

Former councillor wants Region revamped

By **ROB KELLY**

Special to the Independent/Free Press

Former Oakville regional councillor John Graham wants to see Halton Region's political landscape reorganized in the wake of criminal charges against regional chairman Peter Pomeroy.

Graham advocates creating a board of control made up of politicians from each of Halton's three primary committees, so those officials would have their fingers on the pulse of day-to-day regional operations.

Graham stood alone in the summer and autumn of 1991, raising questions about possible wrongdoing in Georgetown land development deals. He clashed publicly with Pomeroy then, and quietly endured the criticism of other regional councillors who felt there was little merit to his probing or substance to his fears.

On May 13, Pomeroy surrendered to police at the Burlington OPP detachment. He faces two charges of breach of trust and two of accepting secret commissions (payoffs).

His wife, regional deputy clerk Pat Crimmins, is charged with one count of offering a secret commission, as are Georgetown development lawyer Bert Arnold and former Georgetown builder Albert Tennant. All steadfastly insist they're innocent.

"I'm saddened by the whole thing," Graham said Monday. "But I was expecting it. This was the sort of thing I thought would result. I'm sorry to see everybody in trouble."

The fallout of last week's charges is lessened credibility for elected representatives, Graham said. "It's unfortunate. It does nothing to raise people's regard for government. The public believes politicians are not straight."

Graham is confident other regional councillors would have spoken out as he did if they were privy to his sources in 1991. "Many of them, if they had had the information I had, would have done the same thing."

Yet, it still rankles him that people he respected on regional council did not back him when he zeroed in on Georgetown land transactions. "I was concerned that I did not have the support of people I regarded very highly."

Asked if he felt vindicated, Graham replied that "it's kind of a hard question. I think I knew when I started out that if the police investigated, they would uncover things."

In terms of revamping Halton's government structure, Graham said currently Halton's three major committees - planning and public works, administration and finance, health and social services - "all operate in isolation." That's wrong, he contends.

"I sat on administration and finance for six years (as a councillor)," Graham noted. Its members are "supposed to" oversee regional operations, "but they don't."

An elected board of control could be made up of the regional chairman, the chairs and vice-chairs of each of the three standing committees, Graham said.

It should not mean more bureaucracy, Graham added. Part of the regional reorganization should include paring down the number of councillors from the current 24. "I'd like to see fewer councillors."

Comparatively large jurisdictions like Mississauga and Edmonton have no more than a dozen city

councillors each, he pointed out.

If there were fewer elected officials "more would take their roles more seriously," Graham said. There are "obscure councillors, those who don't read the reports before they come to meetings. I worked in the school system, and

you can always tell the people who didn't do their homework."

A retired school superintendent, the 62-year-old Graham refused to rule out a return to politics. "My wife said, 'who needs it?'" However, "I've made no decision," regarding a comeback.

Support from council for Pomeroy's decision

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There are "a lot of issues I'm going to have to be front and centre on," Pomeroy said. While "I don't intend to lessen my workload," re-evaluating whether he can continue as chairman "is going to be a regular consideration."

Regarding legal proceedings, Pomeroy said he was anxious to get the case before the courts. "My instructions to my lawyer (William MacDonald) were to move as quickly as we possibly can. We're going to attempt to have it resolved this year."

Milton mayor Gord Krantz said Pomeroy will not be the only one judging if his effectiveness as chairman is being substantially diminished. "I suspect all of us (on council) will be," he noted. The extent of political damage Pomeroy has suffered "can only be determined in the future," he added.

For now, both Krantz and Halton Hills mayor Russ Miller said they supported Mr. Pomeroy's decision. Burlington

mayor Walter Mulkewich and Oakville's Ann Mulvale were more cautious.

"The decision is his," Mulkewich said, "I respect his decision. It's not for me to agree or disagree."

"It's always been his decision," added Mulvale. "He's an honorable person." Asked if she agreed with Pomeroy's stance, however, Mulvale would only repeat, "it's his decision."

Pomeroy faces two counts of accepting a secret commission (payoff) and two of breach of trust. The charges were laid May 13 following an 18-month investigation by Project 80, a joint OPP, York regional and Metro Toronto police corruption investigation team.

Georgetown development lawyer Bert Arnold, former area builder Albert Tennant, and Pomeroy's wife Pat Crimmins each face one count of offering secret commissions in relation to the investigation.

Crimmins, Halton's deputy clerk, will also stay on in her job.

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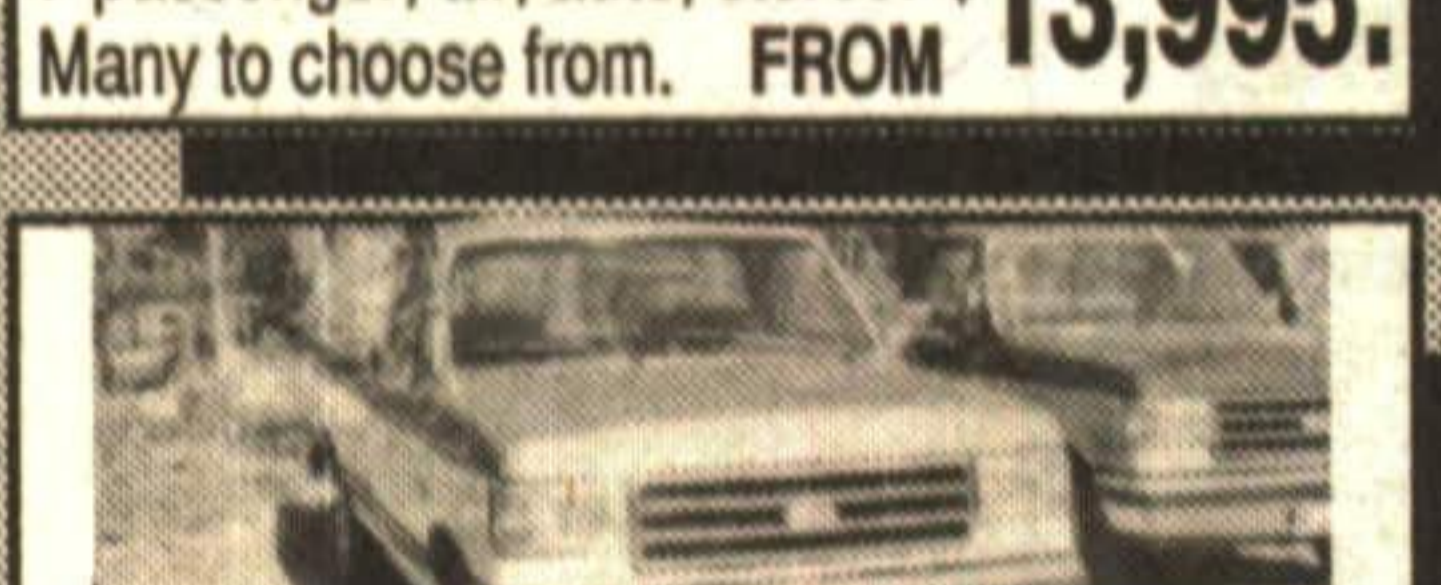
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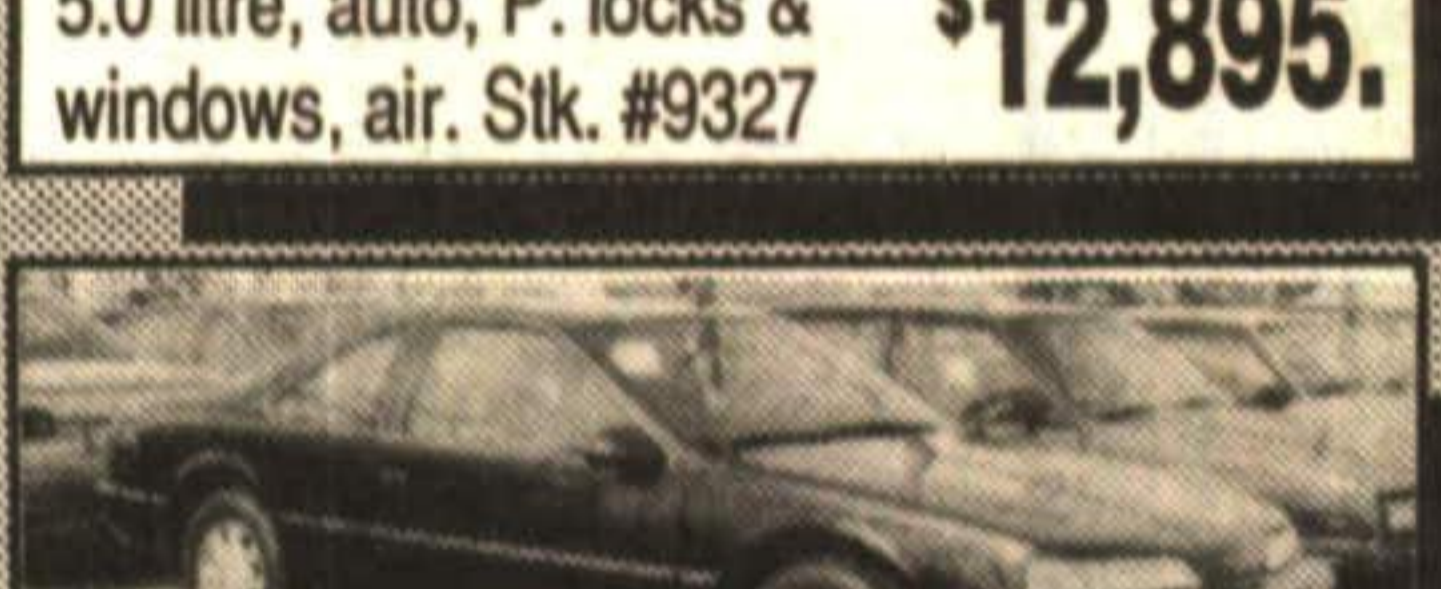
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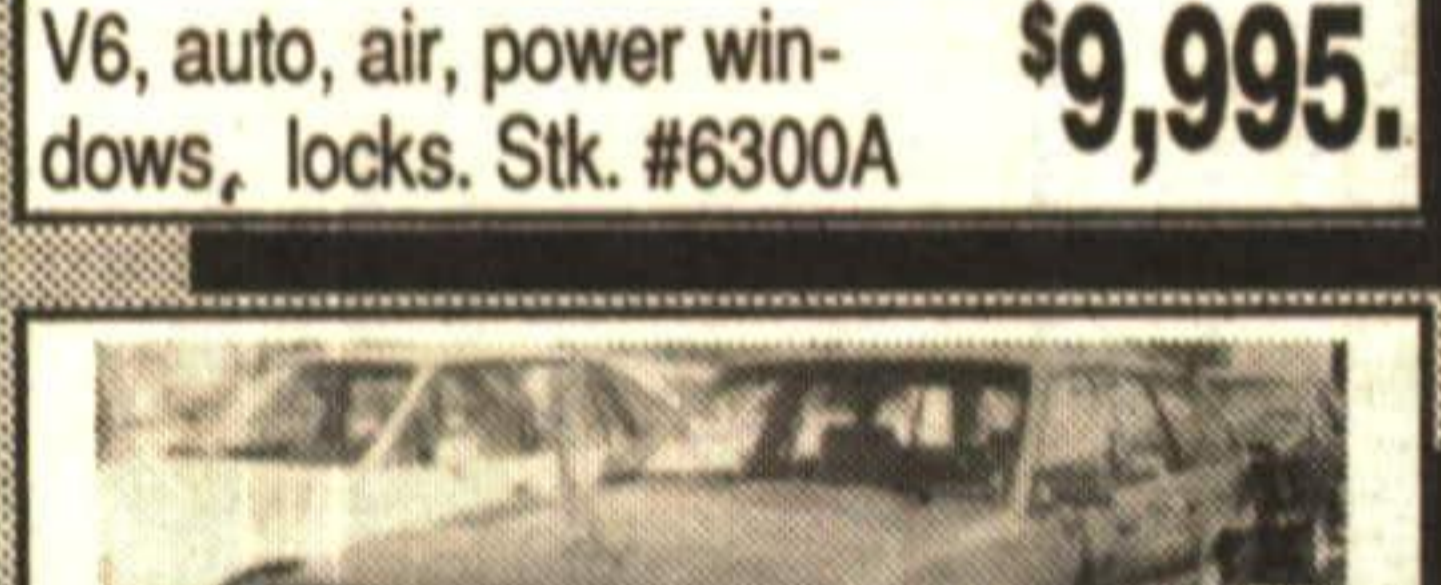
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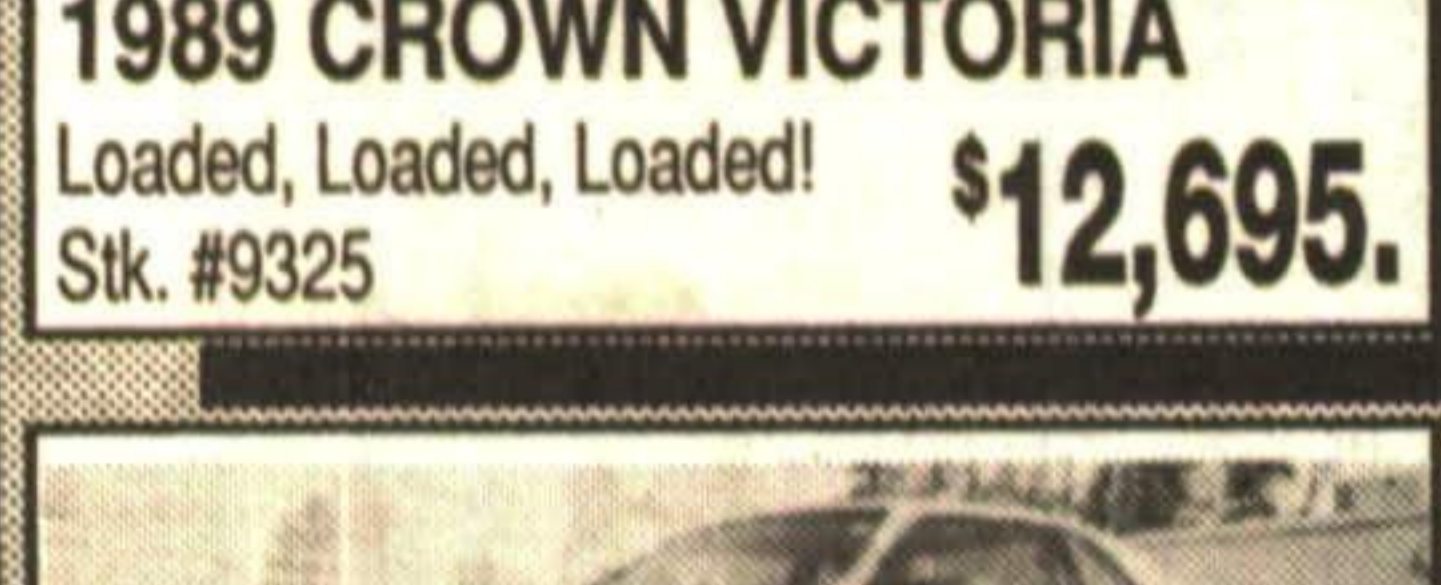
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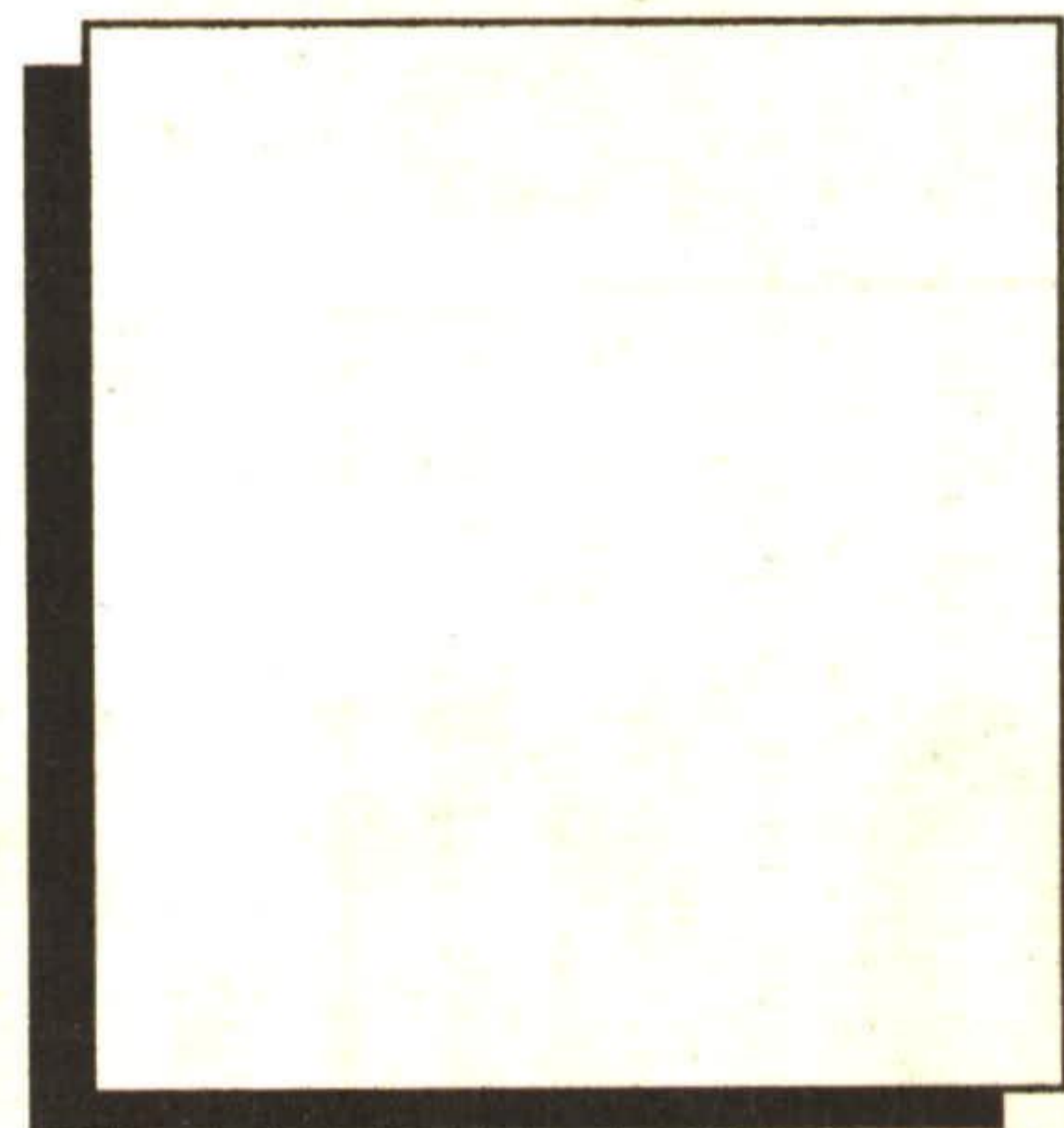
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