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# Property tax reform proposals released

By Johanna Powell  
 Special to HHTW

Halton region should not implement market value assessment using 1988 property values, a citizens' committee on tax reform says.

That will be one of the key recommendations to be made to council in the committee's report, scheduled for release on Sept. 1.

The committee says that 1988 property values should not be used as a base year for assessing taxes because some areas of Halton had inflated property values at that time. Those values have fallen significantly since then, the committee says, and it would be unreasonable to base tax

assessments on outdated real estate values.

The committee will request that an MVA tax study be conducted using 1992 market values, which the committee believes is a better base year.

The tax committee's report, which is still being finalized, will also call for:

- increased user fees to pay for services such as parking and libraries
- shifting the tax burden of education and welfare to the income tax system
- changes to the MVA system to make it more acceptable
- a study of unit value assessment as a possible replacement for MVA.

Although alternatives to market value assessment were considered, the committee will report that it didn't

have enough time to study all of the implications of changing the tax system.

It will recommend that Halton region take part in a pilot study of unit value assessment, a system which is emerging as a possible alternative in studies being carried out both in Halton and by the province's Fair Tax Commission. Under unit value assessment, a three-bedroom, 2,000-square-foot house on a 50 foot lot, for example, is taxed at the same rate as another similar-sized house and lot, no matter where they are situated in the region.

The committee is still wrestling with whether or not to recommend that Halton proceed with MVA if the province is not interested in UVA alternatives. Meetings to resolve this issue are con-

tinuing this week.

The report follows more than six months of study on every aspect of property tax by a committee of citizens from Oakville, Burlington, Halton Hills and Milton. The committee was assembled after a huge outcry last fall from people who objected to Halton's plans to switch to region-wide market value assessment based on 1988 property values. Many seniors said they would be forced out of their homes.

Under conditions set up last December when council agreed to put the brakes on region-wide MVA and set up the citizen's committee to study the issue, two-thirds of council members will have to agree before any changes can be made to the region's plans to implement MVA based on 1988 market values.

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## Information on smoke alarms

How do I know if my smoke alarm is working?

Most hydro-powered smoke alarms have a power on indicator light. Check to see that it is illuminated. Some battery-powered smoke alarms will produce a warning sound to indicate a low battery condition. Replace worn out batteries, only as per the manufacturer's specifications, immediately. The correct battery type is marked inside the smoke alarm. Use of the wrong type of battery could seriously affect proper operation of the unit.

Should I test my smoke alarm?

Testing of smoke alarms should be done on a regular basis, as often as recommended by the manufacturer or at least once a month. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to test. Some units have test buttons. Periodically, test it with smoke. This can be done with an incense stick or by lighting a candle, blowing it out, and then letting the

smoke drift into the smoke alarm. If your smoke alarm fails to respond properly to a test, have it repaired or replaced immediately.

What about accidental alarms?

Smoke alarms will detect moisture and cooking fumes. Accidental alarms may occur when installed near bathrooms or near cooking appliances. Take this into consideration when selecting installation locations. Relocate existing smoke alarms to more suitable locations if persistent accidental alarms occur.

What maintenance is required?

Smoke alarms should be maintained as per the manufacturer's instructions. Occasionally, vacuum the dust from the detection chamber. On batter-powered units, check to see the battery is in place, connected and not corroded.

For more information on this and other fire safety issues, please contact the Halton Hills Fire Department, Fire Prevention Division at 873-1133.



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