

Town coffers short-changed \$147,000 in provincial grants

By LISA TALLYN
Staff writer

Halton Hills will be receiving about \$147,000 less in provincial unconditional grants than was budgeted when tax bills were calculated earlier this year.

The town received word this week from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs that the \$1.143 million in unconditional grants that were to go to the town will be reduced by 12.9 per cent.

"We are going to have to find a way to offset that," said town treasurer Ray King. "It is not just a matter of injecting funds."

"Ultimately it will be up to council to decide, but I know that council would be reluctant to increase taxes."

King says that if council did decide to increase taxes to cover the

funding shortfall Halton Hills residents would face an increase on their 1993 tax bills ranging from \$7 to \$12.

King says that over the next few days he plans to meet with town department heads to come up with ways to cut the town's already very tight \$15.8 million budget. The issue could be discussed by council at Tuesday's meeting.

The provincial reduction is in line with cuts faced by other Ontario municipalities, as part of the government's expenditure control plan designed to recover \$285 million from municipalities.

"We don't expect any municipality to have to increase taxes as a result of this reduction," said Ed Philip, minister of Municipal Affairs, in a release outlining the grant reductions. "But even if some

do choose to raise taxes, we've been able to distribute the reductions so that no municipality would have to raise them more than 3 per cent, translating into an increase of about \$15 for an average household."

King says that cutting capital projects might be an option preferred by council.

"I think that capital projects, like road construction and maintenance, would likely be the type of thing that we would look at first," said King.

However, the unconditional grants cuts are just one aspect of the province's plan to control the province's deficit. The province is also slashing conditional grants, including grants for new roads, by about \$80 million. The town hadn't received word on what those cuts would amount to at press time. In the release Philip said he was optimistic those cuts won't lead to tax increases, but could mean that certain projects are canceled.

King says the cuts announced earlier this week, are not a one-shot deal, and the town is going to have to cope with similar funding shortfalls in the future.

The outcome of social contract talks with public service employees has also not yet been determined. While the social contract may not have a financial impact on taxpayers, King says a decline in service will result from the province's plan to have public service employees (including town staff) take 12 unpaid days off each year.

Woodlot can't be saved

At Monday's committee meeting Toby Barwick of Halton Hills Village Homes Inc. in Georgetown South told council members that the woodlot in the subdivision area between Mountainview Rd. and the Eighth Line cannot be saved.

Due to grading requirements the land the trees are on is two metres lower in grade than the rest of the area will be. Costs involved in the re-examination of two engineering studies was cited as a key reason for not saving the trees.

After much discussion council members supported removal of the trees, with the stipulation the developer plant one tree on each lot in the development and kick in an additional 75 trees to be planted on common lands in Georgetown South.

The recommendation has to get council approval.

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