

# Provincial budget will impact Halton's finances, says Moyle

By **CHRISTINA COMMISSO**  
*Metroland Media Group*

It wasn't the austerity measures of the Rae days or the municipal downloading brought about by the Harris government, but the 2012-13 Liberal provincial budget will have an impact on Halton's finances, councillors heard.

Regional CAO Pat Moyle recently gave council a summary of the potential impacts stemming from the 2012-13 Liberal budget, which will see many provincial programs held at a one per cent increase.

For regional programs that are cost-shared with the Province, EMS for example, the measure could pose problems as demand for emergency services continues to increase with a growing population, said Moyle.

He said a reduction of \$164 million in post-secondary capacity funding could impact the Wilfrid Laurier University satellite campus planned for Milton, and a \$229 million reduction in highway spending may result in a set back for the GTA West and Niagara to GTA corridors; both highways have raised red flags for regional staff and councillors.

"Maybe it could be good news," quipped Moyle.

Investments in highway rehabilitation and GO Transit projects are also slated for a massive reduction—\$1.4 billion over six years. Moyle said that puts plans for bus rapid transit lines along Dundas Street and Trafalgar Road in jeopardy.

Halton Hills Councillor Jane Fogal

questioned how the region is expected to continue to grow at the same time as provincial transportation projects are being put on hold.

However, Moyle said the projects that will be delayed or scrapped haven't yet been named.

The budget wasn't all bad news, he added. "There's no cancellation of any hospital project, there's no public health changes, there's no changes to the gas tax program and there's no plan to consolidate hydro utilities."

He said the continuation of uploading costs for social services to the Province will mean \$13.5 million of additional revenue returned to Halton Region until 2018. "Those commitments have been honoured in the budget and that's very good news."

The Province also wants to streamline the arbitration process when it comes to labour talks with police and fire services, which could mean savings at the regional level.

The current process allows for certain employee groups—those deemed as essential services—to go through the negotiation process and if an agreement isn't reached there's forced arbitration, which Moyle said has raised plenty of concerns by municipalities. "Arbitrators don't look at the ability to pay and the constraints in municipalities. Some arbitrators have taken the position there's always more money available by raising taxes to pay for increases."

He said the new legislation will look at municipalities' finances during the arbitration process.



**PATRICK MOYLE**

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