



YOUR WEEKEND GUELPH MERCURY

New prayer for Loretto Convent

Demolition on hold while city contemplates possible uses

By KERRY THOMPSON
MERCURY STAFF

GUELPH

Guelph's Loretto Convent will be spared from the wrecker's ball if the city decides it wants to use the proper-

ty for a museum or an art gallery.

The Roman Catholic diocese of Hamilton has put immediate plans to demolish the 19th-century convent on hold until a determination of a possible new use for the building is made.

"The demolition of the convent is under a moratorium until the city study is done," city heritage planner Ian Panabaker said yesterday.

If reuse for the convent is an option, however, the diocese's lease provisions require the leaseholder, the city in this case, to pay for renovations and maintenance of the building.

The convent has been vacant for the past eight years.

The diocese will continue with plans to demolish two other buildings, however — the Loretto Academy and former Bishop Macdonell High School — with final engineering documents likely to be presented to the city in the coming weeks.

A demolition permit will be issued when all the documentation is complete, and work can begin soon after.

The Hamilton diocese ap-

plied for a demolition permit in February to tear down all three buildings. But diocesan officials met with about 100 people at an open house in April, who brought forward ideas for reuse of the convent, which was built in 1856.

Father Dennis Noon, parish priest at Church of Our Lady, said yesterday the decision to hold off on demolition came after discussions with Heritage

Guelph. "I think it was just that Heritage Guelph had asked us if we would look at any other possibilities," he said, adding the diocese is in a holding pattern until the city completes a feasibility study on reuse options.

The diocese has said it will lease the building out only for "benign institutional purposes" such as a museum or art gallery, charging a token \$2 per year rent.

SEE CONVENT: PAGE A2

Wal-Mart location foes' fight continues

By KERRY THOMPSON
MERCURY STAFF

GUELPH

Nine years ago, Ian Findlay stood as one of the first people to alert Guelph that American retail giant Wal-Mart had its sights set on their community.

Today, he and a small group of other residents are the last ones standing in the official battle to keep the corporation from setting up shop at Woodlawn Road and Woolwich Street.

"We have the passion and they have the power and it's not a very good match. But I sleep well at night!"

BEN BENNETT

OPPONENT OF PROPOSED WAL-MART LOCATION

They have battled Bay Street lawyers and long adjournments at the Ontario Municipal Board, and sat through endless discussions at the Diana Restaurant. They've even spent wedding anniversaries addressing city council on the issue, and all for the love of their community.

"At first I said I don't know if we can stop them," from coming, "but then we took it to the next step, and said this is not a slam dunk," Findlay, 39, said this week.



TYLER BROWNBIDGE, GUELPH MERCURY

Gail McCormack and Ben Bennett survey the site on Woodlawn Road and Woolwich Street where Wal-Mart hopes to open a store. Despite recent setbacks, the pair and a small group of other Guelph residents have not given up their fight against the location of the proposed big-box development.

LAST ONES STANDING

What has followed since Findlay first addressed 25 residents gathered in his independent video store rivals any planning objection in the city.

It has led the citizens' group Residents for Sustainable Development through the better part of a decade fighting the location of that Wal-Mart, and a Zellers on Stone Road.

"It's been a roller-coaster ride, especially on the council votes, but the passion is still as strong now as it was at that first

meeting," Findlay said.

The full hearing is tentatively scheduled for nine days in August, more than six years after it began in June 1998. Members of the residents' group, which Findlay helped form, maintain they are still fighting for their community.

"I suppose if you live in a city you don't care about, then you don't have much to do," Ben Bennett, 52, said. "There's a selfishness in there, but I'm part of this community."

The frustration shows on Bennett's face when he tries to explain why they've stuck it out.

"We can't seem to get it in people's heads that it's not about Wal-Mart, it's about location," he said during an interview in his office, which has taken the brunt of the hearing, boxes piled high with decisions, tables overloaded with paperwork.

Obtaining a lawyer for only small portions of the hearing

along the way, the group has relied on the work of countless volunteers.

"We have the passion and it's not a very good match. But I sleep well at night," Bennett said.

To counter that, the residents' group is raising funds to cover the estimated \$20,000 to hire a lawyer for the nine-day hearing tentatively scheduled for August.

They started selling memberships only two weeks ago.

A tour of the Ignatius Jesuit Centre, directly north of the proposed Wal-Mart site, is scheduled for tomorrow and next Sunday, in a bid to raise awareness of the fight.

The battle began in 1995, when 6 & 7 Developments proposed a Wal-Mart for the north end of the city.

The University of Guelph, a year later, made an application for a Zellers store on Stone Road.

SEE WAL-MART: PAGE A2

WEATHER

**Tomorrow:
Mainly sunny
High 21**
Full details • A2

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A SMILING GRADUATE

PETER COWAN, GUELPH MERCURY

Kathy Hobson, left, and Kathryn Holliday share a smile with Holliday's 17-month-old daughter Emma during the Wellington Centre for Continuing Education graduation ceremony yesterday. See story on A3.

Couple's cash restitution saves them from jail

House arrest imposed on pair who defrauded their employer

By HILARY STEAD
MERCURY STAFF

GUELPH

A cheque for \$80,436.29 kept Rodney and Cindy McGregor out of jail yesterday.

Justice Terry O'Connor sentenced the Guelph couple to 21 months of house arrest for defrauding Toni and Janet Frank of that amount while running their Guelph manufacturing company, Rycon Furniture.

Rodney, 50, was plant manager, and 48-year-old Cindy was bookkeeper and office manager, when they used company funds to pay personal expenses between 1986 and 2000.

Assistant Crown attorney

Judith MacDonald was asking for jail for the breach of trust, but O'Connor adjourned the sentencing last month to give the couple a chance to make restitution.

Yesterday morning, after the judge walked into court with two versions of his sentencing judgment, MacDonald notified him that she had just handed the cheque over to the Franks.

"I'm absolutely delighted to hear that. So I can read the first of my two rulings," he said.

O'Connor said repayment of the money allowed him to impose house arrest instead of real jail.

SEE FRAUD: PAGE A4

60th Anniversary D-Day Tour

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