

Region is giving taxpayers a break

By IRENE GENTLE

The Champion

It's official — the average taxpayer will pay two per cent less in regional property taxes this year.

That amounts to \$31 for the owner of a \$185,000 home.

After sailing through a series of committee meetings, a \$180 million tax budget was unanimously approved by Halton regional council Wednesday.

"It's harder to fight for reductions when you already have an overall two per cent decrease," said Burlington Councillor Jack Dennison, who is known for going over previous budgets line by line with a magnifying glass.

He jokingly promised to be back with his magnifying glass for the 2000 budget.

Burlington Councillor John Taylor, who is also known for keeping a sharp eye on expenditures, took time to praise the budget.

"I think staff did an excellent job," he said.

What staff did was cut the regional services portion of the tax bill by 5.4 per cent, or \$47 for the average taxpayer.

Once a 4.8 per cent increase in the police services portion of the bill is factored in, that comes out to a 3.1 per cent decrease, or \$35 per household.

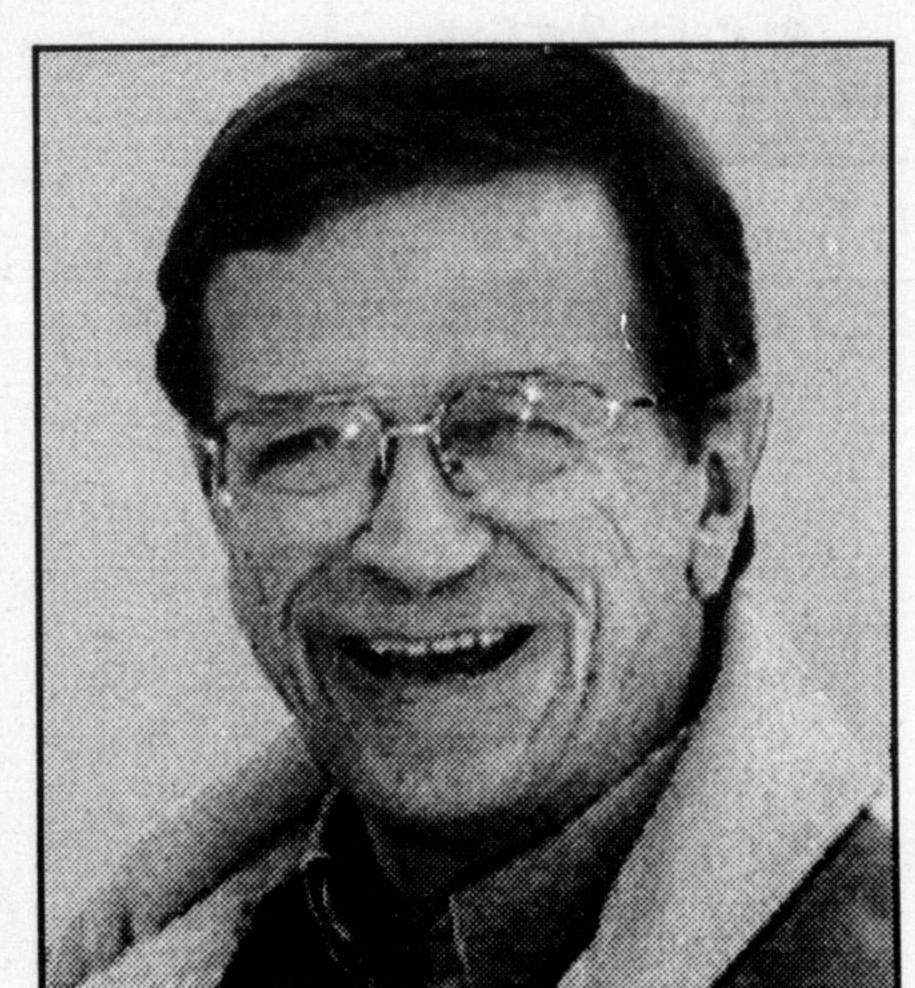
The two per cent figure is reached by adding in a previously approved utility rate budget, which had a tax increase of one per cent.

All told, the average Halton taxpayer will shell out \$1,495 in taxes in 1999.

That's broken down to \$269 for police services, \$819 for regional services and \$407 for the utility rate bill.

These figures do not include the effect of local municipal budgets, which have not all been completed.

Milton's council is heading into budget



John Day

meetings next week.

While councillors approved the budget easily, they weren't as eager to endorse the reality of pooling costs.

In 1999, Halton will be expected to pay \$40 million to the provincial government in pooling costs.

That comes out to about 22 per cent of net regional spending.

That money mainly goes to help pay for social assistance and subsidized housing in

It's just too much, said Mr. Taylor.

"When the pooling component for social services is twice what we pay for people here in Halton, it's wrong," he said.

Mr. Taylor objected to the idea that Halton residents pay almost as much for pooling as they do for their own police ser-

In 1999, the average Halton household will hand over \$235 for pooling, and \$269 for regional police services.

"I'm supporting the budget but I have concerns about the amount of money that is leaving the region," said Mr. Taylor.

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