

Budget highlights

Halton Regional council approved its operating and capital budgets after a long and tedious debate Wednesday afternoon. Here are some of its highlights:

- Property taxes will rise by an average of 7.65 per cent this year. In real dollars, that equals \$22.32 over last year, bringing the total to \$313.93. The figure is based on a property assessment of \$6,850. The total regional tax bill will rise by 5.64 per cent, which means the average Halton taxpayer will be charged \$742.85 in 1992. The figure includes property taxes, water/wastewater fees and waste management charges.

- Halton Region's overall expenditures for 1992 are: \$138 million for its operating budget; a \$50 million capital budget (work on roads, sewers, etc.); and \$80 million for its rate-supported budget, \$55 million of which are paid by taxes (water, police, welfare, conservation authorities etc.).

- Halton regional councillors, the chairman and eight staff department heads' salaries are frozen at 1991 levels.

- A 3 per cent, non-union regional staff reduction (11 people) through attrition and other means. To keep costs down, staff will be asked to take unpaid leave of absences.

- Halton Regional Police will receive \$37,750,000 from the region. The tally includes a 1 per cent wage hike for the officers, even though a salary settlement has not yet been reached. The police will be hiring 12 new officers and one civilian this year.

- * Welfare costs to the region skyrocketing to almost \$26 million this year. Due to the enormous number of caseloads (up to 280 per caseworker per month, and climbing), regional councillors approved seven of 10 new positions for the social services department. An additional \$600,000 was added to general welfare assistance, half of what is expected to be needed to handle the workload. If the remaining \$600,000 is required, it will be taken from existing budgets.

Budget hike 7.65%

Continued from pg.1

Halton Region has budgeted almost \$26 million for general welfare assistance this year, compared to the \$14 million budgeted in 1991. An additional \$1.2 million was requested, but only half that was added to the budget on Wednesday.

The Children's Aid Society will be receiving just shy of \$1.7 million from the region, while Halton Regional Police will be getting \$37,750,000.

Pomeroy is angered that these "uncontrollable" costs have pushed the region's tax bill higher than the rate of inflation, which was council's original target.

Calling the police budget in particular "fiscally irresponsible," pointing out 12 new officers and one civilian are to be hired, Pomeroy insisted that \$95,000 be cut from its budget as a gesture to the police.

He promised to "negotiate" with the province to get it to pay for all social assistance programs, instead of municipal property taxes going towards the high costs.

He also vowed to lobby for ultimate control of the police budget. Under the present system, the police service board sets its own budget, with nominal input from the region. If the municipality and police cannot agree on a final budget, then the region's only recourse is to appeal to the Ontario Police Commission. If Pomeroy gets his wish, then regional council will have the final say on how much the police receive annually.

"We must rationalize the roles of the region and the province — if we only end up being property tax collectors, then we might as well do away with regional government," Pomeroy said.



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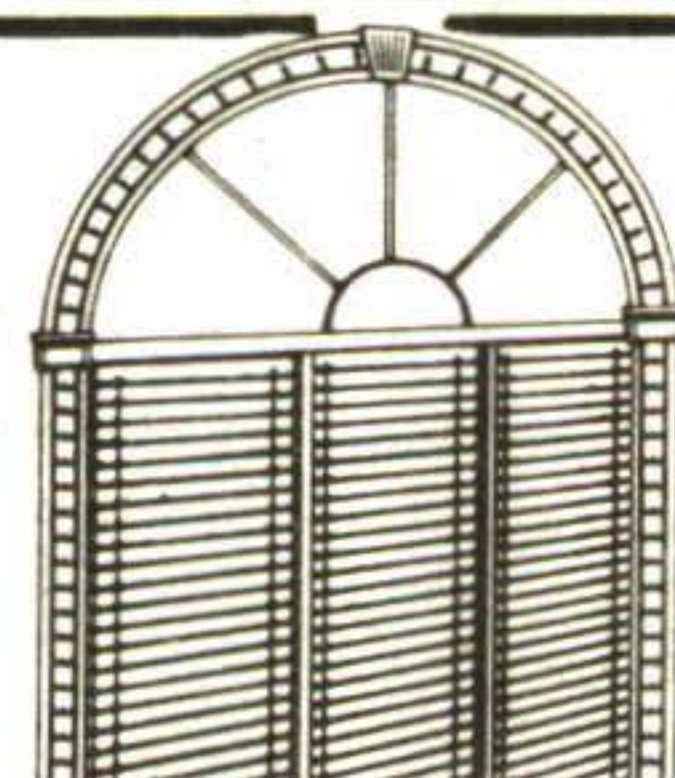
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