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Photo by Jon Borgstrom

Mayoralty candidates Sally Stull (left) and Mayor Rick Bonnette (right) shake hands before the start of last week's Mayor's Debate hosted by the Canadian Federation of University Women-Georgetown at the John Elliott Theatre.

Mayoralty candidates face off in one-on-one debate

By Lisa Tallyn
Staff Writer

About 130 people came out to the John Elliott Theatre Thursday evening to hear from the two candidates running for Mayor in the upcoming municipal election.

No real sparks flew throughout the night between the candidates — Sally Stull, an Erin municipal planner, and incumbent Mayor Rick Bonnette.

After their opening remarks the candidates took questions that had been submitted to the Georgetown Branch of the Canadian Federation of University Women, which hosted the meeting.

Stull was asked to elaborate on an article that appeared in last week's Independent & Free Press and her legal action against the Town of Halton Hills.

"I have actually provided to The Independent a response but they chose not to provide..." said Stull. "There was misrepresentations. It was actually the Town that chose to proceed with legal action against us. That is in the courts, it was not our decision, it was the Town's decision."

"As a member of council you would declare a conflict of interest on such a matter," said Stull.

Bonnette said on one portion of the Stull property, a site alteration application had been approved with conditions, and one condition was restricting trucks at certain times for safety of children getting on/off school buses. The Town decision was appealed, he said, to the Fair Farm Practices Board.

“The Stulls appealed that, that was their choice,” said Bonnette. He said the Town had to spend money to hire lawyers to defend its position.

“Another time, we have a site alteration bylaw, and it was ignored, and again, yes the Town had to go to court, why, to protect our residents.” He said the Town had to spend money to protect the residents because hundreds of trucks were coming through an area of the town.

Stull rebutted saying, “we are well within our rights, they (the Town) could have charged us, they did not, they have taken a very unique position on this.”

Residents of 22 Sideroad and Eighth Line asked the candidates if they had been involved in litigation against the Town of Halton Hills.

“Yes, the Town of Halton Hills has advanced litigation against us,” said Stull.

Bonnette said, “I’ve never been in litigation against the Town of Halton Hills, and I don’t plan to.”

Stull was asked if elected Mayor would she be satisfied that she would have to declare conflict of interest and be obligated to withdraw from any discussion involving her or her family’s interest. She said that would be true for every member of council for any matter they have a conflict of interest on.

“This matter has gone well beyond Council now and is in the courts, so technically the ship has sailed. We’re working towards that now,” said Stull.

Bonnette said it’s true council members are asked if they have a conflict at the beginning of council meetings, and then they declare it if they have one.

“The only issue that is there is perception. People can still draw their own conclusions,” said Bonnette. “It is difficult, the rules are set as Sally said, but perception says a lot too. Sometimes people are guilty by perception.”

“And sometimes they’re not,” Stull added.

The candidates were also asked what their vision for the Town would be over the next decade.

“A lot of what we plan to do is move forward with growth in a slow mannered fashion,” said Stull. “For me, one of the important things that goes with that is the road improvements we need.”

She said she’s heard countless times about road conditions in the south of Georgetown and gridlock. “Over the next 10 years I would like to see that cleared up,” said Stull.

“For the next 10 years we have to manage growth; we have managed growth for the last seven to eight years,” said Bonnette.

While Milton’s population has exploded, he said Halton Hills’ growth has remained at about 4 per cent for the last eight years. He also spoke about Vision Georgetown and the fact it’s been legislated (by the Province) the Town will grow by 20,000 people.

He also said the road network had to be improved and it’s in Halton Region’s capital forecast for Trafalgar Rd. to be widened.

He said a Norval bypass is “a key issue we need to work on,” but added it will take a lot of provincial money.

They both responded to a question about whether it was a good idea not to put a turning lane in front of the Public Works Yard on Trafalgar Rd., “to match up with the Sports park.”

“I can’t wait to see that work advanced. That shared lane has been long coming. The pattern of that road to get to the Sports park or get past the tracks has been difficult at best. I really look forward to improvements in that area,” said Stull.

Bonnette said he too “can hardly wait to see that road completed.” He said the Regional/Town Master Plan is looking at putting an over- or underpass on Maple Ave. and Trafalgar Rd., but

that it could cost over \$65 million.

The candidates were asked if there would be any provision to assist seniors with snow removal. “There are provisions to help seniors with such things and given the kind of community we are we can look at the types of snow removal that is needed, but this was a particularly unique situation this year and I do feel for the seniors,” said Stull.

Mayor Rick Bonnette said he would love to be able to provide the service for seniors, but, “do we have dollars to shovel out seniors laneways, no we don’t. That would be another service and we can’t keep on adding services, this adds to the tax bill.”

“But we do have organizations in town that are happy to help,” said Bonnette, pointing to church groups and Links2Care.

Candidates were asked if once elected they would freeze all government salary increases including the mayor’s until the next term, after the mayor and new council has proven itself worthy.

“The raise that Council has voted for the next term of Council is an interesting increase,” said Stull. “Is it value for dollars, that remains to be seen.” Stull also said Burlington has only seven council representatives in a municipality three times the size of Halton Hills and “perhaps there’s also an opportunity for us to look at whether we are well served by 11 councillors in a municipality of 60,000.”

Bonnette said Halton Hills Council hasn’t had a review of its salary for more than 14 years. He said he put forward a resolution that froze council salaries from 2008 to 2010, and did look at other municipalities with similar populations and “we (council and mayor) were the lowest paid.” So he said Council has decided to increase those salaries to the sixth percentile of the group that was looked at, and that would go in effect in 2015.

Editor’s Note: The Independent & Free Press stands by its story, Mayoralty candidate seeks fill variance, published Thursday, Oct. 2. Stull was given two opportunities to submit a letter to the editor to clarify her position.

Town vs Stull, Stull vs Town

There are two applications currently before the Ontario Superior Court of Justice involving the Town of Halton Hills and the Stulls, said Town of Halton Hills Director of Infrastructure Services Chris Mills. He outlined the timeline.

The first, was initiated by the Town in September 2012, against property owners 1244002 Ontario Limited (Rick and Sally Stull) to enforce an order to cease importing fill under the site alteration bylaw. This application was adjourned in Nov. 2012, on consent and an order was granted requiring the owner (the Stulls) to cease importation. Court file No. 5442/12.

Following the adjournment the Stulls made an application on Dec. 19, 2012 to the Town’s site alteration committee. This application was heard by the committee on May 16, 2013 but not approved. Council ratified that decision.

On Feb. 18, 2014, a separate application, Court file No. 921/14, by the Stulls was then made to Superior Court to quash the decision of the site alteration committee.

Both court cases will be heard in March 2015.