Centre MPP Terence Young.

Mr. Young's riding extends into southern rural Milton.

Mr. Young demanded the board respond immediately to Ontario Education Minister John Snobelen's 'tool kit' released last week.

"The board jumped the gun. This action should be reevaluated in light of (recent) announcements and in the interests of the affected staff and the students."

TERENCE YOUNG

The board jumped the gun and fired 1,501 staff, including 572 teachers. This action should be reevaluated in light of (recent) announcements and in the interests of the affected staff and the students. They need to reassess their position immediately to relieve the anxiety imposed on the

affected staff, the students and parents," said Mr. Young.

In announcing the layoffs, board Chair Linda Glover said the measures were required to set the 1996 budget.

The layoffs would affect about one in five teachers and one in three at the high school level.

"This layoff was a worst case scenario type of response to rumored budget reductions that hadn't been announced yet," said Mr. Young.

According to Mr. Young, the Halton public school board was advised to use an estimated \$5 million reduction in provincial grants to forecast for next year. That figure, he said, would represent about a 2.1 per cent reduction of total spending for the remainder of the 1995/96 school year.

Milton Trustee Tim Kingsbury, head of the board's finance committee, said the layoffs were based on an anticipated \$10 to \$15 million funding shortfall from the province.

Mr. Young was also upset by the timing of the notices.

"In addition to the issue of the unnecessary layoffs, is the issue of how the news was delivered to the employees. When I returned home from the Legislature, one of my three children told me of seeing teachers crying after hearing the news," said Mr. Young.

"They should have waited until the end of the school day to deliver the notices. How can you return to your job and effectively teach a class when you have just been technically fired? The teachers were understandably upset and this was clear to their students, many of whom were also upset by the board's actions."

Cost savings measures announced in the education minister's tool kit include:

- a one year moratorium on new capital projects for 1996/97;
- the introduction of legislation to allow boards to enter cooperative agreements with other boards;
- the introduction of legislation to give boards the responsibility to negotiate sick-leave plans by removing sick-leave entitlements from the Education Act;
- investigating the possibility of employing non-teachers in the library, counselling and computer-related services.

Board eyes slight increase

The Halton Board of Education is currently looking at a \$286 million operating budget in 1996 — an increase of 1.38 per cent over last year's budget.

The \$286 million budget was presented to the board's finance committee March 4, one day before it issued termination papers to 1,501 employees. Board members note the budget is merely a starting point.

Since the board's provincial grants have not been announced this year, trustees cannot predict how much the proposed spending increase would affect the mill rate.

In September, the finance committee received a 1996 budget forecast for a mill rate increase of 4.5 per cent.

The public is invited to the board's finance committee deliberations, scheduled for March 25-27, 7:30 p.m. nightly, at the J. W. Singleton Education Centre.

Rural estate developer says his fight with Halton isn't over yet

By BRAD REAUME
The Champion

Rural estate developers are being asked to put their buildings up or shut up their operations.

Recently Halton regional council supported Milton's bid to deny an extension of approval to the Batten-Leigh subdivision in Nassagaweya. The decision is expected to set a precedent for other rural estate developments in Halton.

However, Batten-Leigh solicitor Bert Arnold told members of the region's planning and public works committee he would simply make an appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). Mr. Arnold was convinced an appeal would be successful, based on an OMB ruling last summer in a similar case.

Milton Councillor Barry Lee said the extension was requested despite the fact no construction has taken place on the site. Indeed, he noted little evidence of any work save the erection of a sign advertising the lots for sale.

"It is the prevailing view of a large majority of the residents (in Nassagaweya) that the rural estate subdivision concept is outdated," wrote Milton Councillor Marion Howard in a letter to regional council. "All of the current planning concepts for the present time and the future are against rural subdivisions."

So-called rural estate subdivisions are usually collections of 20 or so large homes built on lots of an acre or more. Politicians don't usually like them since they are scattered about outside villages and hamlets, yet the homes must be extended various services, such as fire and police protection.

In defence of his client, Mr. Arnold said the developer hired a land manager but that manager abrogated his responsibilities and left the country. By the time the developer realized there was a problem the approval had nearly lapsed. He noted that three years is the minimum length of time granted to satisfy the conditions of approval and that usually extensions are granted.

"You have to balance fairness with the legitimate concerns of the developer," said Mr. Arnold. "The developer expended a huge amount of money to get (construction) approval."

One of the proponents of Batten-Leigh suggested the cost of consultants, plans and studies was more than \$300,000, and might even approach half a million dollars if the price of the land is included.

Mr. Lee led the push to deny the applica-

tion and was supported by Oakville Councillor Kathy Graham, who said rural estate subdivisions were not good planning.

"These subdivisions are like spot rezoning and that's not a good way to proceed," Ms. Graham said.

"It really shook me to see there is a 30 year supply of these lots."

Burlington Councillor Bob Brechin said the decision might be legal, but called it unfair in that renewals are usually automatic and given the considerable sum spent by

the developer.

However Mr. Lee and Ms. Graham disagreed. Mr. Lee said he is more sympathetic with local residents than the developer.

"Should we be more fair with someone who made a bad business decision or the people who live in the area and who will be stuck with this forever?" asked Mr. Lee.

Regional planning director Rash Mohammed said Halton's new official plan, not yet approved by the province, would not allow this development.

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