

GTA

Railway museum balks at development fees

Halton, Milton demanding \$94,000 for \$350,000 addition

Former cabinet minister backs historical group

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Municipal and regional politicians are being blamed for derailing a long-awaited expansion to the historic Electric Railway Museum north of Milton by imposing costly development fees.

Halton Region, the Town of Milton and the Halton District School Board collectively have demanded \$94,000 in commercial development fees to add a \$350,000 structure to an existing building.

The addition will store many valuable museum pieces.

"I think it is disgusting, personally... there just isn't enough importance placed on preserving our history," said Tom Twigge-Molecey, general manager of the Ontario Electric Railway Historical Association, a federally regulated charity since 1961, which has been raising money for the last 20 years to make the necessary improvements.

The association and its supporters are saying there should be exceptions for museums and other charitable groups, which can't afford exorbitant fees.

"Without some help from somebody, this building isn't going to go up.... Until we pay the (development) charges we can't get a building permit," he told the *Toronto Star* yesterday. "Otherwise this stuff is going to basically rot and go to scrap."

Milton council members reached by the *Star* said both the region and the town have been more than generous over the years with grant money, but Twigge-Molecey said that money has gone toward the day-to-day operation.

Twigge-Molecey and museum supporters, including former Conservative cabinet minister John Snobelen, who lives nearby, are to hold a news conference today.

Snobelen said he met with Milton Mayor Gordon Krantz twice and Halton Regional Chair Joyce Savoline once, to no avail. Neither returned calls from the *Star*.

Yesterday, Snobelen said Milton and other GTA municipalities are hooked on development fees.

"I think development charges are the crack cocaine for municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area," the former education and natural resources cabinet minister said.

Ironically, it was Mike Harris' Conservative government, in which Snobelen



TANNIS TOOHEY/TORONTO STAR

Former Mike Harris cabinet minister John Snobelen, on site of the Electric Railway Museum founded in 1954 north of Milton, is among those leading the charge to get the town to cut development fees that threaten to derail a planned expansion.

served, that brought in tough rules for development charges, which municipal officials complain have left them hamstrung.

Jan Mowbray, Milton town councillor for the area, said when contacted yesterday that it was the first she had heard of the dilemma, but quickly added "it's a tricky business when you start forgiving taxes. However, having said that, I will look into it. It certainly sounds (high)."

The museum, in existence since 1954, attracts about 15,000 people annually. In the early part of the 20th century dozens of electric or radial railways dotted southern Ontario. The museum sits on an original electric line that once ran from Toronto to Guelph but was abandoned in 1930.

Twigge-Molecey said the addition will

house items worth millions of dollars.

"There are about 25 rail cars stored outside deteriorating and this will give them a permanent home," he said.

Twigge-Molecey said the Ontario Electric Railway Historical Association has been able to raise \$250,000 to put up the super structure or the frame of the building but raising the other \$100,000, not to mention the \$94,000, is proving almost impossible.

"This project has been going on for so long, people are now feeling it is never going to happen. So in order to kick-start this thing, the plan is to raise the super structure and then fundraise to close it in," he said.

Milton Councillor Berry Lee, who also sits on Halton regional council, encouraged the museum to appeal the development charges.