

# Despite double charge, no rebate will be paid

Halton Regional Council has voted not to pay rebates totalling \$621,000 even though it has admitted it double-billed ratepayers in the new water-sewer rates.

Prior to last Wednesday's Council meeting, the Administration and Finance Committee had been wrestling with the dilemma of whether to pay the rebates now and then hike the sewer surcharge by 20 per cent in June; or to not pay the rebate and ask ratepayers for forgiveness in the form of a press release to be included in the

next water-sewer bill. After lengthy discussion about the principle of double billing and then not paying back the fair share, the Council decision boiled down to the result of the special committee meeting held last Monday.

High recovery costs and political inexperience forced the region's sewer rate committee to balk at issuing sewer surcharge rebates to Halton's residential water users.

The committee recommended to council that the rebate program

be rejected since it would result in a 20 per cent rise in utility bills in July.

The price of the rebate program would have been \$621,000 but would have approached \$700,000 when anticipated increases in administrative costs were included to accommodate the heavy workload of the rebate program.

The \$700,000 loss from the budget would have necessitated higher summer rates, according to Regional Solicitor Dennis Perlin.

However, the committee also agreed that

higher summer rates would have resulted in an added burden to the region's water users since that is the time of year when residential water consumption is at its highest.

Regional council instructed staff to review the implementation of the billing arrangement of the new sewer surcharge system, which went into effect on Jan. 1, in light of hundreds of residents' complaints that they were being double billed.

Under the previous system sewer usage was

charged through the annual municipal taxes. However, the residents claim there is a duplication in the billing system since some are being charged under the new sewer surcharge rate as far back as October.

"There are two kinds of nightmares—the kind you dream of and the kind you dream up," said Burlington councillor David LaCombe. "Sewer surcharges are the kind you dream up."

LaCombe, who said the position is immaterial, he said, "I'm opposed to the motion. We should rebate. At this point of

the game they (the residents) are looking at it as a matter of principle."

However, those in support of Wood's motion felt the issuing of rebates would only result in a "give and take" situation which could eventually cause further problems when rates escalate in the summer.

"You're taking it out of the left pocket and putting it back in their right," said Wood.

"It doesn't make sense. It's ludicrous."

"It's a mess and I don't think you make a mess better by adding to it," added Oakville councillor Bonnie Brown.

If enacted rebates would be issued to about 5 per cent of the population with most claims totalling less than \$15, according to Regional Treasurer Don Farmer.

Farmer added, the higher summer rates would only pertain to about three water bills or once the rebate costs have been recovered.

"I can't see the justification of rebates," said Oakville councillor Carol Gooding. "It's just too costly. We may have to look at things differently and talk about start up costs. Maybe what we need to do is go back to the taxpayers and say here was the problem and here's how we dealt with it. I'm not prepared to build in costs here just to get around a political issue."

In refusing the rebate

program the committee also decided that brochures be included with the next water bill to help further explain the billing set up to the residents and the reason why the committee has refused rebates.

Milton Mayor Don Gordon said the rebate

## The official Region no-rebate story

Halton Regional Sewer Rate Committee Chairman Joan Allingham will be sending out a press release to all Halton ratepayers on the reason why there has been double billing in the new rates and why rebates will not be paid.

The release is to be included in all public utilities bills throughout the Region in an effort to clear up many questions which are being called into Regional headquarters.

Reprinted is a copy of that release, which in Mrs. Allingham's words, probably best describe what has transpired since the Region opted to

move to equalized, "user pay" billing systems.

In October of 1979 Regional Council adopted a sanitary sewer surcharge system as the basis for financing sanitary sewer service on a Regional basis in Halton commencing with the year 1980.

The system was introduced on the basis of a surcharge on all utility bills issued in 1980, to cover all costs of operating the system in 1980. Thus the six bi-monthly or twelve monthly bills would provide the revenue needed for a twelve-month period (the cost of operating the system in 1980) regard-

less of the exact meter-reading dates on these bills.

Unfortunately, the public information which the Region provided to its consumers did not clearly explain the billing method, and complaints were lodged by some consumers. In response to this concern, the Sewer Rate Committee was asked to re-examine the billing method to see if a different financing method could be found, and several options were examined.

The option of rebating sewer surcharges based on 1979 water consumption only to those consumers who had

complained was rejected immediately.

The Sewer Rate Committee concluded that any rebate system must treat all consumers equitably.

The Committee then considered a rebate to all residential consumers, based on bills for 1979 water consumption.

Discussions with the Region's billing agencies indicated that any rebates would have to be processed manually.

They could not be programmed into future utility bills as a credit, nor could the calculations for the 1979 portions of the affected bills be done using the present computer programs. The estimated cost of the rebates involved would be \$621,000, plus an approximate cost for processing the rebates and issuing the cheques of \$50,000, for a total of \$671,000. Most individual rebates would range between \$3.00 and \$15.00.

Because the 1980 sewage budget was based on receiving all the costs of operating the system in the 1980 year, this would have meant that the \$671,000 would have had to be recovered during 1980.

To recover this amount, an increase of approximately 20 per cent over the present rates would have to be implemented July 1st, and stay in effect for the balance of 1980.

Not only would consumers face a rate increase, but it would occur at the time of year when water consumption is heaviest, and water bills the highest.

Consideration was also given to the rebates system described, but without increasing the rates in July.

This would necessitate carrying deficits forward. Because of the highest rates prevailing,

consumers later this year caused some concern at the committee.

The Sewer Rate Committee faced two alternatives - to issue rebates which the consumer would later have to pay for (including processing costs) or to reconfirm the present billing method.

The recommendation not to issue rebates was made in the full knowledge that it would result in less cost to the consumers in the Region, and this was the determining factor.

However, the Sewer Rate Committee was unanimous in its opinion that the Region's public information program on the implementation of the system was not clear enough, and believes that criticism of its advertising campaign is justified.

## Governor-General's wife wearing Sheridan design

By Frank Kelly

Students of Sheridan College's Fashion and Design Techniques program have added an extra challenge to their already busy schedule. They're currently designing a three-piece spring ensemble for Lilly Schreyer, wife of Canada's Governor-General.

Pat Gwyer, co-ordinator of the Oakville campus program, initiated the promotional project to increase public awareness of what Sheridan College and its students have to offer. She feels the trim, conventional ensemble, which is being designed by students in the three, second-year fashion classes, will be a unique talking point for "the first lady of the land" in her travels as Canada's good-will ambassador.

"The ensemble should prove to be a great conversation piece in her travels abroad when she can tell people it was made by Sheridan students," said Gwyer.

"It will show the high calibre of the fashion course and the fact that people can expect the best from Sheridan."

Gwyer wrote Mrs. Schreyer early in the year telling her about the course and asking if the

students may design an outfit for her.

Mrs. Schreyer promptly replied saying she'd be "delighted."

Two weeks ago Gwyer and Joy Morgan, another fashion instructor, set out for Mrs. Schreyer's residence, at Ottawa's Rideau Hall, to take her measurements. Over tea, Gwyer was happy to fill in Mrs. Schreyer about Sheridan life and the fashion course, which she personally feels is the "best in Canada."

"We were scheduled for a 30 minute appointment and ended by staying for two hours," said Gwyer.

"She's an absolutely charming lady, graciously modern in conversation—no airs about her. She was very interested in the college program."

During the visit, the ensemble's prospective color and style were discussed. Gwyer claims the "attractive lady can wear most any design". They decided on a knit jacket, silk blouse and wool skirt.

Gwyer attempted to furnish her students with a "word picture" of Mrs. Schreyer, saying that color consideration was important to complement her red hair.

"The color had to be

carefully selected. We decided on a young, silvery green, almost a dried sage or eucalyptus," she said.

Another consideration in the ensemble's design is Mrs. Schreyer's hectic travelling life, which often has her climbing in and out of cars. The crease resistant skirt will have added fullness for easy movement and the top fashion jacket should be easy to slip off if Mrs. Schreyer becomes too warm, according to Gwyer.

"I feel what we'll come up with is a first class ensemble—not that we don't think she doesn't currently dress well," said Gwyer.

"It will be in very good taste, a fashionable look befitting her office. We're not seeking to make it avant garde."

Gwyer is confident in her students' work though she admits they may be a little nervous in the final construction.



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