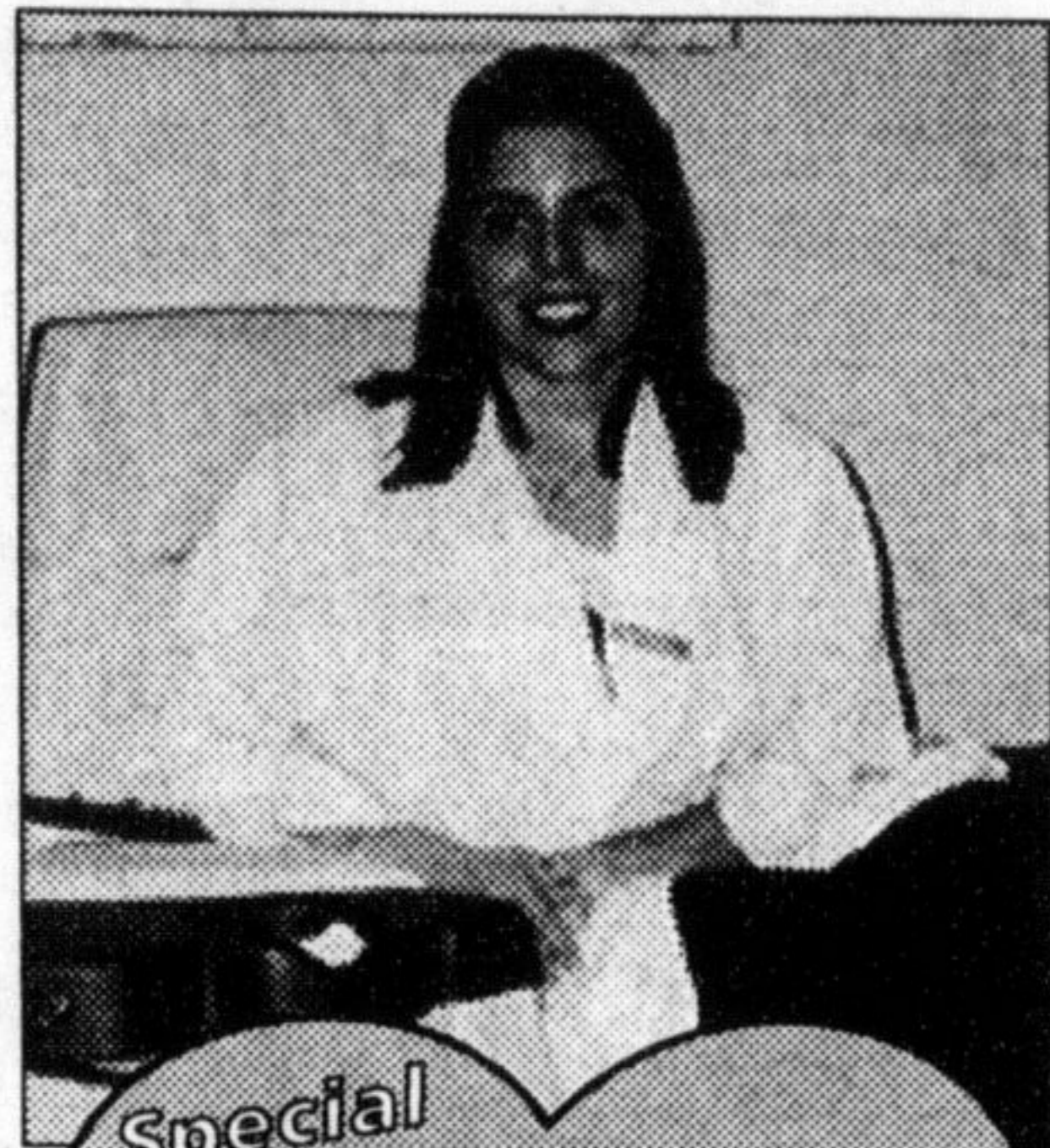


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# Transit study causes controversy

By IRENE GENTLE

The Champion

A \$50,000 study of Milton's transit system came close to stalling Town budget talks recently.

The study became a bone of contention at a recent special administration and planning committee budget meeting when Councillor Ron Furik requested that the item be pulled out of the \$6.2 million capital budget until a later date.

The \$50,000 study would likely pay for a consultant to review Milton's 20-year-old system as well as predict the Town's future transit needs once growth is factored in.

### Questions need

Funding the study just doesn't make sense if there's a possibility the whole system could be scrapped after operating budget meetings, scheduled for later in the year, said Mr. Furik.

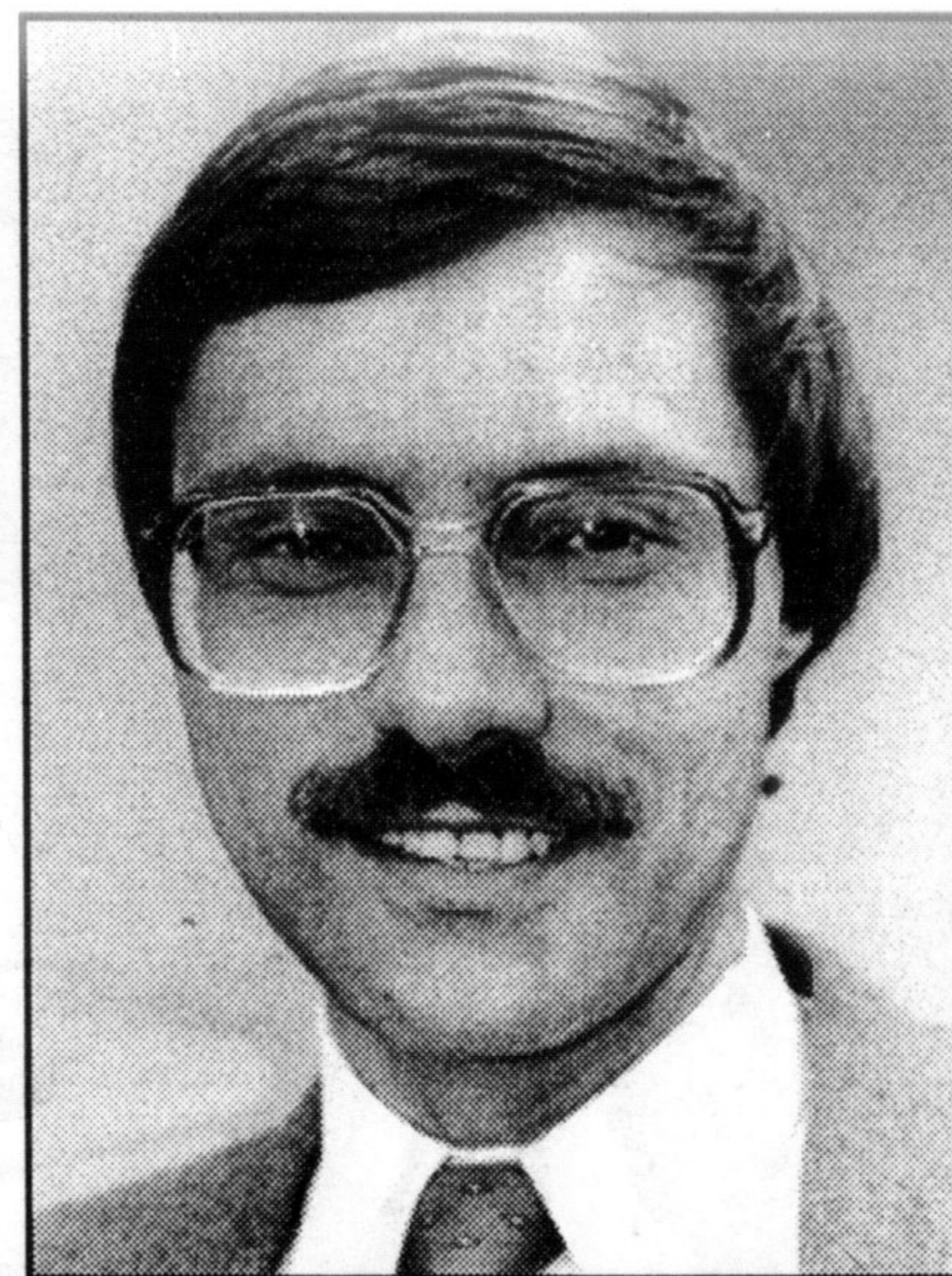
"I don't want to fund a transit study if we're not going to have transit," said Mr. Furik. "I'm open minded on the issue but I will ask for a deferral on it until the operating budget."

In the end Mr. Furik didn't get his way, but not before other councillors weighed in on the controversy.

Council has toyed with putting the brakes on the municipal bus system for years. It is characterized by low ridership and annual operating costs of \$250,000.

Nothing in the study will likely change that, said Councillor Rick Malboeuf.

"What will this consultant's report tell us that we don't already know?" he asked. "We already know we've been losing our shirt for years."



Ron Furik

Mr. Malboeuf suggested that any study should be done at the expense of the contractor, Stock Transportation.

"We see these busses on our streets all the time and they're empty," he said. "We

should go back to the contractor, say it's not working, come back to council with a review."

Councillor John Challinor said that would likely lead to a report in favor of the status quo.

"He's going to come back with a report that says we should keep it," said Mr. Challinor. A thorough review by a third party could settle the transit question for once and for all, he said.

"We're at the point in my view that we either continue the transit or we don't," said Mr. Challinor. "Let's get an outside, neutral authority to view it for us."

### Look long term

Town treasurer Jim McQueen said the study is a valid expense regardless of what decision is made on the present system.

"My view is that (the study) is a separate job that isn't predicated on what we do with this transit system," he said. "There's still a need to examine the longer term needs of the Town."

The committee eventually opted to keep the transit study in the capital budget.

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