

Conservation Authority to cut \$400,000 from budget

By SAL BOMMARITO
Special to the Independent/Free Press

Halton Region Conservation Authority is faced with having to cut more than \$400,000 from its budget after receiving word of the provincial government's decision to trim \$10.6 million in funding for conservation areas.

"It's pretty devastating," said Murray Stephen, the authority's general manager, on Wednesday.

Stephen said the authority received no previous notification of the cuts, other than a "faxed" message from the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR).

He said the province's announcement will mean reductions of \$250,000 in operating

grants and \$162,000 in the authority's conservation land-tax rebate.

Stephen said the funding reductions won't impact on parks, because they operate on a "user-pay" basis. Where the impacts will be felt, however, is in park programs such as tree planting and reforestation, water sampling and pollution abatement.

He said lack of provincial funding in those areas will result in program cuts and staff layoffs.

"Those are programs there's a cost-sharing on. We were to receive 50 per cent of those costs. Whoever put together the analysis (at the provincial level) of why \$10.6 million was conservation authority surplus, I don't believe has an understanding for conservation

authorities or has ever visited one," Stephen said.

Stephen said news of the funding cuts came hard on the heels of a MNR announcement in April that funding levels for authorities would be maintained at 1992 levels.

The HRCRA used that information to set this year's budget, which resulted in a 5.6 per cent reduction over last year. He said the authorities were not consulted prior to the cuts being announced.

"For a government which says it's interested in dialogue and communication, I find this atrocious," he said.

The unexpected loss of provincial funding leaves the authority in a desperate situation, Stephen said.

"We're almost back to square one on the budget. It's an off-loading of provincial costs to the municipal tax base," he said.

To make matters worse, Stephen said the government isn't willing to discuss the funding cuts.

"There's no rationale or information provided as to why (the province) did it. Since they made the announcement, mum's the word. I'm not the author and whoever authored this, they're not giving the answers," Stephen said.

Stephen said the authority's executive committee was notified of the funding reductions last week, adding the implications of the cuts will be discussed at a full meeting of authority members May 13.

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News

Digest

GO stops July 2

GO trains will stop running through Acton on Friday, July 2, according to Tom Henry, manager of information services at Go Transit. Councillor Rick Bonnette says he's disappointed that the GO's decision, and wants to do something about it. Bonnette will ask council to send a letter to Go Transit and Premier Bob Rae asking that the service continue. He wants copies of the letter to be sent to Guelph, which is also losing train service, and Burlington, which will have restricted service so that they can register their protest as well.

Red Cross Clinic

A blood donor clinic will be held Monday, May 10 from 1:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Holy Cross Church Auditorium in Georgetown. Donors are asked to bring photo/signature I.D. along with their donor card.

ASSIC annual

The Acton Social Services and Information Centre is holding its annual general meeting and volunteer appreciation May 12 at St. Alban's Anglican Church, Willow St. North, Acton. Meeting at 7 p.m. followed by guest speaker Rev. Andrew Asbil on clowning.

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Award winners

Members of Georgetown Little Theatre were recently honored for their production of The Curate Shakespeare; As you like it, as they won two Thea awards from the Association of Community Theatres (ACT) at the awards presentation in Toronto, April 24. Among the winners were (from left) producers Joyce Holland and Fran Anthony who won the Adjudicators Award for original and creative treatment of the play, and Frank Anthony, who received the Thea for Best Technical Achievement for his efforts as stage manager in the play. GLT was also nominated for four other categories including best lighting, best set, best director and best overall comedy.

TED BROWN Independent/Free Press

Grant cuts could alter Town budget

By JANET BAINE
Staff writer

Halton Hills could be facing drastic cuts as a result of provincial government cutbacks, possibly having as much as \$500,000 slashed from the budget this year.

"I'm rather shell-shocked today, and I don't know what to say," Treasurer Ray King told councillors at committee meeting Monday.

"Originally we thought the impact of the budget would be \$110,000 to 130,000."

This is the money which would come out of the unconditional grants to the municipality from the province. But with new information received from the Ontario government, the cutback in unconditional grants will be more like \$150,000, King said. If Premier Bob Rae's social contract discussions fail, the town could stand to lose more.

"In addition to \$150,000, an additional \$334,000 comes from the social contract," King said. These are discussions with various government unions through which the province hopes to cut a total of \$2 billion from the budget. If these discussions fail, the town could have this money cut from its budget as well.

The NDP government is suggesting that each employee take 12 days of unpaid holiday this year in order to save this money, King said, adding municipal employees in Halton Hills would be affected by this, if it goes through.

The town budget is \$15.8 million, so the cutback could be as much as 3 per cent of the total budget, according to senior accountant Cor Buikema.

The Ontario budget is slated to come down on May 19.

In March, council approved its 1993 budget, with a zero per cent increase in taxes for rural residents and 1.25 per cent increase for urban residents.

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