

Fast-tracking plan would see 50 police officers hired by 2000

The Halton Regional Police Service could have 50 new front-line officers on board by the year 2000.

That's fast tracking an original plan to hire 50 officers by 2005 in order to keep pace with the region's projected growth.

In the accelerated model, the police propose to hire 24 officers in 1999 and 26 in 2000.

The juiced-up pace comes courtesy of a Community Policing Partnership Program (CPPP), in which the province will match up to 50 per cent of a new officer's salary, as well as

some implementation costs, for five years.

The CPPP will help subsidize 1,000 officers in Ontario. They have requests for 1,400 new hires before them already.

"We may not get a funding grant," said Halton Chief Peter Campbell. "This is approval in principle, if all the world unfolds ideally."

By cramming the new hiring into a two-year period, Halton police will have a longer interim to take advantage of the subsidies. For example, an officer hired in 2002 would be eligible for just a one-year subsidy, while

an officer hired in 1999 would have a full five years of matched provincial funds, Halton's administration and finance committee was told.

Even with the subsidies, there is a cost to the new hires that averages out to about a 5 per cent police budget increase every year until 2003. That is over the 4 per cent per year ceiling requested by regional council.

Factoring in assessment growth at about 2 per cent, the total tax impact of the new hires would be about 3.2 per cent.

At present, a full 85 per cent of the police budget goes to

salaries and employee benefits.

While the committee approved the application for the subsidies, the hiring is in no way a done deal.

First the police have to prove they're needed.

To that end, the committee approved a \$175,000 study to be conducted jointly by Halton Region and the force to analyze the budget requirements for policing in Halton.

Police hiring has normally been done on a police-to-population ratio. By that measure a growing region translates into more officers, potentially leading

to escalating budgets.

In the end that means more of a burden on the taxpayer, who now pays an average of \$257 annually for police services.

The study will analyze the old officers-per-population premise to see if it still stands, as well as take a look at how the police service in Halton compares with other areas.

It will also do it quickly. A report is expected back in March, 1999, enabling Halton police to make their application to the province for subsidies under the CPPP.

—By Irene Gentle, special

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