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Milton council calls public school boards 'irresponsible'

By ROB KELLY
Despite the advice of the municipal treasurer, Milton town council endorsed a resolution last week that paints the public education system as financially irresponsible.

The resolution originated in the village of Millbrook, near Peterborough. Such resolutions are often circulated around the province in an effort to drum up support among other municipal governments for political stances.

Millbrook's resolution said municipal governments aren't compensated for collecting school board taxes, so they should not collect them — the school boards should. It also said the school boards are "seen as not being responsible or accountable" for the tax money they obtain.

While Milton's support is only a formality in that no action will be taken locally beyond paying lip service to the Millbrook protest, Milton treasurer Jim McQueen cautioned against endorsing Millbrook's resolution because he viewed it as inaccurate.

Municipalities do get compensation for the school board taxes they collect, McQueen said. Taxes are generally collected prior to the date at which they must be forwarded to the school boards, and the municipality invests that money and earns interest income for the short time span in which it holds the education tax dollars.

As far as accountability goes, McQueen added that school boards are "certainly" subject to the standard financial control procedures used in any public corporation, such as external auditing.

"I would definitely caution council in terms of approving this resolution."

That didn't sway Milton councillor Bruce Attenborough, however. "I disagree with Mr. McQueen's in-

terpretation. I don't think the board has been responsible or accountable."

While the town may "indirectly benefit" from interest income on school taxes, that modest sum is probably "more than offset" by the cost of paying crossing guards, a cost assumed by the municipality, Attenborough pointed out.

The councillor added that the board abdicates its responsibilities by keeping the public at arm's length whenever possible and making most decisions at in-camera meetings. "They discourage

public input and they discourage the public from coming to their meetings."

Councillor Colin Best sided with Attenborough, painting a picture of a school board that has become totally alienated from the electorate. "Only 10 per cent of the people come out to vote for the school boards and no one asks them (the candidates) any questions at the all-candidates meeting."

(Rob Kelly is the news editor at *The Milton Champion*, a sister newspaper to this publication.)

Town council says board should collect own taxes

By JANET BAINE

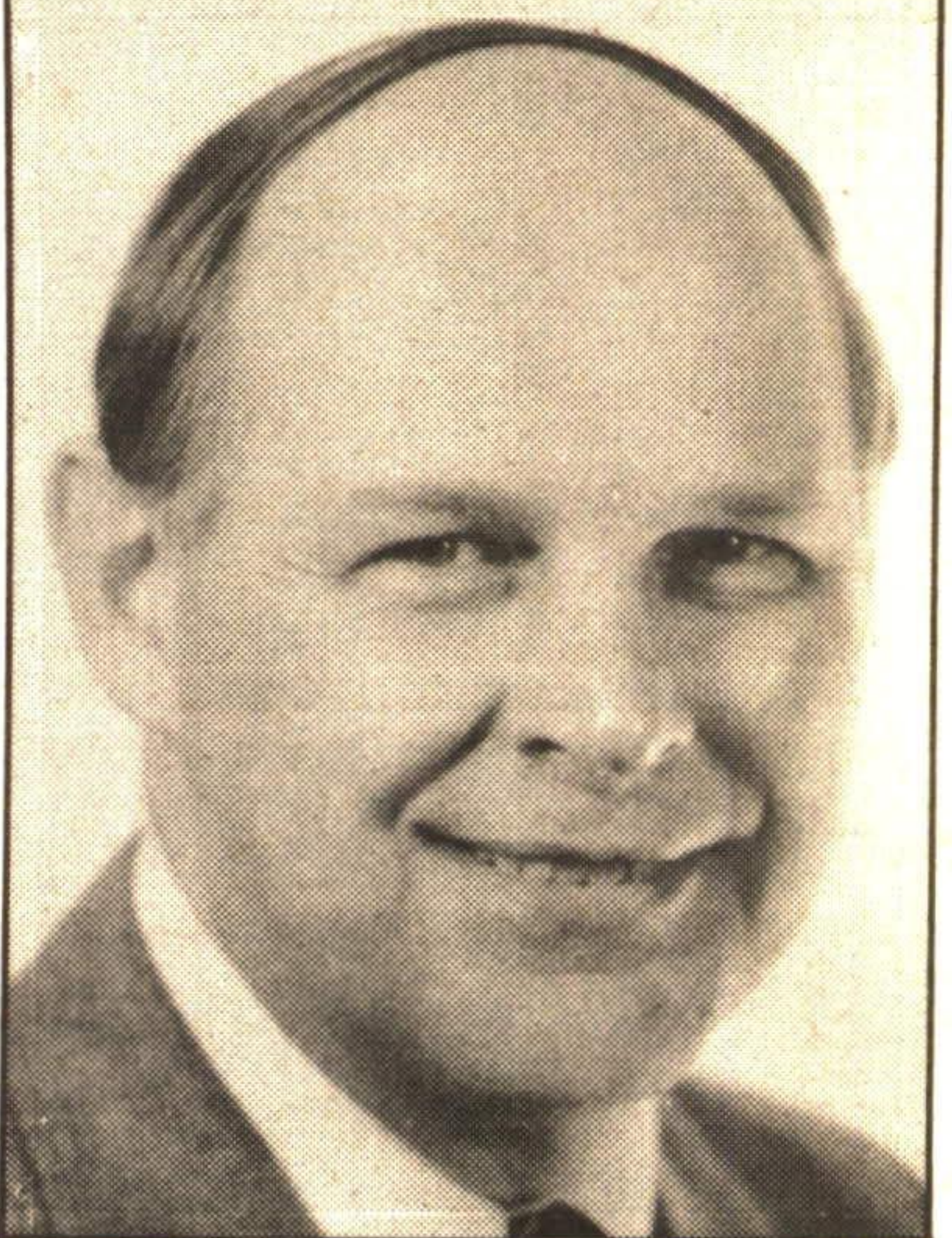
Halton Hills council has endorsed a resolution asking the province to allow school boards to collect their own taxes, but stopped short of calling public boards irresponsible.

The resolution came last month from the village of Millbrook, near Peterborough. It says "school boards are seen as being not responsible, not accountable for their share of the taxes collected" and asks the province to allow school boards to collect their own taxes.

"It's not that they're irresponsible, but we have to collect their taxes and take the heat for it," Mayor Russ Miller said.

Only about 30 per cent of the municipal taxes go to Halton Hills, about 12-15 per cent to Halton Region, and the remainder goes to the school boards, he said.

Although the motion was endorsed by Councillor Alf Spence, he said he doesn't really agree with the wording on the motion, which could imply school boards are not responsible.



TRUSTEE DICK HOWITT

"There should be greater differentiation between where the finances are being allocated," he said.

Georgetown school board trustee Dick Howitt said he doesn't think the school board would mind collecting their own taxes.

"It would have to be someone who has been living on another planet with all we've been hearing lately" about high school taxes who doesn't know school boards get a major portion of money which is collected, he said.

While he blames this on less funding from the provincial government, Howitt said the board also has to do what it can to keep spending down and keep taxes to a minimum.

"I'm hearing the message (that taxes are too high) and have been for a couple of years," Howitt said. "It isn't enough to say that grants have been decreased; you've also then got to look at the expenditure side and what you can trim."

The Halton Board of Education has a long-standing dispute with municipalities over tax collection, because there is a lag between the time the money is collected and when the school board receives it.

During this time, the school board has to borrow money and pay interest, while the municipality holds onto the money.

In the spring, the Halton Board of Education sent a letter to all municipalities in the region asking them to give the money to the board as soon as it is collected, and only Burlington agreed to do this.

Howitt admitted that sending out two tax bills would be more costly. The board would have to ask for a report from staff to find out whether the current payments in interest would cover the higher cost of collecting the money before pursuing the issue, he said.

A more constructive approach municipalities could take, Howitt suggested, would be to pass a resolution asking the NDP government to increase school funding as they promised to do during the election campaign. Renfrew County has already done this.

Interestingly, the resolution from Renfrew County was given to Halton school trustees, whereas the resolution from Millbrook was not.

Your Week Ahead Horoscope

- ARIES** Mar. 21-Apr. 19 The new moon on Wednesday is likely to bring a surprise or two to business dealings. Family plans are altered.
- TAURUS** Apr. 20-May 20 A turning point is reached where organizational matters are concerned. Your goals are most certainly within reach.
- GEMINI** May 21-June 20 There are some details to be worked out before making a firm commitment in financial arrangements with another.
- CANCER** June 21-July 22 Partnership matters are highlighted. You are at your best when resolving a dispute over a business matter.
- LEO** July 23-Aug. 22 Look for a surprise twist as the employment picture unfolds. There will be a marvelous opportunity for advancement.
- VIRGO** Aug. 23-Sept. 22 The holiday spirit prevails. Friends and family make for a busy social scene. Be aware of the cost.
- LIBRA** Sept. 23-Oct. 22 An emotional sensitivity to matters concerning home, family, possessions, brings out deep feelings of nostalgia for the way things were.
- SCORPIO** Oct. 23-Nov. 21 You should find it easy to communicate with those who can promote your ideas and plans most effectively.
- SAGITTARIUS** Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Resist the tendency toward impulsive spending. Review the budget and know where you stand financially. The holiday period can be costly.
- CAPRICORN** Dec. 22-Jan. 19 The Sun moving into Capricorn promises an optimistic period. You can move forward with confidence and accomplish your goals.
- AQUARIUS** Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Confidential plans develop to your satisfaction. An important person seeks your advice in a professional matter.
- PISCES** Feb. 19-Mar. 20 The focus is on friends and family, and a busy social life, with some down-to-earth business dealings thrown in.



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