

Tax hike to be lessened but not enough, some say

By BRAD REAUME

The Champion

A revision to the 1998 Halton Region budget should reduce previously expected property tax hikes.

However, attempts by Burlington Councillor Jack Dennison to make further cuts were defeated at the budget review committee Wednesday. The issues will be revisited when full Halton council meets next week.

If the committee recommendations hold, the owner of a \$185,000 home in Halton should see property taxes increase of only about \$98, or 3.9 per cent, exclusive of any changes due to reassessment.

Prior to this most recent juggling of the books the same taxpayer was expecting an increase of \$138, or 5.4 per cent on an average house.

The most recent changes occurred largely because the provincial government has taken on some social housing responsibilities, which in Halton amount to \$2.6 million savings to local taxpayers.

These figures are based on Halton-wide averages and could be higher or lower depending upon in which of the four local municipalities the property is located.

Shifts from the provincial government to Halton Region and a small increase in the Halton police budget have caused the property tax increase.

Mr. Dennison led a charge to convert what is essentially money in reserves into tax reductions for all Halton residents. His motions were opposed by members of the budget review committee.

Mr. Dennison pointed to \$1.2 million which the provincial government has said Halton Region need not pay in 1998 to a pension fund for municipal employees because of a fund surplus. He asked committee members to give that money back to taxpayers.

In addition Mr. Dennison took the position that at least \$2 million from a planned 1998 surplus should be refunded to taxpayers. He explained that a \$1.6 million provision for tax write-offs in the 1997 budget was increased in the 1998 budget to \$3.6 million.

Last year only \$700,000 in taxes were written off. Mr. Dennison also wanted to give taxpayers back the



"I can't ever remember giving a surplus back to the taxpayer in the form of a tax break."

— KEVIN FLYNN

more than \$900,000 which went unused for write-offs in 1997, increasing his total tax reduction package to \$4.1 million or about 1 per cent. He also attacked a \$500,000 contingency fund set aside for further impacts from provincial legislation.

"The taxpayers want us to do everything we can to mitigate the tax increase," Mr. Dennison said. "There are already substantial reserves. We are not putting the Region or constituents at risk by eliminating these reserves. This is what reserves are for."

However members of the committee disagreed, saying given the uncertainty surrounding changes in funding and program responsibilities, they preferred to hold on to the money.

Joe Rinaldo, Halton's commissioner of corporate services, said it has been Halton's policy for many years to use surplus funds to pay down debt or help finance the annual capital program. He explained while it is apparent there will be a surplus, it is impossible to determine how much it might be in order to include it in the budget.

Mr. Rinaldo explained that Mr. Dennison's tax reduction package was funded by one-time only money and that such a program would be difficult to sustain. The pension plan savings cannot be counted on in future years, he explained.

In addition he said Halton's responsibilities have grown substantially with programs coming from the provincial level, so higher levels of reserves and contingency funding are required.

• see PLAN on page 18

SECOND SET SPECIAL

foto source™

99¢ Second Set of Prints
IN THIS STORE!

Simply More Advanced **FUJIFILM**

*1 Hour Processing
**Some restrictions apply, ask for details

Your local, independent photo experts, providing personal service with national buying power.

Milton Photo
Milton, ON
(905) 878-3361

Georgetown Photo
Georgetown, ON
(905) 873-1237

Acton Photo
Acton, ON
(519) 853-4814

Try Our Summer Sizzler Better Body Program. Lose the inches you've always wanted now! This great new program is guaranteed to educate and motivate you into shape!

Pump up your heart and lungs, lose fat, and tone muscle with our Fitness Walking Program.

Make working out the least painful point of your day by joining our Fitness Walking Program with 37 locations to serve you. Call TODAY for your free consultation!

GoodLife

FITNESS CLUBS

call 1-905-876-FITT

855 Steeles Ave. East at Thompson Rd.

DON'T WAIT. JOIN TODAY!

DELIGHT

Discover Over 200 New Designs at
Keepsake Ornament Premiere
July 18&19

Santa's Merry Workshop
Musical Figurine plays "Here Comes Santa Claus." PREMIERE EXCLUSIVE
\$32 USA
\$40 Canada

Bride and Groom
Madame Alexander® Merry Miniatures® Figurines 2-piece set
PREMIERE EXCLUSIVE
\$12.95 USA
\$16.25 Canada

HERSHEY'S KISSES™
Merry Miniatures® Figurines 2-piece set
Available at Ornament Premiere
\$10.95 USA
\$13.75 Canada

EXCLUSIVE Hallmark Collector's Pins
#2 in a series of 3 pins designed to celebrate the Hallmark Keepsake Ornament 25th Anniversary.
99¢ with the purchase of 2 or more Hallmark Keepsake Ornaments.

You'll Love Keepsake's Ornament Premier

REGISTER TO WIN
The Entire 1998 Hallmark Keepsake Ornament Collection!
The biggest Keepsake Ornament prize package and more national winners than ever before!

© 1998 Hershey Foods Corporation. Trademarks used under license. Hallmark Licensee. Madame Alexander® ALEXANDER DOLL COMPANY, INC. © 1998 Hallmark Cards, Inc.

Milton Mall
55 Ontario St.
875-3776

Hallmark Walker Place
3505 Upper Middle Rd.
336-4274