

Water rates may climb \$27 for an average household

By **CHRISTINA COMMISSO**
Metroland Media Group

The typical Halton household is likely to pay about \$27 more for water next year, and one councillor is concerned that this basic necessity will become too costly for some.

During last Wednesday's planning and public works budget meeting the committee heard that the 2012 water rates for the average household are set to reach \$778 a year, up from \$752 last year. The increase will go before the budget committee Monday (December 12) for discussion and then must be passed by regional council.

"People will soon be paying more for water and wastewater than they're paying for all regional services combined, with the exception of police," said Burlington Councillor John Taylor.

Halton Hills Wards 1&2 Regional Councillor Clark Somerville told *The Independent & Free Press* that water hikes are "borne out of the Walkerton inquiry."

"Halton has a good quality water system and it's expensive to maintain a quality system," he said.

The Region is forecasting the average household (\$350,000 assessment value) will pay \$1,319 for regional taxes in 2012, up by about \$15, or 1.2 per cent from last year.

It's forecast by 2017 the average household will pay more than \$1,000 for water.

"Water is a necessity of life," said Taylor. "No matter what your income is, there's a basic human necessity for health and hygiene. I'm concerned that it is getting very pricey, at least on paper."

However, Taylor noted he was pleased the Region is now predicting lower annual water rate increases over the next

10 years than what was previously forecasted.

Public works staff expect the annual increase to hover around 5.5 per cent, where in 2010 that increase was pegged closer to seven per cent.

"We have started to bend the curve," said Taylor. "If we go back 10 years and forward 10 years using budget history the rate doesn't quadruple as it did in the past, it only triples. That's a big step."

Commissioner of Public Works Mitch Zamojc said water consumption has decreased dramatically in the last few years, with a greater emphasis being placed on water conservation and the use of more efficient appliances.

He said in 2006 the average water consumption per household was 300 cubic meters per year and it has now dropped to 274 cubic metres.

Increased hydro prices are also putting pressure on the costs at water treatment plants.

Zamojc said the cost of hydro at these facilities is \$8 million per year, and 2012 should see an increase of \$727,000. "We have fixed costs so there's no relationship between a drop in consumption or a drop in customers and the cost of a plant."

In 2011 Halton households paid on average about 10 per cent more for water (based on 250 cubic metres) compared to the rest of the GTA and about 14 per cent less than the Ontario average.

Milton Councillor Colin Best told the committee not to expect water consumption to increase any time soon, even with Halton's population spike.

"Canada, on average, consumes three times of any industrial country. (The decrease) is not a phenomenon, it's the way it should be. Other countries get by with far less and pay far more with no complaints."



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