

\$86 million budget Education costs up

Acton's average taxpayers will fork over \$15.28 more for education this year than they did in 1977.

Thursday Halton Board of Education approved its \$86.1 million 1978 budget and also released mill rate hike information for all areas of Halton.

Acton's average education tax increase is based on a mill rate hike of 3.39 mills and an average assessment of \$4,480. In Esqueving the average taxpayer will pay \$17.87 more this year for education because of a 3.67 mills increase. Average assessment in Esqueving is \$4,619.

These average tax hikes are for education only. To get the total picture for rising taxes town and region increases must be added.

In Acton homeowners will pay for education based on 65.49 mills and education taxes will amount to 64.10 mills in Esqueving.

A residents total contribution for education in 1978 can be worked out by multiplying the mill rate for his area by his assessment.

Education taxes aren't up quite as much as first expected. When the board first unveiled its budget on March 2 education taxes were expected to be up four mills.

Acton residents will pay nearly \$900,000 for education in 1978 and Esqueving close to \$1.5 million.

Budget debate
During debate on the budget finance committee chairman Fred Armitage urged the \$86.1 million be passed promptly so the board could make its apportionment to the municipalities based on actual costs rather than estimates, and save \$120,000 in bank interest payment.

He said restraint efforts had been made in the preparation of the budget noting this is difficult when 77.29 per cent of the board's costs go to wages.

Another 12 per cent of the budget is spent on supplies and services, which bore the brunt of restraint practices while nine per cent is eaten up by capital costs and debt charges.

Recalling trustees' comments and concerns voiced when the budget was unveiled March 2, Armitage said his committee reviewed a number of items.

It was decided the \$4.88 per pupil allotment for library books at high schools would remain unchanged.

When the budget was first examined trustees expressed concerns regarding surprisingly high costs for enrichment programs.

Armitage said this was examined and it was discovered the board planned a special program for bright children so they could spend some time with their peers

despite the fact segregated enrichment was cancelled. This policy dates back to 1973, Armitage observed, but in May of 1975 trustees failed to approve funding of the policy.

He said his committee decided to leave the money for the enrichment program in the budget to see if the board will approve funding this year. If funding isn't approved the money won't be spent.

The enrichment program for bright children will cost \$83,211 in 1978. Over \$54,000 of this total will go to wages and fringe benefits for two teachers but dropping enrichment won't save this money since the two teachers are part of the board's staff and in the pupil-teacher ratio.

Another \$26,396 will be spent on supplies and services for the enrichment program and \$2,500 on transportation, so killing enrichment will only save \$28,900 Armitage observed.

The recently announced 37.5 per cent increase in OHIP premium costs will prove expensive for the board.

He said the board has already budgeted \$560,000 for OHIP and if the increase was applied to a total year it would cost Halton taxpayers another \$210,000.

Fortunately the increase doesn't come into effect until May 1 and contracts with board employees expire August 31 so the board must spend only \$70,000 more for OHIP.

Armitage said the board currently pays 75 per cent of employees OHIP premiums. Since the board hasn't provided in the budget for a \$70,000 increase in that expense between September

and December of this year, this implies the board won't absorb the cost of the 37.5 per cent increase.

He urged the board negotiate a lower level of OHIP contributions with its employees this year so the board isn't paying 75 per cent any longer.

Armitage observed many Halton taxpayers pay all of their OHIP and he thinks "such an approach would be viewed favorably by Halton ratepayers."

Trustee Bill Priestner asked what had happened to Halton's provincial grant money?

He observed the province had said grants would go up 4.8 per cent but in Halton grants went up a mere \$10,000 or one one-hundredth of a per cent.

Armitage said this was the price Halton pays for its affluence. Another factor in low grant increases was the decline in enrolment.

Since the increase in costs is being borne almost completely by local taxpayers, Priestner observed last year's over levy of \$2 million and greatly increased assessment in Halton, were all that prevented a huge local tax hike. He claimed the board was using all its financial resources to keep taxes down this year but things could be much worse in 1979.

Armitage acknowledged this year's budget "is certainly a button down budget." He said costs are kept down by the "resourcefulness" of the business department.

A bid by Trustee Len Crozier to have the enrichment program dropped and budget funds spent on class or library books was rejected, for the time being.

All trustees except Bert Hinton supported the budget.



BERT HINTON Budget thorn

Atoms in finals

Acton major atoms will face Milton Saturday at 2:45 in the arena in the OMHA zone championship finals. Second game of the series goes Sunday at 3:45 in Milton. Milton atoms were undefeated in Tri-county play while Acton went 18-1-1.

Light costs in hamlets

Residents of the hamlets around Halton Hills pay an extra charge for street lighting.

According to the budget, set this week, costs are down in Glen Williams and Ballinafad, and up in Norval and Stewartown.

Norval will pay 46 or almost half a mill more, and Ballinafad will pay .33 or a third of a mill more. Glen Williams will pay 69 mills more, and Stewartown .06 mills more.

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Hinton blasts budget

Acton-Esqueving Trustee Bert Hinton received no support from his colleagues at Halton Board of Education Thursday when he tried to have five per cent trimmed from the board's \$86.1 million budget.

During the only full board debate on the 1978 budget, Hinton proposed an amendment which would have sent the finance committee back to the drawing board to slice five per cent off the budget which is up 5.3 per cent over 1977 spending. Nobody would second Hinton's amendment.

In a long, prepared speech, Hinton harshly criticized this year's budget and the way it was prepared.

Following his address he found himself criticized by colleagues, notably board Chairman Garry Morton, and finance committee chairman Fred Armitage.

Morton said if Hinton had expected to be taken "seriously" he would surely have submitted something to the finance committee during the over two months it held meetings on the budget.

He noted trustees are expected to speak from notes but not prepared speeches.

Morton said many committee members and trustees had submitted ideas and thoughts to finance committee regarding this year's budget and could see these concerns reflected in the final budget. He added Hinton had been specifically invited to make his thoughts known to the committee.

"Your concerns might be taken in a better light if you had done this," the chairman said.

Armitage said he was "delighted" with Morton's comments. He said many items in Hinton's presentation were totally "wrong" and suggested he would need until midnight to correct all of Hinton's errors.

Hinton began his comments on the budget by saying provincial grants have not been cut as the board claims. He stated the amount of grant increase is simply less than in other years. Hinton said this was because the province is practising fiscal restraints, something Queen's Park hoped school boards and municipalities would follow.

He suggested savings could be made if mileage rates were reduced for board members and staff. Hinton says the highest rate around is paid by the Halton Board of Education.

He complained about no representation on the finance committee from Halton Hills since former Georgetown Trustee Don Long couldn't attend meetings because of business. Hinton also objected to lack of separate school representation on the committee and domination by Burlington trustees, whom he later claimed vote in a block for anything the administration proposes, on the committee. There were five trustees from Burlington on the committee he said along with two from Oakville and one from Milton.

Hinton claimed attendance at budget meetings was poor and stated sometimes there weren't even enough people to make a quorum. This statement is wrong, according to trustees on the committee and other people who attended budget meetings.

He said because of lack of Halton Hills representation on the committee he attended most budget meetings but wasn't allowed to contribute. Hinton said he went to budget meetings so North Halton would have an idea of how its tax dollars are "squared."

He questioned spending of education dollars on community use of schools claiming costs aren't being fairly shared by municipalities. This very concern of Hinton's is being examined now by the board's business department, the investigation having been approved on March 9.

Hinton asked why the board took so long to start reviewing the "validity" of some of its courses. A special committee was set up just last month to review all programs offered in Halton schools to see which ones are too costly and benefit too few people to continue operating them.

Hinton wondered why adult education isn't self-supporting? Trustees, including Ivan (Continued on Page 16)

Duby worried about hall

Councillor Les Duby said he was very concerned about the old town hall in Acton and especially about the Ministry of Labor moving into inspect and close it up.

Clerk Delmar French pointed out the request for the inspection came from Halton Hills council.

Duby said the occupants have no other place to go since the YMCA building to be rented by Halton Regional Police is not ready for them to move in. "There's a poster on the door saying occupancy prohibited."

Councillor Russ Miller said he doesn't know what the next

step is, but claimed council is waiting to hear from the town hall committee. He said the recreation director is trying to find accommodation for the senior citizens, and the police are moving into the "Y" building when renovations are completed.

Duby claimed the awkward transition period is putting undue pressure on the Town Hall Restoration Committee to do something.

Miller said no-one knows how much money it would take to make the building useable.

Duby said he wanted to know as much as possible so he can answer questions.



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