



By Cory Soal  
R.H.A.D.

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Exposure to cigarette smoke may hasten hearing loss as you grow older.

Monitoring more than 3,500 people between the ages 48 and 92 for 3 years, University of Wisconsin Medical School researchers found that smokers were almost twice as likely as non-smokers to have trouble hearing. Some scientists think cigarette smoke has a toxic effect on inner-ear cells, while others believe it may constrict blood flow to the inner ear.

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## ► COUNCIL

# HALTON TAXES TO RISE 2% NEXT YEAR

MELANIE HENNESSEY  
mhennessey@metroland.com

Local residents can expect to see a modest tax increase on the Halton portion of their bill next year.

During its July 10 meeting, regional council approved the 2020 budget directions, setting the stage for staff to prepare the tax-supported budget with an increase at or below the rate of inflation (or two per cent). This would equate to an extra \$6 per \$100,000 of the assessed value of one's home - \$4 for regional ser-

vices and \$2 for police services.

Halton also oversees water and sewer infrastructure and services throughout the region. On this front, local residents can expect to see a 3.9 per cent increase in their utility bill next year, or an additional \$39 based on a typical household consumption of 250 cubic metres of water per year. Halton finance commissioner and Regional Treasurer Mark Scinocca told council that the 2020 budget year will be "very challenging" due to changes in provincial funding for programs such as public health and paramedic services.

"The provincial announcements are our biggest challenges," he said. "Although it (regional budget numbers) all seem to fit in this time of uncertainty, I can tell you under the hood, there's a lot of moving parts."

Halton Hills Coun. Jane Fogal asked if the provincial budget cutbacks on things like health and children's services will result in regional service cuts or job losses.

"We get feedback from the public that they love our programs and they're not going to



Torstar file photo

Provincial budget cutbacks will be a challenge in preparing Halton's 2020 budget, says regional staff.

want to lose them, and we don't want to see that happen either," she said.

Commissioner of social and community services Alex Sarchuk said the provincial funding changes could result in an increased wait time for families seeking child care fee subsidies.

"We continue to look at our staffing model and seek efficiencies on a regular basis," he added. "We intend to be able to continue to provide the excellent programs and children's services on a going-forward basis."

Burlington Mayor Marianne Meed Ward asked when the province intends to solidify plans that will impact the regional budget.

Scinocca said due to the impending federal election, the region likely won't know the province's full intentions until late fall.

"As new information becomes available, we may have to go back and re-look at this budget," he said. Council approved having regional chair Gary Carr write a letter to the province requesting direction on funding for public health and paramedic services.

The 2020 budget and business plan will go back before councillors on Dec. 4 for budget deliberations, followed by approval at regional council on Dec. 11.

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