

Man pays extra taxes for four years because of assessment

Couple gets \$1,016 back

By CHRIS AAGAARD
Herald Staff Writer
Halton Hills ratepayers will pay for a clerical error committed by the provincial assessment office which cost an Eighth Line resident \$1,300 in property taxes he shouldn't have had to pay over the last four years.

Noting that the town can collect three years of back taxes against properties which have been improperly assessed, council bent the rules in favor of Ron Chatten and his wife, Elaine, Monday night, ordering the treasury department to compensate him with a \$1,016 cheque for extra taxes he's been paying since an assessment error was made in 1977.

Although council limited its grant to cover extra taxes paid between 1978 and 1980—the equivalent three-year term in which it can claim back taxes from residents—Mr. Chatten said he was "very pleased" with the settlement.

Under municipal regulations, residents can only claim tax refunds for assessment errors going back one year. Mr. Chatten previously proved he paid too much in 1981 and was awarded \$408. He will be unable to recover the \$284 he paid in excess taxes in 1977 under the agreement worked out Monday night.

By returning the money as a

grant rather than a refund, the town has assumed responsibility for recovering the region's and school board's share of the municipal make-up grant to Mr. Chatten.

In the hour-long debate which preceded council's decision, some councillors warned that paying for the three-year old error could represent a precedent for residents who feel they've also been over-assessed.

Mayor Pete Pomeroy advised council that the town only collects taxes for the region and the school board and has no real right to refund the over-assessed portion. In a recorded vote, Mayor Pomeroy and councillors George Malby, Mike Armstrong and Pam Sheldon opposed the refund, arguing that while they might support returning the municipality's share of the overpayment, they didn't want to make that decision for the other agencies involved.

Thanking town treasury staff members for helping him calculate the error, Mr. Chatten explained that assessment officer Jeff Denny recently acknowledged he had made an error.

Town lawyers, in a letter to council, advised that the town could not refund the money but could make a grant to the citizen affected by the assess-

ment error. Town treasurer Ray King told council that the money paid Mr. Chatten would be recovered in the town's 1982 budget and expressed doubt whether the school board or the region will repay the town for their portions included in the grant. Each agency, he indicated, can argue that over-paid taxes are only refundable for one year.

Coun. Harry Levy, the town's finance committee chairman, warned that such cases should be looked at on their own merits and noted that while the town is not legally bound to do anything for Mr. Chatten, "it is a moral case".

Also included in the agreement is a stipulation insisting that Mr. Chatten pursue no further action against the town regarding the error. The town's lawyers indicated that Mr. Chatten could take the town to court to get the money back and suggested that the grant was the most "pragmatic" way of handling the issue.

Regardless of which agency was responsible for the error, the town is ultimately responsible for collecting taxes and any complications which may arise afterward.

Town staff and councillors are largely protected from the consequences of similar

blunders by insurance which covers them for "errors of omission". Coun. Levy urged that the province's assessment department should have similar coverage, relieving the municipality of having to correct department mistakes.

\$2 million grants for water, sewer accounts arrive

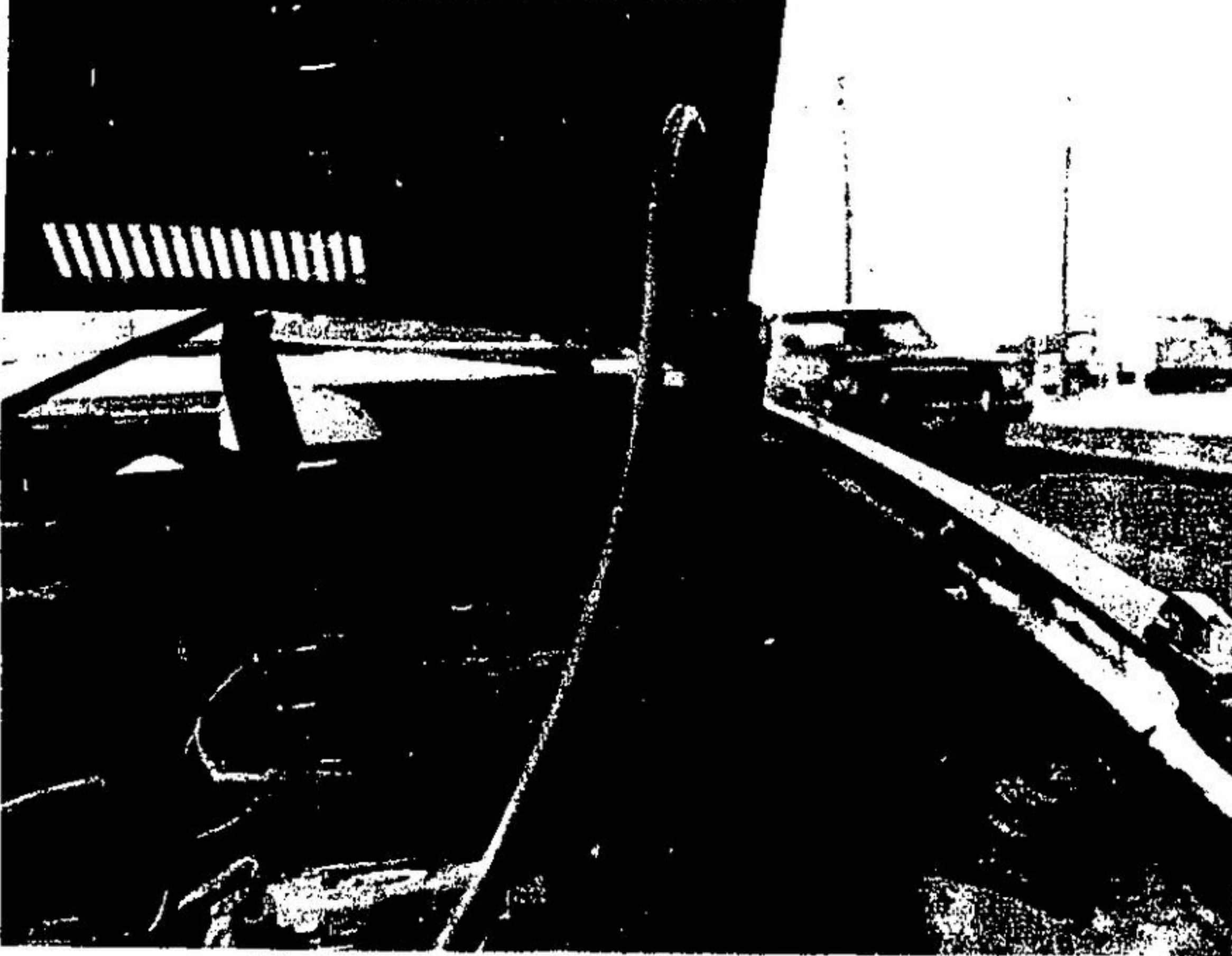
Long-awaited grants from the provincial government which will cushion water and sewer rate increases as the region heads for uniform rates have finally arrived.

A press release issued from regional chairman Jack Ruffis' office last week confirms that the province will pay Halton \$2 million into the sewer and water account. Last year, Oakville and Burlington representatives on council insisted that the province chip in to offset costs carried by their residents as water and sewer bills rise toward uniform rates.

South Halton has maintained

that they pay artificially high rates because they are helping fund sewer and water facilities built or modified in north Halton.

Sewer and water rates has been regional council's most divisive issue in recent years and councillors have regarded the grants as almost essential to keep peace around the council table. Had the grants not been available, it is likely that the region would have voted to make sewer and water charges a municipal responsibility once again which would mean an enormous increase in water and sewer charges in Halton Hills.



'SALT AND BATTERY CHARGES'

By Monday, many severely frostbitten weathermen were agreeing that today (Wednesday) would see a rise in temperatures, and none too soon as far as most area residents - and especially motorists - are concerned. With the thermometer dropping to minus-28 degrees Celsius (minus-18 Fahrenheit) over the past weekend, scenes like the one above were all too common along Halton Hills roadides, towtrucks being repeatedly summoned for battery charge-ups. Across town, plumbing

fixtures froze and furnaces everywhere were hard pressed to keep those who didn't have to go outside warm. If you did have to go outside, the weatherman had chilling warning for you: wrap up well, because the cold can kill quickly. With high winds subsiding by Tuesday, Halton Hills was expected to thaw out a little through the end of this week.

(Herald photo by Chris Aagaard)

Honorable mentions for 1981 fire posters

Two Halton Hills public school students will be among several young people honored at today's (Wednesday's) regional council meeting in Oakville for their efforts to promote fire prevention. Michelle Perry of Robert Little School in Acton and Peter Armstrong of Speyside School received honorable

mentions in the 1981 fire prevention poster design competition sponsored annually by the Halton Region Fire Service Association.

Michelle and Peter will join four other students from Milton and Burlington who also received honorable mentions, as well as the two

competition winners, for a special presentation at today's council meeting. Chairman Jack Ruffis is expected to present certificates to top boy John Schultz of Oakville's Ecole Ste. Marie and top girl Anna Marie Gremmen of St. Vincent's School in the same city, along with the other children.

UWC porn lecture

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package for his shelves. Retailers can be charged for knowingly selling obscene material, Const. Norris said. Public complaints about what appears on retailers' shelves should be made to the local police force. An officer visiting the store to check a complaint informs the store owner that he or she may be selling obscene material, pointing out the offending article or magazine. If the material is still on the shelves at a later police check, charges may be laid.

Sealing the magazine in plastic, or "polywrapping" doesn't provide an effective obscenity dodge for the storeowner. Organized by the club's "Woman Aware" committee, the lecture, members agreed, shocked them into a greater awareness of what pornography is and the type of lucrative business generated from it, legally and illegally. While the club plans to discuss the presentation by Const. Norris at future meetings, president Carol Lusby told The Herald there are no intentions of actively trying

to clear pornographic material, as police regard it, from local variety stores. "I think we are more aware of the kinds of things that might be sold," Mrs. Lusby said. Pat Stuart-Hagge, a club member who helped organize the lecture, said a lot of women "just don't realize the extent to which obscenity has gone". She expressed concern that some store owners are forced to accept certain magazines on their shelves as part of package deals, describing this as a form of "blackmail".

Need disposal depots

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contractors for garbage disposal. Recalling a trash separation conference she attended at the region last year, Coun. Pam Sheldon warned that people will only remain interested in the program as long as the

region has markets for the separated material and residents can reach disposal depots easily. "The region may have put the cart before the horse," Coun. Sheldon said. Once the program is operating, Coun. Marilyn Serjeantson argued, residents should

purchase goods made from the recycled waste, increasing demand and keeping the source separation program afloat. Council's appeal for an extended deadline is expected to be discussed at the region's public works and planning committee next week.

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