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Halton residents to give input on school boards association

By DENNIS SMITH
Special to The Champion

Copyrights, labour negotiations and special education are among current issues being tracked by the Ontario Public School Boards Association (OPSBA).

The association now includes two members from the Halton District School Board — Michael Ellis and Milton's Erica Andrew.

Burlington trustee Mr. Ellis was recently elected as a vice-president and chair for OPSBA's central west region. Milton trustee Andrew succeeds him as Halton's representative on the association.

"Halton now has two voices and two votes at the table," said Mr. Ellis. "There are concerns from each area of the province and when Halton has concerns it will definitely be good to have two votes."

The association provides resources, training and lobbying efforts for public school boards under one umbrella organization.

"It's one voice for school boards in Ontario and we have the power to lobby the government collectively for school boards," said Mr. Ellis. "I definitely think we get looked after better as a group."

Association supporters say the group's lobbying has saved boards

many millions on special education, debenture funding, early childhood education and other areas.

Mr. Ellis noted the organization has work teams reviewing educational developments and evaluating how they will affect individual boards.

The Burlington trustee cited the following items as key concerns for the association.

- Labour negotiations. OPSBA provides comprehensive negotiating information and is trying to get boards to develop common bargaining positions.

- "We're trying to bring boards together regarding negotiations," said Mr. Ellis. "We want to get negotiations moving on a province-wide basis."

- The LabRnet service provides information about collective agreements at all Ontario boards and plus labour relations training through trustee conferences.

- Copyright. Fees paid by boards on learning materials is another big issue. OPSBA officials say their negotiating has saved boards more than \$3 million in licensing over three years.

- "The association was able to get a better deal than we would've received on our own," said Mr. Ellis.

- Hydro deregulation. School boards are large hydro consumers

and the association is trying to get an overall deal to save boards money.

- Special education. The association formed a team to provide figures for special education needs in an effort to obtain improved funding from the provincial government.

- Legal advice, awards, student scholarships, conferences for trustees, staff and school board chairs and a web site with educational information are other services provided by OPSBA.

Mr. Ellis said he wishes more Halton trustees would attend association conferences, but he feels the organization is appreciated.

"I believe most trustees believe there is great value to OPSBA, although there is concern about the amount of dues paid," he said.

The Halton board pays \$67,000 annually to the association through dues from the administration budget, said Mr. Ellis. "It does not affect classrooms or students."

He believes the association is worthwhile, based on the work performed and the dollar return it achieves.

In a recent report, OPSBA president Liz Sandals said the association is a leader in presenting both views and needs of public school boards to the provincial government.

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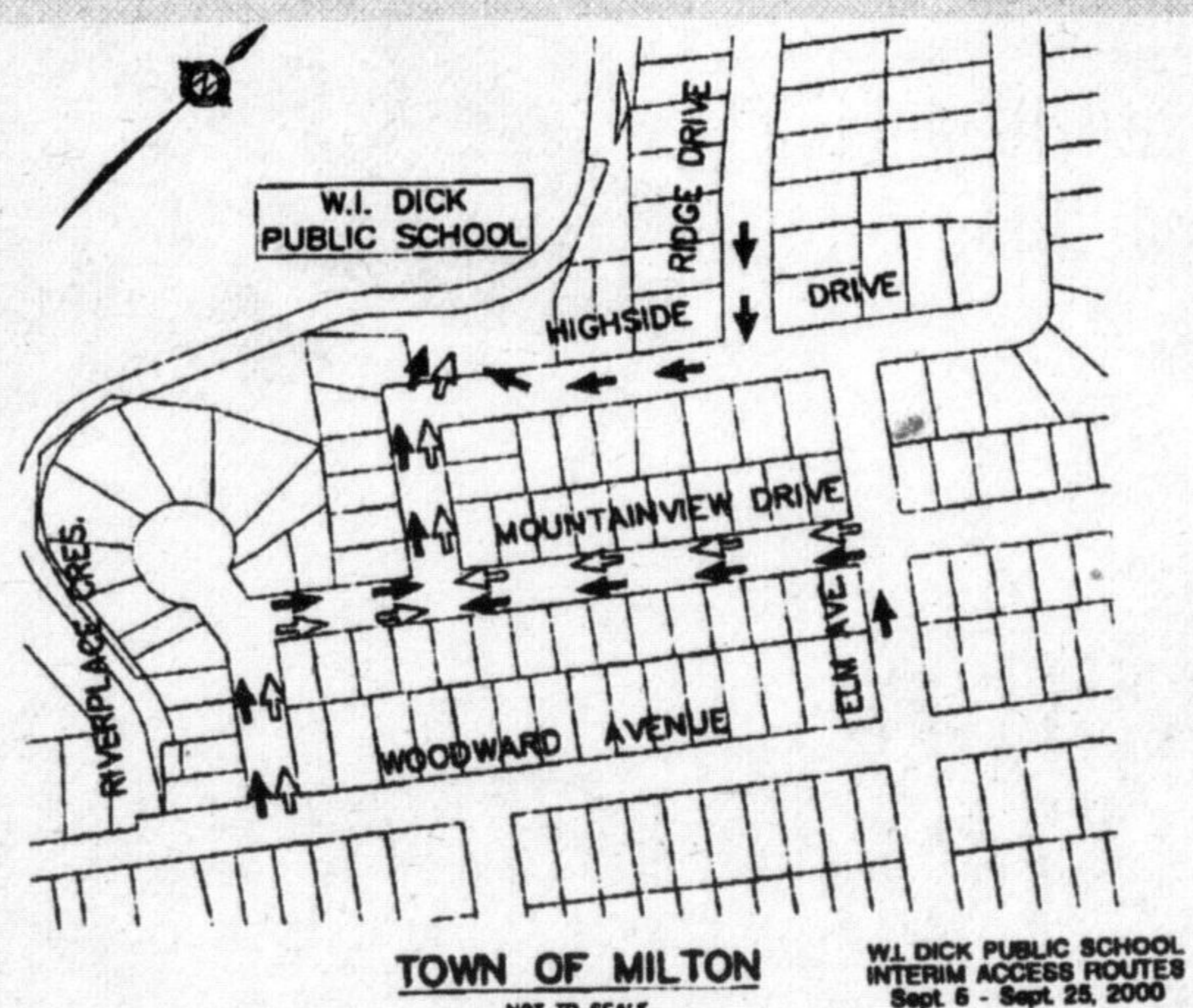
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Teachers honour Greer

Theresa Greer, executive director of Halton Women's Place, was honoured August 17 by Ontario's elementary teachers.



Theresa Greer

Ms Greer was presented with the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) 'Women Working in Social Activism on behalf of Women and Children Award'.

Phyllis Benedict, president of ETFO, presented the award at the federation's annual meeting in Toronto.

The award, for which the recipient gets \$5,000, is granted each year by ETFO to an individual woman or group of women who aren't members of the federation but have been outstanding social activists on behalf of women and children in Ontario.

"For the past eight years, Halton Women's Place has been working in both elementary and secondary schools to deliver 'Developing Healthy Relationships,'" said Ms Benedict.

"This program's goal is to promote positive peer interaction, including a focus on what is and what is not a healthy friendship or dating relationship. The project also aims to develop problem solving and conflict resolution skills."