

Halton Region initiates noise attenuation policy

By IRENE GENTLE

The Champion

Residents hoping to reduce the racket of passing traffic may find salvation in Halton's new noise attenuation policy.

Its aim is to cut through the din to improve the quality of life for Halton residents whose homes back on to traffic-clogged Regional roads.

The policy to erect noise walls in decibel-challenged neighbourhoods over a 10-year period was approved by Regional Council Wednesday. They'd rise only in noise sensitive areas with no other viable options for dimming the din.

Cost of the walls would be split, with 75 per cent covered on the general tax bill and 25 per cent by the affected residents.

But Oakville resident Cheri Bain appeared before council to ask that taxpayers pay the full freight.

"We'll be requesting that the Region pay 100 per cent of the cost," she said.

She asked that a 1 per cent tax increase be instated across the board to pay for the project. Once the walls are up, taxes could be reduced to their former level.

"This isn't something that will last forever," said Ms Bain.

She also asked to speed up the pace of the policy.

"We have a hard time asking residents who have waited 20 years to wait another 10 years," said Ms Bain.

And Burlington resident Jerry Horak asked council to consider putting a lid on noise in his area by decreasing the speed limit on Regional Road 5 (Dundas Street) from 80 kms to 60 kms.

"Traffic has increased substantially since Waterdown was built up," he said. "But there's nothing really mentioned about reducing speed limits."

Lowering speeds would motivate loud trucks to use other roads, added Mr. Horak, substantially decreasing the noise problem.

But the request baffled Burlington Councillor Mike Wallace.

"Are you seriously asking us to reduce the speed from 80 kms to 60 kms," he asked. "Do you think that's feasible for us?"

And shifting truck traffic elsewhere would only transfer the problem, noted Halton's Planning commissioner Pat Murphy.

"I don't think reducing truck traffic on Regional Road 5 is a realistic option," he said. "It has to go somewhere."

Mr. Horak also asked for natural noise buffers in the form of tree planting to be considered in place of wood or concrete barriers.

Burlington Councillor Jack Dennison strongly objected to putting the lion's share of the costs on the regional tax base, saying residents knew what they were getting into when they bought their homes. "Those roads were always planned as major roads and the people who bought there bought for less," he said. "Thirty years ago, anyone could have seen that coming."

But there's no way people could have predicted the current vehicular onslaught, countered Burlington Councillor John Taylor.

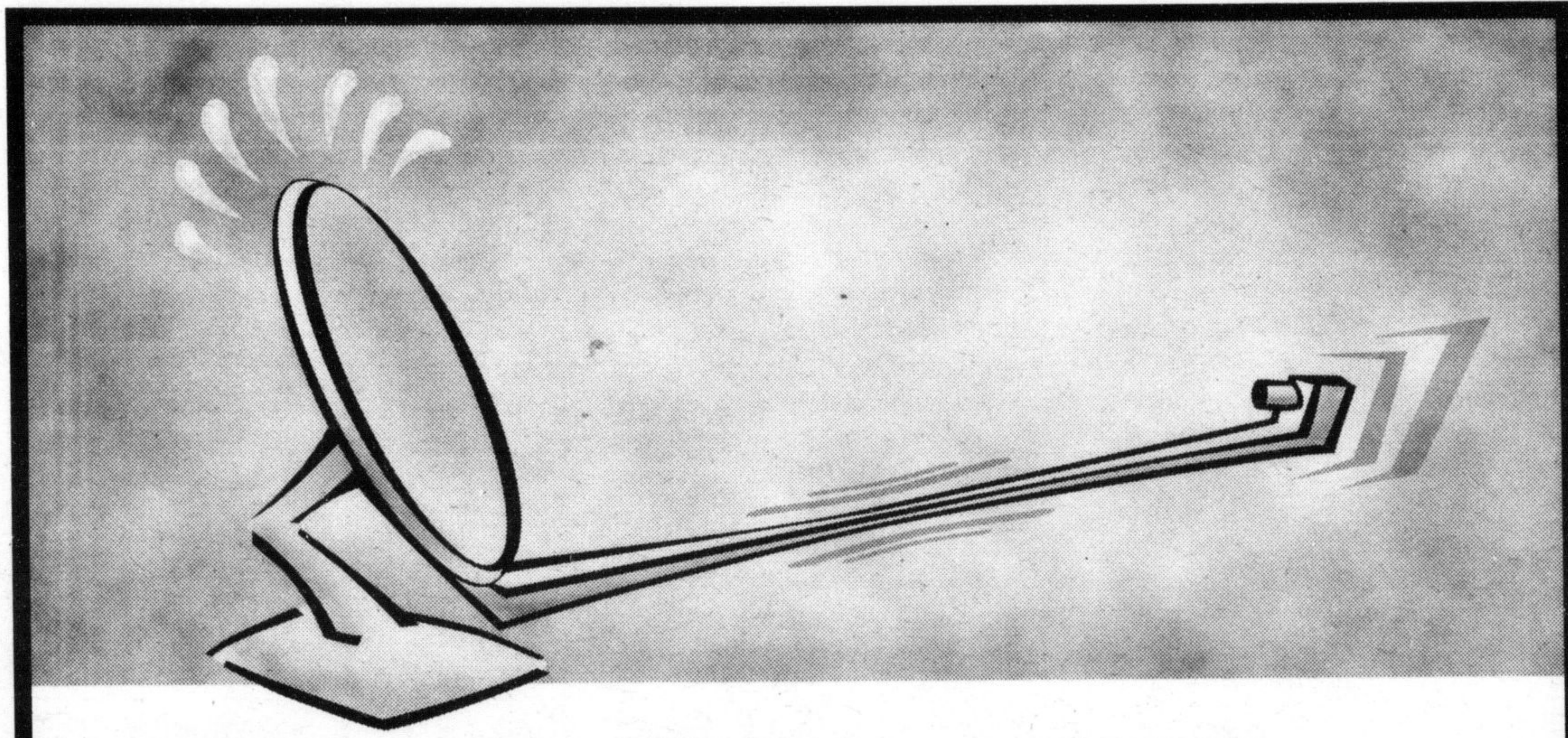
"Who could have anticipated 30 or 40 years ago when their homes were built that there would be five lanes of traffic and 35,000 vehicles a day," he asked. "We have to take action."

Milton Mayor Gord Krantz worried that the policy could get out of hand without careful monitoring.

But the policy will be restricted to Regional Roads and no indoor noise attenuation will be attempted, assured Mr. Murphy.

"Once you get into the retrofit of the interior of homes, the costs are incalculable," he said.

Though the total price tag will vary according to what type of barrier is erected, the cost is expected to be about \$400,000 in the first five years, and \$425,000 for the final five years.



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