



Holiday help for the food bank

Staff at Paul Armstrong Insurance gathered a number of food items to donate to Georgetown Bread Basket Food Bank for the holidays. Among those taking part were, in front, from left, Monica Donaldson (of the food bank) and Victoria Palmer. In back,

Janet Armstrong, Paul Armstrong, Lindsay Brown, Catherine Brown, Mandy Armstrong Rogers, Cindy Kallmeyer, Samantha Armstrong Rogers, Jody Jackson, Cathy Flaxbard, and Elizabeth Brooks.

Photo by Ted Brown

Region says no to housing cash

By **CHRISTINA COMMISSO**
Metroland Media Group

Re-investing in social services, particularly in assisted housing, was highlighted in Halton's recent 2012 budget. But one regional councillor wanted to see a few more million dollars dedicated to the cause.

Burlington Councillor Marianne Meed Ward put forward a motion during the Dec. 21 council meeting that would see an additional \$2.9 million invested in assisted housing next year. The motion was voted down 20-1, with only Meed Ward voting in favour, but sparked a lively debate.

The \$2.9 million represents half of what the Region is saving from the GTA pooling upload in 2012. Since the uploading began in 2007 the Region has saved \$123.9 million. Of that amount, \$26.1 million (45 per cent) has been reinvested into social and human services and \$32.4 million (47 per cent) has gone toward waste and transportation projects.

"I think we can do better on that. Our human capital is more important, I would suggest, than our infrastructure," said Meed Ward.

The remaining \$65.5 million of the pooling money has been used to reduce the regional budget so tax increases remain minimal.

Regional treasurer Jane MacCaskill said keeping the Region's portion of the tax bill low gives local municipalities more wiggle room to increase their own budgets.

But Meed Ward said she'd like to see an end to the "tax room concept" and invest the entire \$5.8 million of GTA pooling savings back into social services.

"I know people who are looking for housing

within a matter of months, they can't wait years," she said.

During the meeting Halton Hills Councillor Jane Fogal spoke against the motion, "not so much because I disagree with the sentiment, but because in my opinion it reflects a change in policy," she said, referring to the GTA pooling split.

"When we decided to share the GTA pooling with local municipalities, unfortunately at time the decision was made by way of reducing regional taxes and providing tax room at local level. It's hard to understand but it is the way we're doing it. This (\$2.9 million) reneges on that."

If the \$2.9 million went towards housing projects opposed to lowering the regional budget, Halton's tax increase would have risen from 1.1 to two per cent in 2012.

Additional information provided to councillors about Halton's community housing waitlist shows during 2010 only four individuals on the all-ages chronological waitlist for one-bedroom assisted housing units were placed and the average time they spent waiting for a unit was 7.7 years. As of the end of 2010 there were 587 singles and childless couples on the waitlist for a one-bedroom unit.

"If we're placing four people per year out of 587, if that continues you'll see how long it will take to place everyone on that list today in housing," said Meed Ward.

Single adults and childless couples wait the longest for housing in Halton. Priority is first given to victims of domestic abuse, homeless individuals, newcomers and applicants with special needs.

Staff will begin working on a Halton housing strategy in February that will address the housing need.

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By Cory Soal
R.H.A.D.

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