



NICK IWANYSHYN, GUELPH MERCURY

A bus drives past a sign showing the price of gas below 90 cents per litre yesterday at the Esso on the corner of Edinburgh Road and College Avenue. Prices have dropped 30 cents per litre over the last month.

Gas has drivers pumped

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falling fast

Guelph gas since Oct. 23:

- Oct. 23: 99.3 cents
- Oct. 26: 96.5 cents
- Oct. 28: 92.5 cents
- Nov. 1: 90.4 cents
- Nov. 4: 83 cents
- Nov. 5: 87 cents

GUELPH — The pump hand of motorists is more relaxed this week, allowing the petrol to flow freely now that it doesn't cost a small fortune to fill up.

Prices at the pump have been in steady decline, reaching the lowest level in months Tuesday and remaining below 90 cents per litre for regular gasoline yesterday.

"I think we are all enjoying it," said Eduardo Gonzalez as he fuelled up with 89.1 cent gasoline at a Petro-Canada station at the corner of Willow Road and Silvercreek Parkway North.

"But I don't think it will stay this low, not for long," Gonzalez added. "I just hope it doesn't go back up to the \$1.40 level, ever again."

Since Oct. 23, the price of a litre of regular gasoline in the city has dropped from an average 99.3 cents to a low Monday of 83 cents, according to price-tracking website Gasticker.com. The price jumped about five cents yesterday.

Local prices have followed provincial and national downward trends, as the price of crude oil has tanked after peaking at \$147.27 a

barrel in mid-July. Oil fell to \$65.70 per barrel yesterday, 55 per cent less than its summertime high.

"I was very pleased to see that prices have dropped so significantly," said Chuck Cunningham, after gassing up yesterday at an Esso station, also at the corner of Willow and Silvercreek.

Cunningham, director of communications and public affairs for the University of Guelph, has been in Africa on university business for several weeks. The drop in gas prices was a pleasant surprise up-

on his return.

There is a general hope, he added, that prices will stabilize, so businesses and households can better plan their budgets.

Jason Toews is co-founder of Gasbuddy.com and Ontariogasprices.com, consumer advocacy websites that track gas prices across the country. Stagnancy in the global economy, he explained, has caused a rapid decline in world demand for oil and gasoline.

Toews said the price of regular gas is expected to drop further, to about the 80 cents per litre level by sometime in December. But those low prices won't last forever.

"The general long-term trend is a downward trend," Toews said. "I expect gas prices to bottom out in Ontario at somewhere around the low 80s average. But the bad news is we are going to go back up again starting in late-January or early-February next year."

"Crude oil can't go down much lower than it is right now."

The average price in Ontario yesterday was 89.4 cents, with the average price in Guelph around 87 cents per litre. The average price in the province was about \$1.07 per litre less than a month ago. In mid-September it reached \$1.36 cents.

land Pines Campground. They found thieves pried open doors into 22 trailers at the campground on Wellington Road 19, east of Fergus. The break-ins occurred sometime since the beginning of November and some items were taken. Police are still contacting property owners and have yet to compile a list of stolen items. Wellington County OPP are asking anyone with information to call the Rockwood office at 519-856-1506 or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477.

Mercury staff

Solar tracker project running out of daylight

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GUELPH — Concerns that a proposed solar tracker near a rail crossing on Speedvale Avenue may distract motorists may be the project's end, its developer says.

Now Sunpark Energy Corp. is seeking new corporate sponsors for another location.

The solar tracker — a device to orient solar panels towards the sun — was intended as a public awareness campaign, Sunpark's Bruce Fraser said.

It was to sit outside the AgEnergy Co-operative office on Speedvale, northeast of Woolwich Street. Through the Community Energy Plan, the site already has 50 solar panels on its roof.

But a rail crossing less than 100 metres away requires motorists to pay attention to the flashing lights. Guelph Junction Railway is concerned drivers looking at the tracker might miss the signals.

"We are certainly not wanting to cause any problems or anything that would be a safety concern . . . but we are not certain there is a safety concern," Fraser said.

It is the project's public awareness nature that concerns the railway.

"They want to put it out front for people to see, we want the opposite," said Tom Sagaski, general manager of Guelph Junction

Railway.

The railway was notified of the plans because of a committee of adjustment meeting last month.

Sunpark was before the committee for a minor variance application to allow the 6.4-metre tall structure, even though zoning only allows for a 4.5-metre structure.

Sagaski said Sunpark's application does not include details, including measurements to the nearby crossing.

"Safety sight lines are needed so vehicles can see trains, as well as so trains can see vehicles," he said, adding that it is also about distraction.

"At best we can judge that it is close to interfering with sight lines."

Sagaski said at least two trains pass the crossing daily on weekdays. It does not have lowering arms.

The committee passed the zoning application, but with some conditions, including the need for Sunpark to undertake a road and railway safety audit.

Guelph Junction Railway requested the audit, Sagaski said, adding that he doesn't think the request is "outlandish."

But Fraser said the cost and time of hiring an engineer is too much.

"To go through the cost and time of an audit only to find that the application is still opposed," he said, is not worth while.

City eyes tract of land to host new energy site

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GUELPH — The city has identified three large publicly owned tracts of land as potential solar energy sites, but is also open to proposals from private companies to help meet its Community Energy Plan targets.

City council gave staff the green light to pursue the initiatives during yesterday's finance committee meeting.

To realize the plan's 15-year target to supply at least a quarter of Guelph's electricity from renewable energy, the city needs the equivalent of 1,000 rooftop solar panel installations, said Jim Stokes, the city's manager of realty services.

"We have been approached by a couple of different companies . . . and there is some federal funding available," he said.

The three city-owned properties are: the Eastview landfill site, which is slated to be redeveloped as a park; 30 acres at the north-west

corner of Watson Parkway and Stone Road; and about 100 acres at the Arkell Springs grounds.

"There are a few concerns about environmental impacts, but maybe there are none," Stokes said.

Concern over potential impact on water recharge — the replenishment of groundwater — would limit the size of a solar project at the Arkell Springs site, he said. It seems the Watson and Stone tract of land, which was purchased for future economic development, may be the most viable location.

"It's the only one with real long-term potential," Stokes said. "We might be able to get 10 years as an interim before moving to a more appropriate site."

Councillor June Hofland, who called the venture "a very exciting initiative," questioned whether smaller sites may be considered.

Calling it an economy of scale, Stokes said solar-energy projects need to be about 50 acres to yield economic results.

Staff will report its findings back to council.

at a glance

PUSLINCH TOWNSHIP Morrison man facing assault charge in paintball shooting

A 19-year-old Morrison man is facing an assault charge after he allegedly shot another man in the face with a paintball gun. The victim told the Ontario Provincial Police that he was on Concession 1 shortly after 4:45 p.m. Tuesday when he was shot by someone in a vehicle that drove past. Police said the victim knew his assailant. He refused an ambulance but police said he likely required some med-

ical treatment. Officers found the suspect a short time later and seized a paintball gun. The accused faces a charge of assault with a weapon and is scheduled to appear in Guelph court in December.

CENTRE WELLINGTON Police seeking public's help after rash of break-ins

Ontario Provincial Police are investigating a recent rash of break-ins into trailers. Around 1:45 p.m. Tuesday, officers received a call about trailers broken into at High-



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