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Trustees aim for 2-3 per cent public school budget increase

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
Staff writer

An apparent lack of facilities for special needs children in Halton Hills was the major concern raised by Georgetown residents during a meeting with local public school trustees Dick Howitt and Dave Whiting.

About 20 Georgetown residents attended Tuesday's meeting at Stewarttown School which included a progress report on this year's budget process.

Howitt explained that in order to keep the Halton public school system running to capacity, a 4.5 per cent increase in school taxes will have to be made.

"We felt that this was too high, so we've asked the Halton Board of Education Staff to prepare a budget with a 3 per cent increase and 1 with a 2 per cent increase and then we'll look at how painful it is to get to each figure," said Howitt.

The preliminary budget will be presented to trustees February 15.

Howitt and Whiting explained that while some trustees want to see a 0 per cent increase, this would be impossible because teachers' salaries in Halton Region, which will increase 1 and 2 per cent over the next two years, represents 80 per cent of the budget.

"If we had 45,000 students in the school system last year, we still

have 45,000 students this year. We can't send 15,000 of them home on rotation, we can't treat the system like an industry," explained Whiting.

The trustees explained that this year provincial grants to the various school boards will be announced before the preliminary budgets are presented, which will help the school boards better prepare their individual budgets. Provincial grants are expected to be announced this weekend.

A number of parents attending the meeting voiced their concern that there is no high school in Halton Hills designed to deal with special needs children; they have to send them to E.C. Drury in Milton.

A couple of woman felt that it would be more beneficial for these children to stay in their own community rather than ship them off to school once they reach the high school level.

Howitt made it clear that "there just aren't the dollars in the budget right now and that it's not going

to happen quickly."

Howitt explained that with the population growth expected in Halton Region over the next 10 years, taxpayers can expect to pay a higher percentage of the cost of running the school system.

"You would think that with a population growth, the government would be paying more of the cost of running the system but it's just the

opposite. In Toronto, taxpayers have to pay the entire cost," Howitt stated.

Howitt explained the Halton public school trustees will be working hard in the next few weeks to satisfy the two groups of people they have to deal with, taxpayers and parents.

"We'll be trying to maintain a quality education at a reasonably priced budget."

Board spends \$70,000 on membership

Public school trustees agreed to spend more than \$70,000 for membership in a provincial public education lobby group despite not yet knowing the Halton Board of Education's 1993 budget.

The membership fee for the Ontario Public School Board Association (OPSBA) is \$66,389 plus GST of \$4,647.23.

Burlington trustee Don Cassidy said OPSBA will speak on behalf of public education whether or not the board joins this year, so the board had a "moral obligation" to pay its membership dues.

"It's very difficult for us to get an appointment with the Minister of Education and make our views known, but OPSBA does it for us," said Burlington trustee Marg Bullock.

"Everyone is talking about this organization speaking on our behalf. I have just one question, 'Who's listening?'" asked Burlington trustee Noel Cooper.

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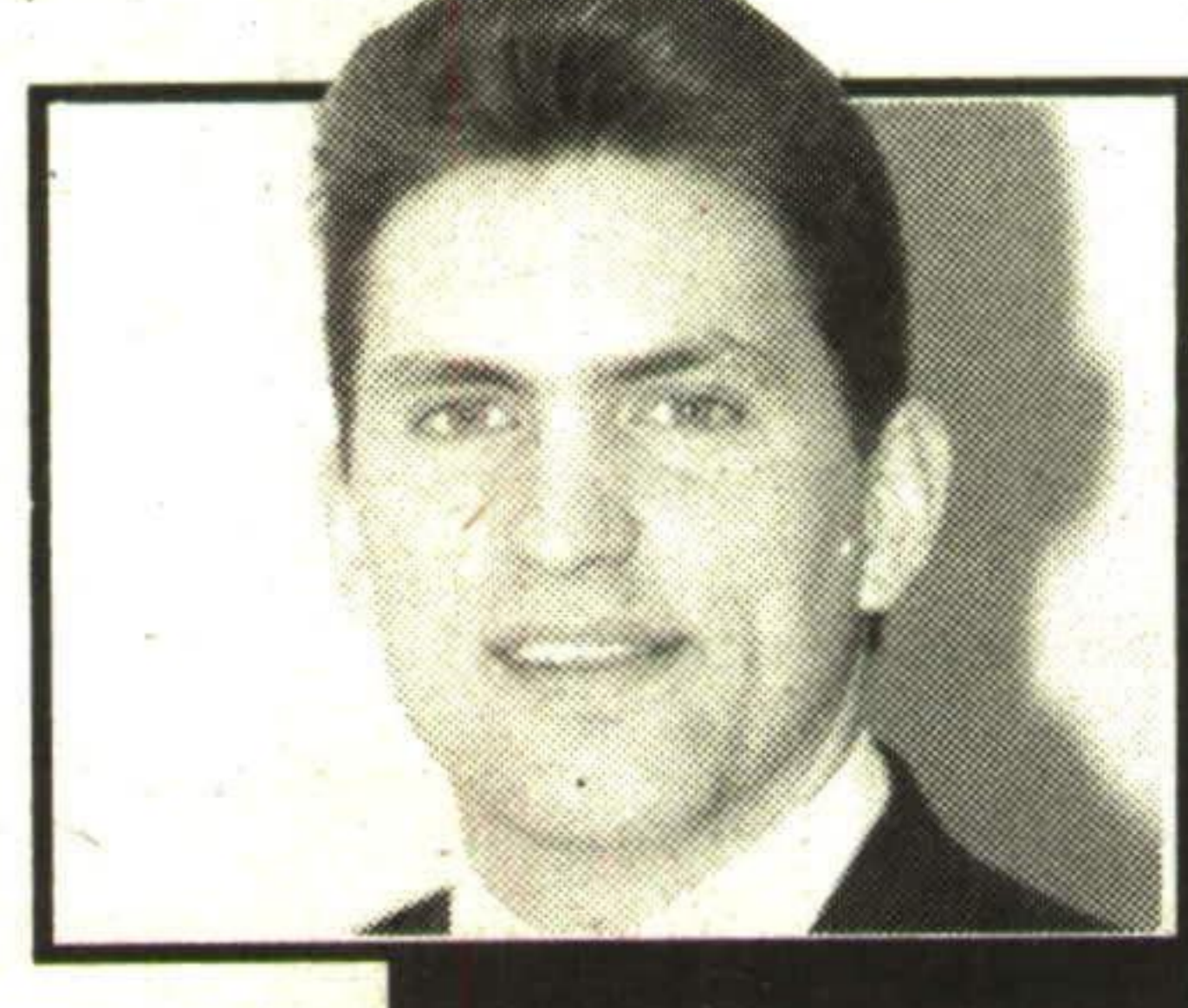


Ed and Brenda Hillier are pleased to announce the engagement of their daughter Crystal Robin to Claude Marcel Bégin, son of Claude and Patricia Bégin of Hearst, Ontario.

The wedding is to take place May 29, 1993.

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