

Watson plan sparks outcry from school communities

Only a few delegates commend the plan for being a step in the right direction

By DENNIS SMITH

Special to The Champion

School communities targeted for closure fired back during a Halton District School Board meeting Wednesday.

An overflow crowd of nearly 200 applauded loudly for 18 public delegations expressing views about a proposed \$409 million strategic capital plan.

Building 41 schools, closing 15 others and undertaking major debentures are recommended in the plan, which the board will consider March 22.

The 20-year plan, proposed by consultant C.N. Watson, was roundly criticized by many delegations.

"The timelines are too short. There's concern the public has not had ample time with this information. The process is flawed. It's not democratic and it's perceived as a done deal," said Burlington resident Chris Carver.

"The financial model is flawed. Is this the \$1 billion legacy you want to be remembered for?"

Milton's Paul Tate said Martin Street School has many new features and shouldn't be closed.

"The classrooms are larger because it was originally a high school," he said. "It looks like a very modern school on the inside."

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CHRIS CARVER

Mr. Tate claimed enrollment at existing Milton elementary schools are higher than the consultant has stated. Martin Street has near-capacity enrollment, he added.

"I kind of wonder how our name got on the list," said Mr. Tate. "The school meets all the criteria of C.N. Watson and should not be considered for closure."

But a couple of delegations seeking new schools supported the consultant's capital plan proposal.

"Taxpayer money has been spent by the board to bring in an outside, independent and objective body to come up with a long-term plan," said Jim Robinson of northeast Oakville's Clearview community.

"It is a direction — a step for-

ward. Taxpayers have been waiting too long for important decisions to be made."

Many crowding the board offices were from two Burlington high schools suggested for closure — Central and General Brock.

Brock has unique programs and helps students with learning needs become employable adults, noted parent representative Randy Van Impe.

"The school reduces the gap between haves and have-nots," he said. "Students thrive in the self-contained atmosphere."

"They have opportunities to take lead roles in school teams and participate in extra-curricular activities."

The capital plan recommends moving Brock students into Lord Elgin High School, but Mr. Van Impe warned this could be costly and disruptive.

"Is the board willing to make a firm commitment for an adequate vocational composite facility?" he asked.

"The board should move programs and teachers, make it a school within a school and retain the Brock name."

"The programs, facilities and opportunities that exist today must continue tomorrow."

An additional meeting for delegations may be held prior to March 22.

For further information, call 335-

CARP holds contest for students

The Halton Chapter of Canada's Association For The Fifty Plus (CARP) is sponsoring an Intergenerational Contest as part of its millennium celebration.

The contest is open to Halton students attending secondary schools for both public and Catholic boards as well as independent schools.

Students are asked to write an essay of 500 to 750 words detailing an experience they have had or an interview they conducted with a grandparent or senior. The contest essay will be judged on both literary skills and content, says CARP.

Each secondary school will submit its winning entry to the judges no later than March 31.

Prizes are \$300 for the first place, \$200 for second and \$100 for third.

Winners, parents, a representative of their school, directors of education and judges will be invited to CARP's May 24 meeting where prizes will be awarded. The students will be asked to present their essays to the group.

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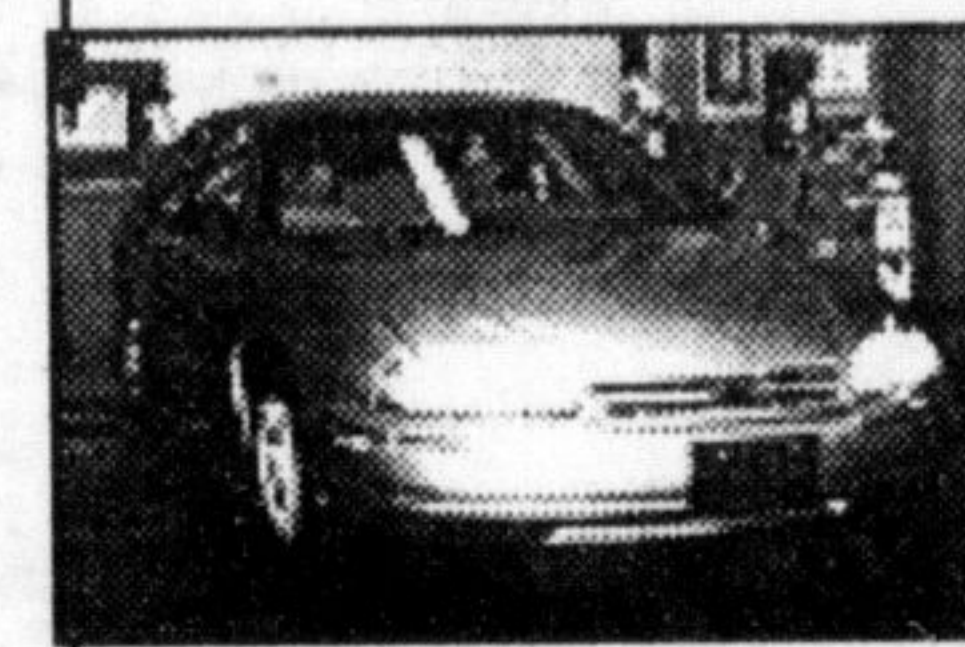
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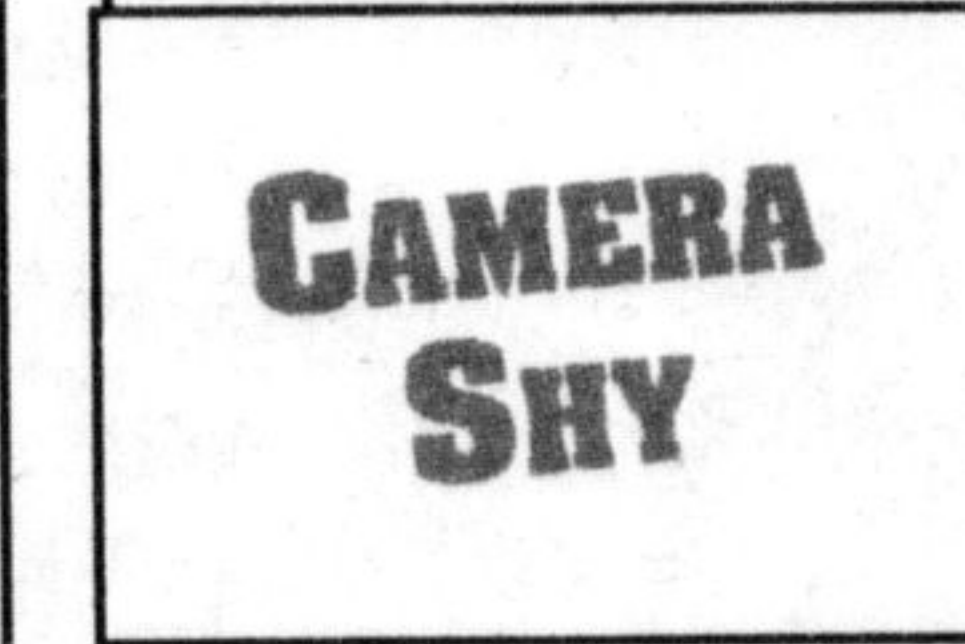
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