

Taxpayers get two per cent break as Halton Region approves budget

It's official—the average taxpayer will pay two per cent less in regional property taxes this year.

That amounts to \$31 for the owner of a \$185,000 home.

After sailing through a series of committee meetings, a \$180 million tax budget was unanimously approved by Halton regional council Wednesday. Staff did cut the regional services portion of the tax bill by 5.4 per cent, or \$47 for the average taxpayer.

Once a 4.8 per cent increase in the police services portion of the bill is factored in, that comes out to a 3.1 per cent decrease, or \$35 per household. The two per cent figure is reached by adding in a previously approved utility rate budget, which had a tax increase of one per cent.

All told, the average Halton taxpayer will shell out \$1,495 in taxes in 1999. That's broken down to \$269 for police services, \$819 for regional

services and \$407 for the utility rate bill.

These figures do not include the effect of local municipal budgets, which have not all been completed.

While councillors approved the budget easily, they weren't as eager to endorse the reality of pooling costs.

In 1999, Halton will be expected to pay \$40 million to the provincial government in pooling costs. That comes out to about 22 per cent of net regional spending. In 1999, the average Halton household will hand over \$235 for pooling, and \$269 for regional police services.

Halton Hills Regional Councillor John Day wondered if there was a way Halton could keep track of the pooled money.

"Do we get back how that money is spent?" he asked. "Is Toronto able to offer programs outside of what we would call social services from that money?"

— By Irene Gentle, special



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