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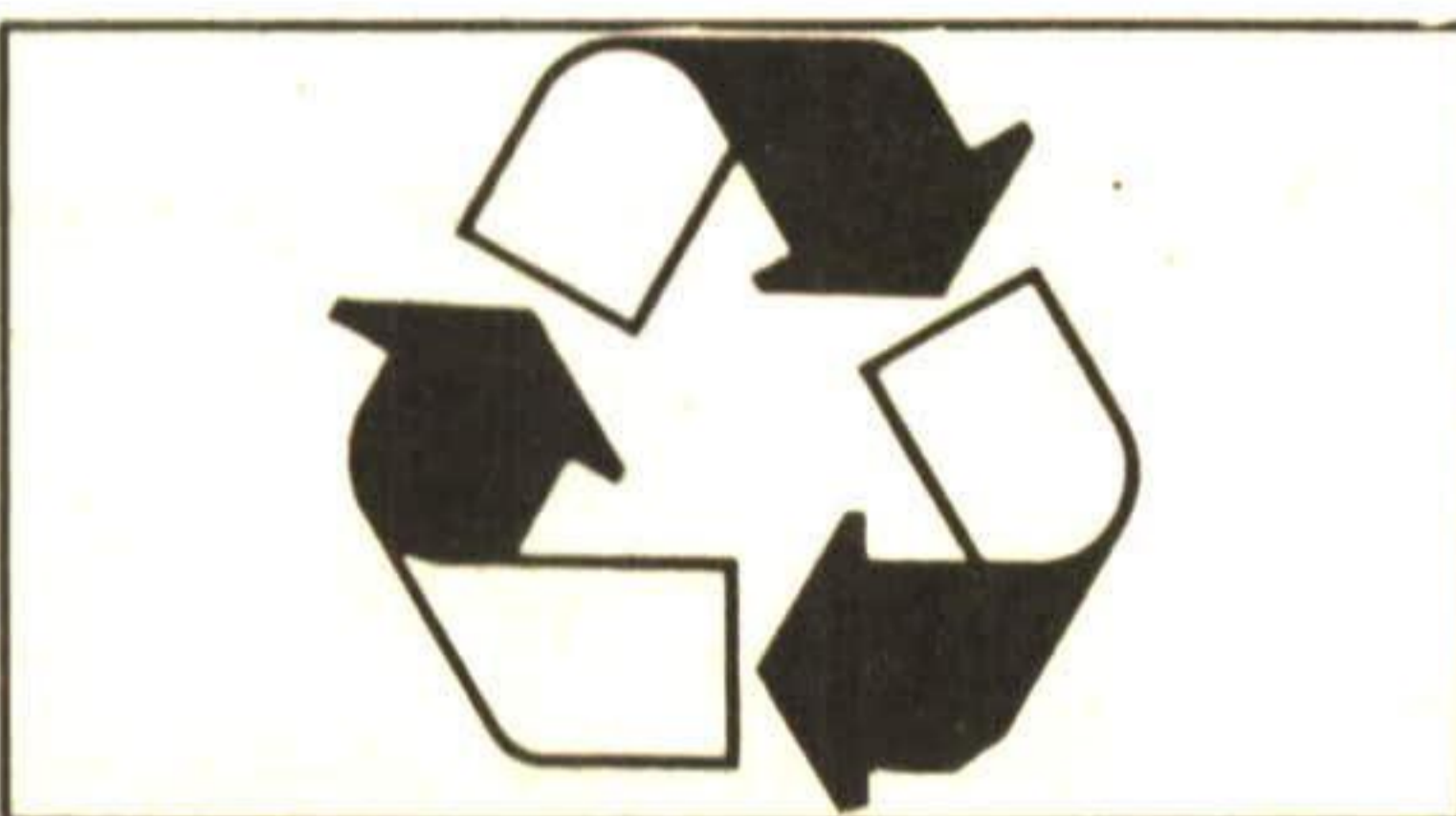


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Police officer disputes Johnston's comments

The Halton Region Police Service is concentrating more effort combating violence, in particular against women and children, than for any other crime in the region, according to media relations officer Sgt. Carey Smith.

In an interview Wednesday, Smith disputed regional councillor Pam Johnston's accusations that Chief James Harding is too aggressive for a man in his position, and that his officers do not go far enough when dealing with violence in society.

"I really get irritated when people say that we're not doing anything about (violence)," he said. "We've done more on that particular concern than any other."

Smith emphatically denied that the Police Service's family violence committee is only window dressing, as Johnston claimed, noting that it is legitimately trying to deal with the problem of violence against children and women.

"(Johnston's) statement is completely false - that committee is certainly not taking its mandate lightly," he added.

Smith noted that the committee is "currently in the agenda and policy formation stages," adding that it was only created last fall. Representatives from regional government, both boards of education, Halton Women's Place, family services, police and the judicial system sit on the committee, which has met about four times so far.

"Every officer has undergone eight hours of training on wife assault and family violence - that may not seem like a lot, but we've never had a training session where every officer and civilian has been pulled away. Everyone had to do it, and I've never seen anything like it before in my 15 years of experience...I really object to the statement that it's just window dressing."

Smith added that his job involves "substantial media coverage" in an effort to "inform the public that the police is intolerant of violence against women."

As for Johnston's criticism that Chief Harding used intimidation and bullying tactics against councillors last week, Smith believed that what the chief said was true. Harding threatened that police officers' lives would be endangered if

their current radio system is not drastically improved.

"Communication is a fundamental part of our job - what (Harding) said was the truth," he insisted. "Police are charged with the responsibility of protecting citizens and themselves. But, it's a dangerous position these days, and, like it or not, it takes money to discharge our duties properly. We need the tools of the trade and personnel...If someone feels intimidated by (Harding's) remarks, well, being hurt is a real possibility."

Councillor upset

Continued from page 1

Johnston considers his approach a form of intimidation and "aggressive behavior," warning that it will not be tolerated anymore.

"We need to make decisions based on a logical and rational manner, not by bullying tactics," she said. "Yes, I felt that (Harding) was using intimidation and scare tactics trying to get us to support something he wants...That type of behavior promotes violence in our society. I think, in the 90s, there are changes in boardrooms across the country and those displaying aggressive patterns will not be promoted or hired anymore."

Although she believes that Harding should no longer hold the position as police chief, Johnston refused to go a step further and officially push for him to resign.

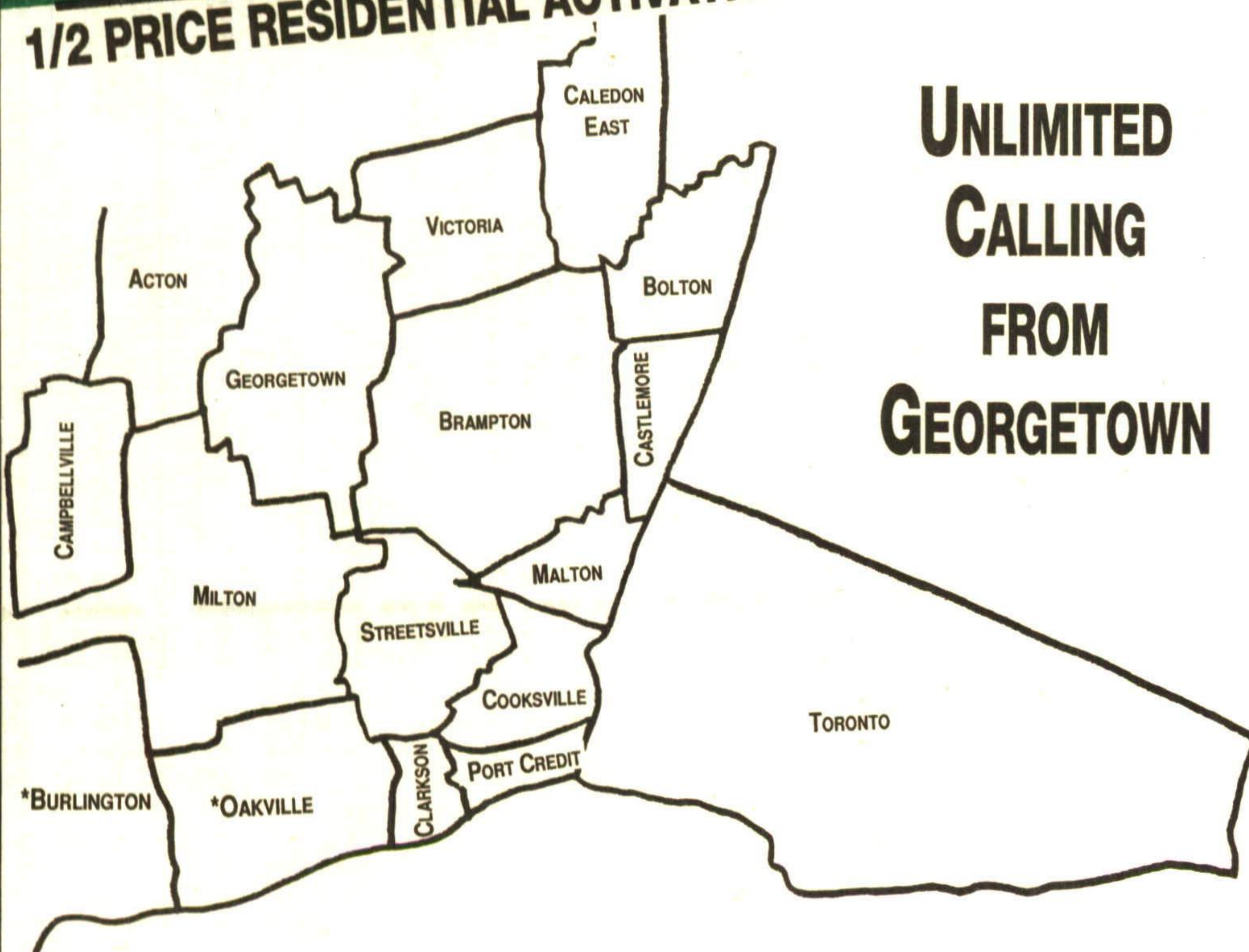
"I didn't like what happened - I don't like it, and I want it to stop," she said. "That's just my opinion, but I'm not going to take the steps (at council) to see that he's removed...It's not just (Harding), it's a general pattern in society. I want to see an overall change in aggressive behavior, so it's not an attack on just one person. We need to show leadership and demonstrate that's not acceptable anymore."

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