

Halton will set up task force to review police commission

By BEN DUMMETT
the Herald

After a heated debate Halton Regional councillors approved the 1990 Halton Regional Police budget Wednesday, which calls for an increase in police spending of almost 15 per cent this year.

Halton police will spend just over \$31.6 million in 1990 compared to the \$28 million spent last year. The police budget represents well over 50 per cent of Halton's 1990 proposed tax-supported operating budget.

But councillors also passed a resolution questioning the report on which the budget is based.

A special task force will be established to review the Ontario Police Commissioners report which recommended the Region's force hire 49 police officers this year. The analysis will be sent to Ontario's solicitor general and to members of the OPC.

The task force will be made up of Regional councillors, John Graham - a strong opponent of the police budget and the Halton police commission - Joyce Savoline, Regional treasurer Joe Rinaldo and representatives from the Halton board of police commissioners and the Halton Regional Police force.

Regional Chairman Peter Pomeroy introduced the resolution last Wednesday after questioning why the OPC recommended the hiring of 49 police officers when it says Halton's crime rate is below average, during the Region's administration and finance committee meeting.

"Misinformation may have been factored into the report," he said at the time.

Councillor and member of the Halton board of police commissioners, James Grieve, supported this view at Wednesday's council meeting.

"It (the OPC) is way out of step," said Coun. Grieve. It operates "in the dark ages in many respects."

The OPC's recommendation of 49 police officers is based on the old benchmark of police required per population. It doesn't take into account that many jobs police used to do are now performed by civilians and therefore the OPC's recommendation is too high, Coun. Grieve told councillors.

Coun. Grieve and the rest of the Halton board of police commissioners recommended that the force hire 23 police officers and 11 civilians.

New staff accounts for the majority of the budget increase.

Police Chief James Harding has attributed the hiring of 34 new people to an increase in Halton's population and the number of service calls to police and provincial legislation.

Court security is an example of a provincial responsibility that has now become a municipal responsibility.

The new resolution against the OPC is just one more example of councillors' dissatisfaction with the provincially appointed body.

Councillors object that they have no control over the police budget. If council had opposed the 1990 police budget Halton police could have appealed the decision to the OPC. The OPC's decision is final.

Councillors argue the OPC would reject a decrease in the police budget because it has already recommended Halton police hire 15 more police officers than is indicated in the budget.

Coun. Robert Forbes called the process "ridiculous" at Wednesday's council meeting.

The council has already passed a resolution that the province's solicitor general revoke the OPC's appeal power and as part of this recommendation councillors also called for changes to the Halton Police Board of Commissioners so that the majority of members are elected officials.

Although all council members supported the resolution questioning the OPC report some, including Halton Hills Regional Councillor Joe Hewitt, objected to passing the police budget.

"We have to get down to single digit-tax bills," said Coun. Hewitt.

He argued since council only acts as a rubber stamp for the police budget it shouldn't be held accountable for passing the budget.

Instead the OPC should be held publicly responsible, he said.

Coun. Graham said he can't accept a double digit budget when ratepayers' incomes will only increase by six per cent or not at all if they are on a fixed income.



Ready for dutch treats

The Knox Presbyterian Church, on the corner of Main and Church Streets in Georgetown, staged a garage sale last Saturday to raise funds for the Choral Society's proposed tour of Holland in April. Pictured above, from left to right, Choral Society

members Sandy Patey, Barbara Koszler and Tom Schenk help man one of the booths offering items for sale. According to Choral Society members, the garage sale was very well received by the public. (Herald photo)

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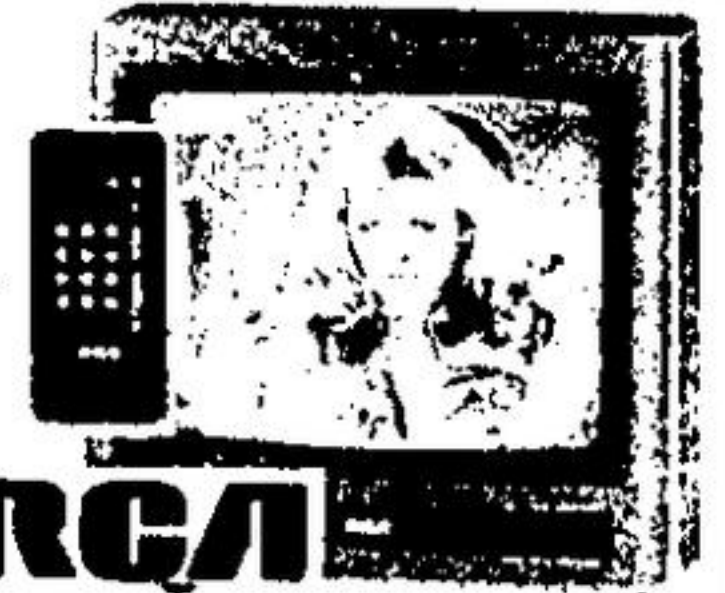
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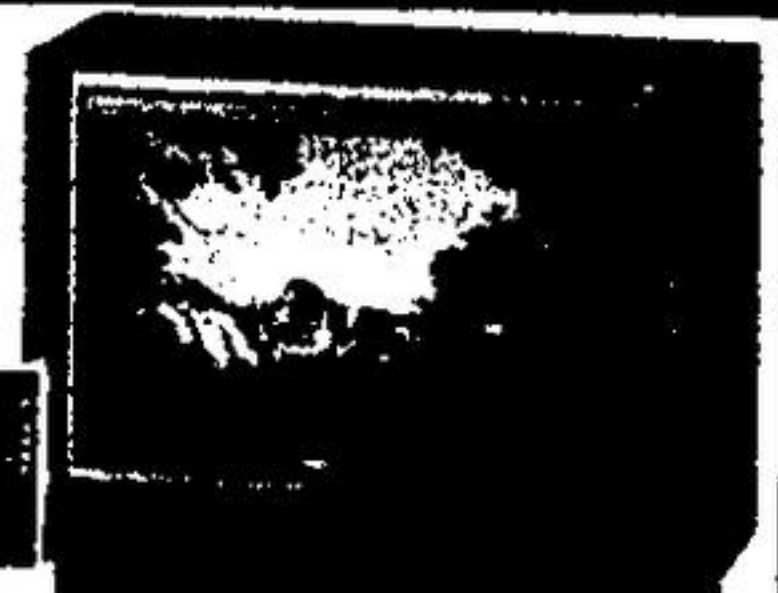
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