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## Councillor calls for collective support on arena

By DANIEL SCHWAB

Now that the provincial government has promised to pump \$2.5 million into the construction of a new Essex arena, Ward 1 Coun. Randy Voakes says the project has received the "stepping stone" needed to move toward completion at a greater pace.

Voakes said plans have been stalled by council's decision last month to undertake an independent review of the condition of Memorial Arena.

In November 2005, cracks were found in the arena's walls and it was closed for two weeks due to safety concerns. The announcement caused several hockey games to be rescheduled. At that time, council considered a report by DMA Planning and Engineering about the possibility of building a new arena with an attached second ice pad at the site.

Since then, plans have been modified and a focus has now been put on building a facility modeled after the twin-pad St. Thomas Community Centre Complex – built three years ago for \$12.5 million.

But Voakes said since municipal budget deliberations began weeks ago, support for the project has continued to be a divisive issue for council.

Voakes, council's most vocal proponent for a new arena, said the need for an updated facility is two-fold.

SEE STEPPING STONE, PAGE 2



Andy Comber / Free Press

**JUBILATION** – Moments after their winning overtime goal last Friday night in Essex, the 73's pile onto the ice to celebrate their Great Lakes Jr. C championship win over the Belle River Canadiens, 4-3. Local businesses congratulate the 73's on pages 8 and 9 of this week's edition. Kevin Neels' account of the defending champions' fifth title win in six years can be found on page 17.

## Wind energy meetings called 'one-sided'

By ANDY COMBER

Some local residents and citizens' groups expressed disappointment with two recent wind energy meetings that they feel did not fully address the negative impacts of wind power developments proposed for much of Essex County.

"Overall, the presentation was extremely one-sided - unfortunately," said Malden resident Bill Anderson, chair of the Essex County Wind Action Group (ECWAG), speaking of a public wind energy meeting co-hosted by the Essex County Federation of Agriculture and Kent County Federation of Agriculture March 29 in Tilbury.

"The emphasis, to the point of exaggeration, was put on any positive aspects of wind turbines in Essex County, while any comments made by the presenters about negative aspects actually trivialized them," said Anderson, who complained that the format afforded no opportunity for debate.

"No mention or concern was directed towards the properties of the thousands of rural residents who do not own farms, but are neighbours with legitimate concerns about decreased property values, noise, health, wildlife, and overall quality of life," he said.

At the public meeting, brief 20-minute presentations were given

by Mike Crawley, president of AIM PowerGen, a UK-owned wind energy company based in Toronto; Juan Anderson, an engineer with M. K. Ince, a wind energy consulting firm; and Ted Cowan, a researcher with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture Farm Policy Research Group.

Earlier that day, ECFA hosted a similar but more indepth meeting with interested Essex County municipal leaders and staff. Although that session was lightly attended, citizens who had expressed interest in attending that meeting were barred entry.

"I was refused entry to a wind energy meeting that has been organized by an association into

which I pay membership," said Colette McLean, a Colchester farmer and OFA member, who had explained to organizers that she was unable to attend the later meeting.

"I have noticed in the past year, since the prospect of having a wind farm come to my area, that tension, suspicion, fear and even anger has developed within my friends, family and neighbours," said McLean.

McLean expressed bewilderment over the province's handling of wind energy development, expecting farmers "to carry the full risk" without being fully informed of the implications.

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