



WORTH THE DRIVE: Carter Leslie, 5, of Georgetown and his dad caught more than a dozen Crappies during fishing excursions to Fairy Lake on Saturday and Sunday. — Frances Niblock photo



**Michael Chong,
M.P.
Wellington-Halton
Hills**

Here to assist you

1- 866 - 878 - 5556
Chong.m@parl.gc.ca

Georgetown
16 Mountainview Rd S., Suite 205
Georgetown, Ontario L7G 4K1
(905)702-2597

Fergus
200 St. Patrick St. E., Suite 5
Fergus, Ontario N1M 1M4
(519) 843-7344

Halton's budget, business plan Water rates increase \$43.86

Halton Regional Council approved the guidelines for the preparation of the 2008 Budget and Business Plan last Wednesday, July 11. Council directed that the guideline for the tax budget should not exceed an increase of 2.9 per cent (excluding Police Services).

For a typical homeowner with a property assessed at \$300,000, this would mean a property tax increase of approximately \$24.54 for Regional services (or \$8.18 per \$100,000 of assessment). The guideline for the Police services tax increase is 6.2 per cent, or \$25.16 for the typical household. The total projected tax impact for Regional and Police services would be 4.0 per cent or \$49.70 for a typical household.

"The 2008 Budget guidelines give us a framework to provide programs and services to Halton's taxpayers in 2008 while we look for more ways to improve cost-effectiveness and co-operation between levels of government," said Halton Regional Chair Gary Carr. "Staff have prepared the guidelines based on known

economic conditions and pressures, although there is still a lot of work and consultation to do before the budget is approved in December."

Regional programs that require a base budget increase include the following:

- Social Service Program Payments: \$930,000 in additional funds to respond to pressures relating to the cost-shared Ontario Disability Support Program and additional funding to Social Housing Providers.

- Waste Management Operations: \$4,000,000 largely related to accelerating the implementation of the GreenCart organics program.

- Debt Charges: \$551,000 related to increased debt charges primarily for the transportation program. Debt charges are the principal and interest payments that the Region needs to pay for the funds borrowed to finance significant infrastructure.

- Transportation Capital: \$4,500,000 to realign the Budget with the 2004 Transportation Master Plan.

The 2008 Budget process will also address other program pressures to meet service demands and implement new initiatives identified in the Region's Strategic Plan. These include: Health program delivery; EMS Master Plan implementation; Social Services program delivery; Comprehensive Housing Strategy implementation; Sustainable Halton, a planning process to determine how and where Halton will grow in the future; and the Economic Development Strategy.

"Halton needs to address various cost pressures, including increased costs of oil, hydro and natural gas, and the impacts of updates to our master plans, which will be incorporated into the budget process as appropriate," said Halton's Acting Chief Administrative Officer Jane MacCaskill. "The next step is for staff to prepare operating and capital budgets based on input from Regional departments, with the budget being considered by Council throughout November and December."

Council has directed that \$6.1 million in available funding resulting from the phase-out of GTA Pooling be transferred to the local municipalities on a one-year basis to address their infrastructure requirements, and that the Region reinvest the balance (approximately \$6 million) to fund Regional requirements. GTA Pooling was a Provincial funding formula by which Halton and other GTA Regions contributed funds for Social Service costs in the City of Toronto. The Ontario government has committed to eliminating GTA Pooling by 2013.

The base budget guideline for the Rate Budget for water and wastewater services is 6.5 per cent, which reflects cost increases in consumable items such as chemicals and hydro, to meet Provincial standards, additional capital financing requirements and impacts from the Tangible Capital Assets Project. If approved, the typical homeowner's annual combined water and wastewater bill would increase by approximately \$43.86.

New money for hospitals

Some of the health care "coping strategies" that would have had a "huge negative impact" on health care at Georgetown Hospital have been avoided with a multi-million dollar funding announcement from the province last week.

Plans for a new Oakville hospital received a \$12.5-

million shot in the arm from Health Minister George Smitherman who also delivered \$2.5-million for upgrades and expansion to the Milton Hospital and \$1-million to Halton Health Care Services at an Oakville press conference last Monday.

Council's rep on the Halton Health Care Services board, Acton Councillor Jon Hurst says the "pretty significant" announcements

will have a positive effect on the service delivery in Georgetown, as Milton won't face growth pressures it would have without the additional money.

Hurst also told Town Council that Smitherman is pleased with the transition of the Georgetown hospital into Halton Health Care Services with the Milton and Oakville Trafalgar hospitals, and not with Brampton and Etobicoke hospitals.

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