

Region settles on 1.4% tax hike

By **CHRISTINA COMMISSO**
Metroland Media Group

In a budget that will see close to \$1 billion spent on infrastructure, programs, services, regional staff and police, Halton's council was hung up on about \$190,000.

That amount represented the difference between capping Regional staff pay increases at 2.25 per cent, which was the amount decided upon during Monday's budget deliberations, or at 2 per cent, which some councillors deemed would bring public sector wages further in line with those in the private sector.

"I think that the public is looking for us to show some leadership and keep in line with the private sector," said Halton Hills Councillor Jane Fogal Monday.

Fogal introduced the motion after the defeat of a similar motion from Burlington councillor Jack Dennison that would have seen pay increases capped at 1.9 per cent.

"Is it a lot of money, no. But we have to do something different. Public sector salaries have gotten out of line with the private sector," said Dennison.

Fellow Burlington Councillor Paul Sharman supported the motion, citing an imbalance in private and public sector wages and increasing poverty rates in Halton.

However, the majority around the council table were satisfied with the cap.

"This isn't a negotiation. We're not setting numbers in stone," said Oakville Coun-

cillor Jeff Knoll. "We're stuck at a \$191,000 decision and who are we putting this on the shoulders of — our staff. It sets a tone."

Following a half-hour in-camera session, council reconvened and the motion to decrease the cap to 2 per cent was defeated 15-6.

However, there was no divide when it came down to the approval of the Region's 2011 budget, which was unanimously passed during Wednesday's meeting.

Halton's 2011 operating budget will see more than \$700 million spent on costs, including police services and regional staff, and the capital budget totals more than \$200 million.

While the Regional services budget represents a 0.2 per cent decrease from last year, the rising costs of policing and water and wastewater rates have offset that tax cut.

When combined with the 4.4 per cent increase in the Halton Regional Police Service budget, taxpayers will see an increase of 1.4 per cent on the total Regional property tax bill. For a household assessed at \$350,000, their 2011 taxes will increase about \$19 over last year.

The approved rate-supported water and wastewater budget for 2011 sees an increase of 4.1 per cent. For a typical household using 300 cubic metres of water a year, this equals an increase of about \$31 over 2010 levels.

—with files from Kim Arnott, special



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