

Multi-million dollar school plan delayed

By DENNIS SMITH
Special to The Champion

Trustees took one step forward and one step back from approving a \$409 million capital strategic plan for the Halton District School Board Wednesday night.

The board delayed considering the plan until April 19 but agreed to establish a committee to consider closing an Aldershot elementary school. Nearly 200 people attended the meeting.

Burlington Trustee Michael Ellis proposed amendments to keep the process moving while allowing further examination of consultant C.N. Watson's 20-year plan.

"The timeliness have definitely been a concern for the community," he said. "This will provide staff with extra time to check the plan and will give the community additional time to look at different alternatives and scenarios."

A committee will be established immediately to look at potential closure of an Aldershot elementary school, likely Fairfield or Maplehurst.

The board set a June 20 deadline to consider closing an Aldershot elementary school. If approved, the school would be closed effective June 30, 2001.

Education director Dusty Papke has told trustees they must commit to school closures to attract lenders for new school con-

struction. He said the board must act soon to build the first recommended new school by June, 2001.

Proposals to establish committees to examine closing several other schools were shelved and will probably be reconsidered in June.

The group recommended for closure includes the elementary schools Martin Street in Milton, Pauline Johnson, Champlain and Mountain Gardens in Burlington, and Burlington high schools Central and General Brock.

Altogether, the capital plan recommends closing 15 schools and building 41 others over the next two decades.

The board has considered numerous school closure/construction proposals in recent years, but they've been stopped by vote reversals and deadlocks.

But Mr. Ellis expressed optimism trustees might start reaching a consensus on school accommodation issues.

"I'd come to believe the consultant's report could separate the board even further than now if that's possible," he said. "But if we could look at what's going on in each other's area, the report could bring us together."

Votes on the compromise amendments were approved unanimously after Burlington Trustee Sheila Flook's proposal to delay considering the plan until June was defeated.

"This is a whole new report with new

schools in it. Looking at it for an extra month would have no implications," she said. "It would provide an extra opportunity to see the consultant and give us more time to understand the report. And I'd like some discussion about the educational component."

She added staff needs more time to

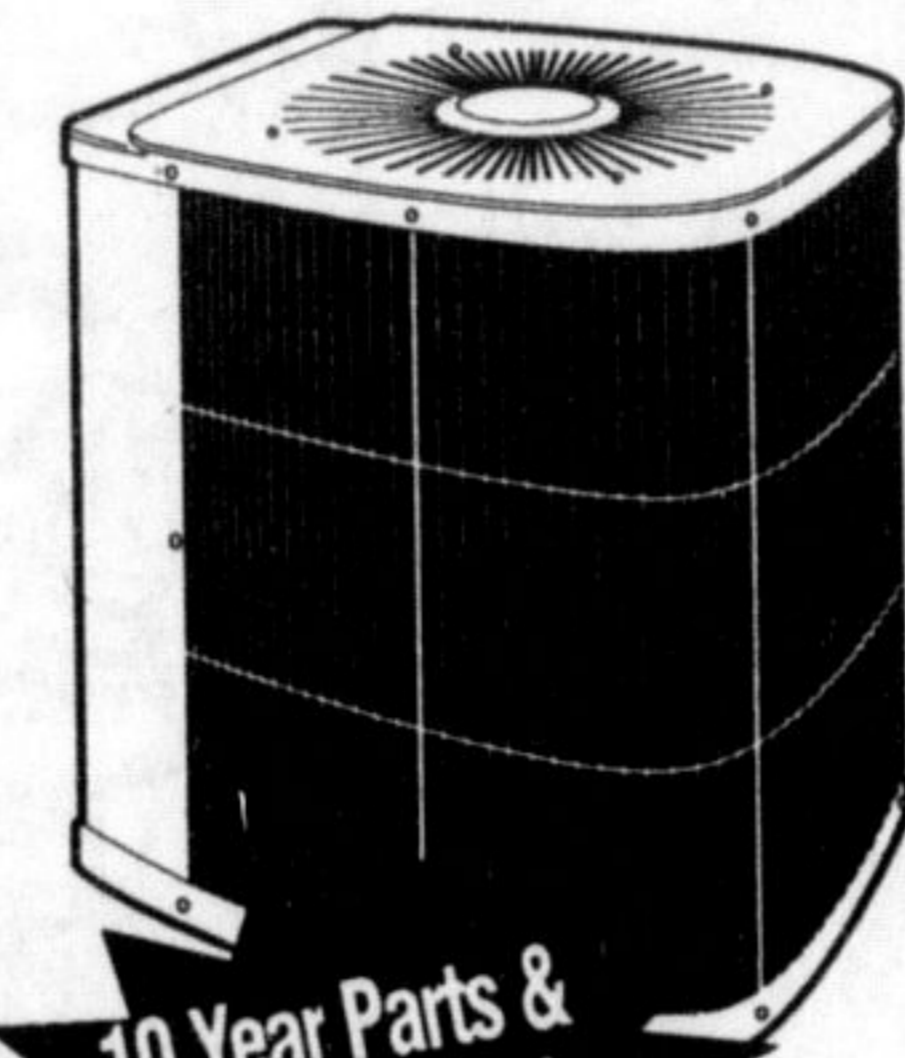
answer the many questions about the report, which was first unveiled February 9.

Mr. Papke has said the board is being asked to approve the 20-year plan in principle, which would okay the plan's first five years for implementation, but still subject it to annual reviews.

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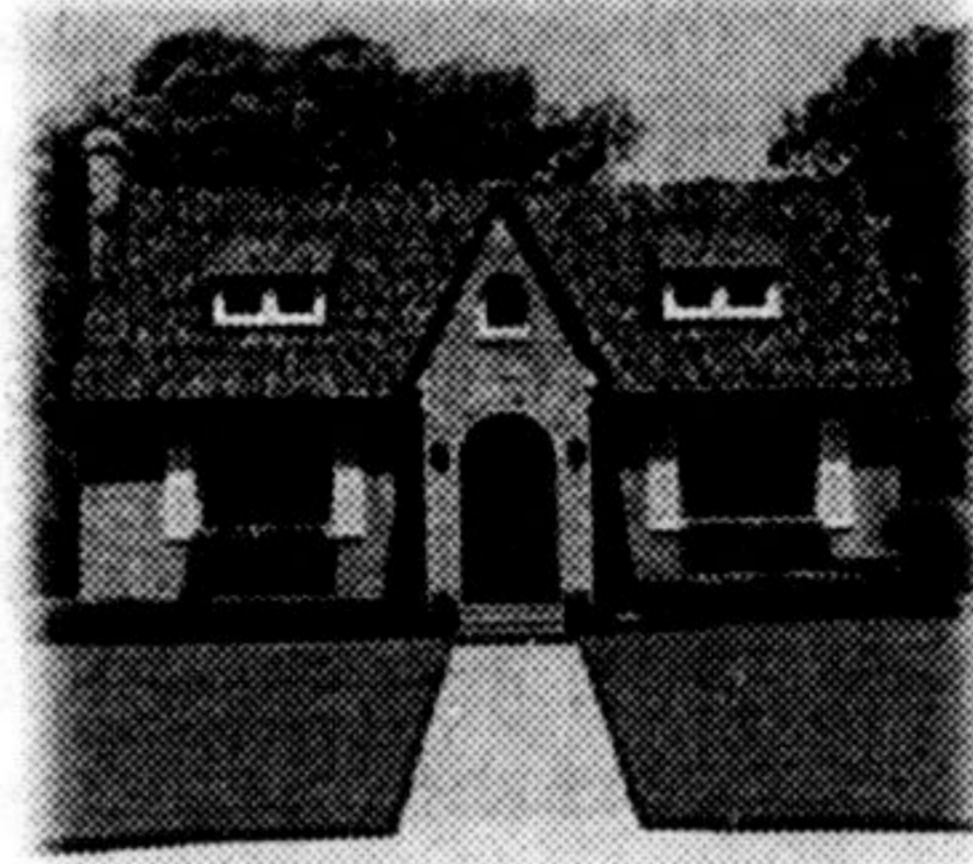
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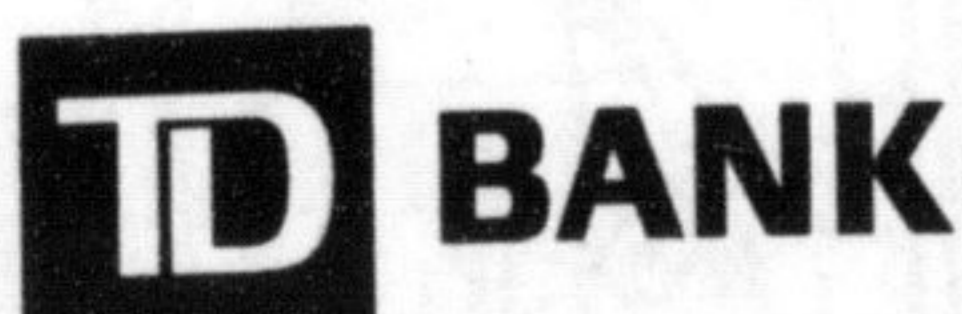
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