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Henry Stewart planning for the future

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Former OMB boss back in the thick of things

By JOHN STEWART
Staff Reporter

Even after a distinguished 34-year career which took him from a small planning board office in the Township of Toronto to the top of the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), Henry Stewart still can't get local government out of his blood.

When Stewart, 60, retired as chairman of the OMB at the end of 1989, it would have been easy to put up his feet, marvel at his career accomplishments and continue with his volunteer efforts, which include chairing the Credit Valley Hospital Board. Instead, Stewart accepted a job offer in the thriving local planning practice of John Rogers. In an interview at Rogers' Hurontario St. office, the long-time Streetsville resident explains that in his new job he is a part-time consultant to the consultants.

"I'm available for problem cases and this allows me to keep my hand in a little bit," says the father of four sons. He assists in the preparation of cases which are going to the OMB, ensuring that reports, exhibits, and maps are properly prepared. Stewart was recently involved in a similar capacity in helping to prepare the successful case in favor of the site for the new Ottawa Senators franchise in the National Hockey League.

Although he's offering the expertise gathered from 15 years with the OMB, 10 as chairman, Stewart says he won't be appearing as a witness before the body until a two-year period has passed. "I think it would be wrong," he says. "It's similar to judges, who stay away from the courts for a period of two years after they retire."

Ironically, Rogers used to work for Stewart in the clerk's department at the Township of Toronto in the early 1960s.

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- Henry Stewart



Born on a farm north of Bolton, Stewart was one of eight children. He got sick before his final year of university, a circumstance which had a lot to do with his future career. He accepted a job as assistant-treasurer of the local planning board, working in Cooksville and never left local government. In ensuing years, Stewart became the deputy clerk (1960), assistant to

Chief Administrative Officer Dean Henderson (1965) and eventually city manager in 1973.

When a reform council was elected in the fall of 1973, Stewart found himself at odds with many of the policies of new Mayor Martin Dobkin and his council. "I've always felt that council should be free to introduce its policies and if staff can't accept those, it's really the staff person" who should move on.

Stewart became a member of the OMB, then took on a special task as chairman of the Hamilton-Wentworth Region Review Commission. His recommendation to create a one-tier government there caused quite a stir. He was even accused of being an "assassin" at one point.

The former Mississauga city manager is well aware that the OMB is

not always regarded fondly by municipal governments, especially when it periodically overturns a decision by elected representatives. He's heard all of the arguments about why someone from Toronto shouldn't overturn an elected council's decision in Thunder Bay. He still believes firmly, however, that "there is no other province or state that has as good a system for dealing with local government problems," as Ontario has.

It would be a sad day for everyone if the board ever became simply a rubber-stamp for policies of the Municipal Affairs Ministry or local councils. "Great care should be taken by municipalities when they talk about the OMB," Stewart says. "Ratepayers need it, municipalities need it and the provincial government needs it. I feel with a great See FORMER page 11

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