

Youth crime also targeted

Province gives Halton Police \$600,000 to hire 43 officers

An injection of more than \$600,000 from the provincial government is helping to pay for at least 43 new cops and a new program to discourage youth crime.

"(Staffing) represents about 84 per cent of our budget so by the province contributing to front-line staffing that, in turn, decreases our budget pressures," Ean Algar, Halton police chief, said. "And at the same time (it) allows us to gain additional staff to place them on the road to respond to front-line issues."

Late last week, Citizenship Minister Cam Jackson presented Algar and Police Services Board Chair Don Robinson a cheque for \$607,401 on behalf of the ministry of the solicitor general. It is the third payment to Halton police since 1999 and brings the province's total commitment to the service to more than \$2.2 million over three years.

"It is a decent shot in the arm," Algar said. "That's 2.2 million the Region of Halton and the taxpayers of Halton did not have to contribute."

Most of the money goes directly into the service's Community Policing

Partnership Program which was set up in 1998 to facilitate the hiring of new officers for Halton. Since then, the service has brought on 43 recruits and used provincial funds to help pay as much as 50 per cent of those officer's wages and benefits. The partnership program also directs money into community-based policing programs such as DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education).

Police Supt. Dan Okuloski is also getting his hands on some of the funding.

The officer in charge of community policing will use \$30,000 to set up the Strategic Targeted Offender Program (STOP). This pilot project will see two officers in each police district in Halton work directly with convicted youth criminals to help prevent re-offending. Halton's police districts include Halton Hills, Milton, Burlington and Oakville.

"Beginning April 8 right up till June 30, each one of the districts is now going to have—two nights per week—the opportunity to have two staff just for these enforcement issues," Okuloski said.

"If a judge says (an offender) has a curfew or can't be drinking or associat-



Halton Regional Police Services Chief Ean Algar (left) and police services board chair Don Robinson (right) accept a cheque for \$607,401 from Citizenship Minister Cam Jackson. Photo by Ron Kuzyk

ing with certain people and nobody checks up on them, there are no consequences."

The program will see officers identify youth who have committed crimes or who may be at risk to offend and work with them to uphold their probation conditions and to discourage further illegal behaviours.

Okuloski said the project is based on similar youth diversion projects run by

other police services in Ontario. In developing the project, he consulted Halton's front-line youth officers and counsellors who work with more than 300 youth offenders in Halton who are currently on probation or police-sponsored diversion contracts. Okuloski said if the project is a success he'll work to create a similar system to be put in place permanently.

—By Robb Swybrous, special



Banner day

Jack Mathews, 10, a Grade 5 student at Limehouse Public School, was one of several students holding a banner of student handprints at the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination flag-raising at Milton town hall Thursday. Photo by Graham Paine

Blaze destroys heritage barn

County of Wellington OPP and Eramosa Fire Department were called to a barn fire on the Ontario Heritage Foundation property on Main St. S. in Rockwood early Tuesday morning.

When they arrived the barn was fully engulfed in flames.

The cause of the fire has yet to be determined and the investigation is continuing. Anyone with information is asked to call OPP Guelph Detachment at (519) 822-7250 or Wellington County Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS.

Region enjoyed \$20M surplus last year

Halton Region appears to be in the money.

The Region's Administration and Finance Committee heard last week that a \$20 million surplus was realized last year.

However the region's financial gurus warned councillors not to think they'd won the lottery.

In fact, as Oakville Mayor Ann Mulvale noted, what adds up to a good news story this year could easily take a turn for the worse in other years.

That's because a big chunk of the surplus comes from savings realized in Halton's lower-than-expected share of the provincially-required pooling of cash to pay for social welfare and housing outside of its borders—a very unstable source.

The surplus was dubbed as "significant."

That's because last summer regional staff projected it would be \$6 million.

It's "primarily due to one-time adjustments relating to prior years including a \$4.5 million reduction in the allowance for tax appeals, \$2.5 million in Provincial Offences revenues related to 1998-2000, and a

\$1.8 million accrual reversal relating to GTA pooling," said a report from regional corporate services commissioner Jane MacCaskill.

Another \$6.4 million was saved in Halton's contribution to GTA pooling, though MacCaskill warned there could be some back-billing that could reduce the contribution amount.

The region's investments also earned \$1.5 million more than anticipated.

Councillors voted Wednesday to redirect the \$20 million into various reserve funds.

Those include: transportation for anticipated future bridge repairs (\$8.2 million); social housing (\$3.7 million); policing (\$694,000 to the debt charge reserve and \$1.3 million to the capital reserve); tax stabilization (\$6.2 million); and water capital reserve (\$226,000).

"The reinvestment is the proper way of dealing with it (the surplus)," said Halton Hills Regional Councillor John Day.

Day was pleased to see cash directed to policing roads and affordable housing.

The region's 2001 budget was \$258.3 million. As of Dec. 31, it came in at \$237.8 million.

Councillors were quick to note the surplus is a small percentage of the overall budget and is related to pooling, which eats up a full one-quarter of the budget—and is not within the region's control.

Pooling is the money required to be paid to the province to offset social service costs.

Another \$5 million was also added to the surplus from reserve accounts that were established to offset property tax appeals which never materialized.

Mulvale said she still believes the new system of property tax assessment "is wrong, but said it was good news that appeals aren't on the rise.

Milton Mayor Gord Krantz asked if large surpluses are to be realized, should the region have come up with a lower increase for taxpayers last year.

"We have gone through the 2002 budget and we're quite convinced that we'd put forward the same budget even with this information," said MacCaskill.

The commissioner said last year's savings were realized from numerous "extraordinary" circumstances.

—Angela Blackburn, special with files from Lisa Tallyn, staff writer

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