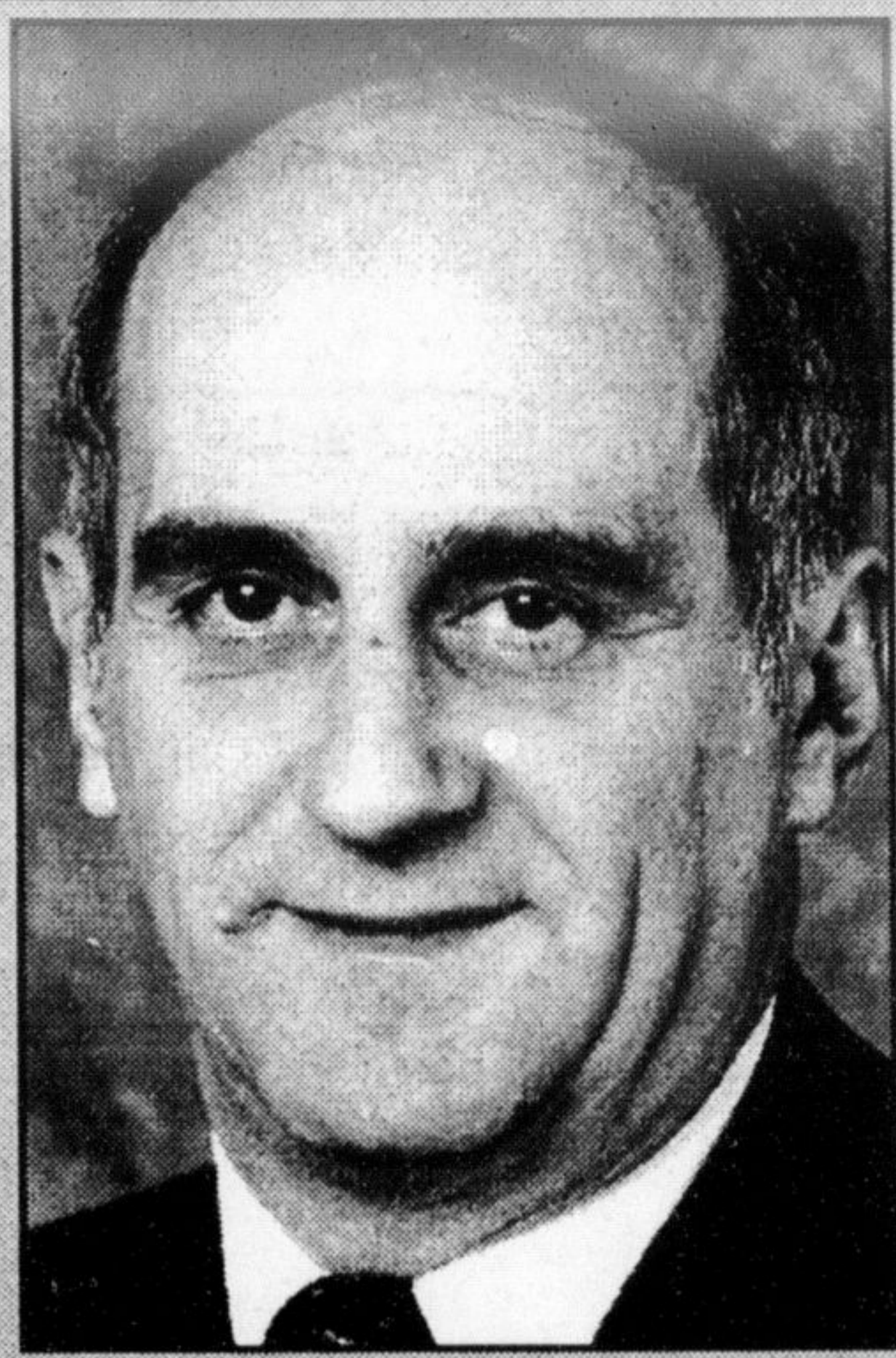


Question lingers of favouring local bidders

"I'm wondering if the policy we're following here by going outside for small purchases is really the best thing."

— RICK MALBOEUF



By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

What is better for Milton — saving taxpayers money on Town purchases or shopping locally?

That was the question Councillor Rick Malboeuf posed last week with regard to Milton's participation in the Halton Cooperative Purchasing Group (HCPG).

"I'm wondering if the policy we're following here by going outside for small purchases is really the best thing," he asked at council.

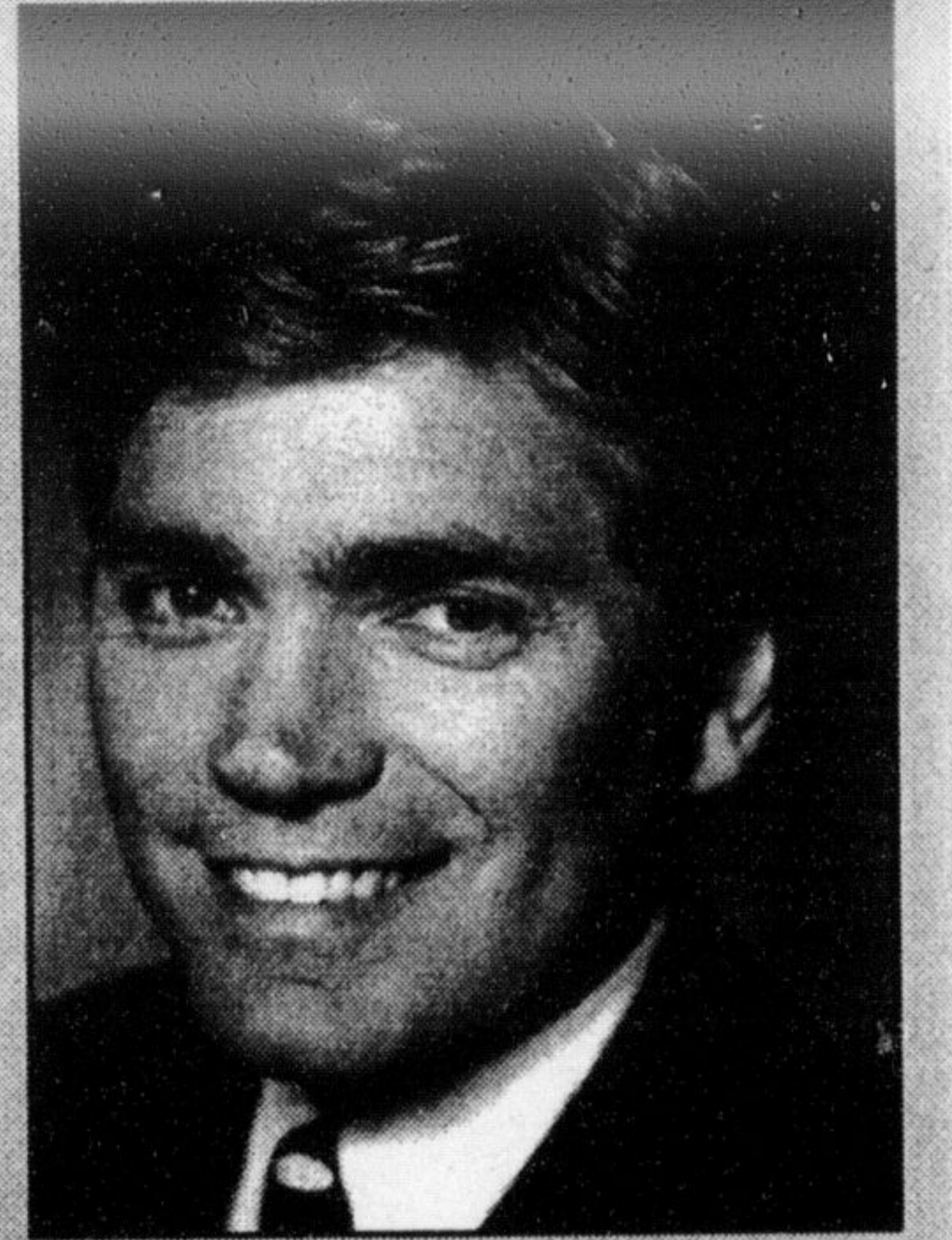
The HCPG was formed in 1974. Today it has 11 core members, including the towns of Oakville and Halton Hills and the City of Burlington.

Members are expected to encourage open bidding for the purchase or rental of goods and services.

According to a HCPG report, the group saved \$222,900 on 38

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— JOHN CHALLINOR



contracts adding up to \$10.2 million in 1998. Milton alone saved \$15,000 on the \$955,000 it spent on 26 of those contracts.

The report was issued to council for information only. No decisions were to be made on the matter at the meeting.

Split bidding

Mr. Malboeuf wondered if small, low volume bids would be better off staying local while big ticket items remained under the wing of the HCPG.

"We're taking away business from local businesses. I wonder if it's in the best interest of the town to do so," he said. "If we're talking below a certain dollar value, maybe exceptions should be made to see what we can do to shop locally."

Mr. Malboeuf first raised the issue at a community services committee meeting.

It arose again at a recent administration and finance meeting, which Mr. Malboeuf was unable to attend.

At that meeting, Councillor Ron Furik had waved the flag for local businesses but was told that Milton might have a legal problem if it hoped to opt in and out of the HCPG at will.

A decision should be made one way or another, he told council.

"Is it the best thing for ratepayers if we stay in the cooperative? If it is, then we should stay in it," said Mr. Furik. "We have to make a decision to opt out of this cooperative or not."

If Milton remains in the group, efforts should be made to ensure that local businesses are informed of the bids, he said.

"I just hope and pray we get the message out to all the local businesses."

Warns of risk

It isn't the role of council to restrict anyone from bidding on a tender, said Councillor John Challinor.

"You really can't have a policy in this day and age that prohibits anyone from bidding. That doesn't do the taxpayers any good at all."

Mr. Challinor advised that council continue to support the HCPG.

"I think we're doing the right thing by the taxpayer in continuing the process that we have today," he said. "I think we run fairly serious risks if we start deciding if this council will or won't buy locally."

Staff are following council's direction when it comes to purchasing policy, said Town treasurer Jim McQueen.

"We felt we'd given council very specific information when the policy was developed," he said. "First of all, there is no local

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