

# Conservation Halton makes the grade, but more work is needed

By **RICHARD VIVIAN**  
The Champion

Conservation plans are working, but more improvement is needed.

That's the message Conservation Halton (CH) representatives delivered at Regional Council Wednesday during a presentation of their inaugural watershed report card.

The report card is a review of CH's strategic plan, announced in 1998. The project, dubbed "Inspired by Nature," consists of a number of initiatives aimed at protecting and enhancing the natural watershed environment.

"Even though this was a celebrating exercise, we view the report card as a good snapshot of how we are doing," said Jean Williams, Conservation Halton board of directors chairperson. "What we tried to do with this system is establish a benchmark to which future targets and trends can be compared."

Grading was conducted in 11 different areas, most of which received high 'A' and 'B' marks. The only 'C'-quality rating came in the category of acquiring natural areas.

Since the watershed plan first came into action, 109 acres of land have been acquired for protection — a rather small number compared to the 9,006 acres that have been acquired since 1956.

"The health trend here is literally losing ground. The population of Conservation Halton's watershed is expected to double in the next 20 years. There must be sufficient green space to accommodate recreation, and to keep corridors in the natural habitat," Ms Williams said. "Funding for land acquisitions has been dramatically reduced in recent years."

However, Milton Mayor Gord Krantz — CH's local representative — told The Champion this 'C' grade is not necessarily reflective of what's best from an overall community standpoint.

While there is room for improvement, financing

involved with land purchase can be burdensome.

"We'd like to think that everything doesn't evolve around the all-mighty dollar, but of course more often than not it does. Would I like to see a bit more of it (environmentally sensitive land) purchased? Yeah. But do I want to further impact on the taxes that people have to pay provincially or locally in property taxes? No. There's a balance there that has to be taken into consideration."

On the high end of the report card were 'A' grades for providing a natural legacy, developing watershed plans, and improving governance and operations (A-).

"I'll take that report card any time," Burlington councillor Mike Wallace told council.

In addition to grades, the report card also indicated current trends (whether they are improving, worsening, or steady). In most cases, the watershed is experiencing growth in conservation techniques and practices, said Ms Williams.

Among the down trends are the conservation authority's ability to provide flood control and warning programs, as well as develop long-term funding principles, the report card stated. These downward trends are a direct result of lower provincial funding, said Ms Williams. "The Province needs to recognize and increase support for the efforts of Ontario conservation authorities."

While the organization's overall budget has risen over recent years, provincial funding has slipped by almost 70 per cent. Taking an overall look at the report card shows the work the authority has been doing is paying off, said Mr. Krantz.

"I think it was a fairly accurate assessment with regard to what is evolving throughout the watershed. There are some areas, over the past few months and past few years, we've done quite well and there's other areas where we're sideways on it. Certainly as far as I'm concerned, nothing is really critical in that area."

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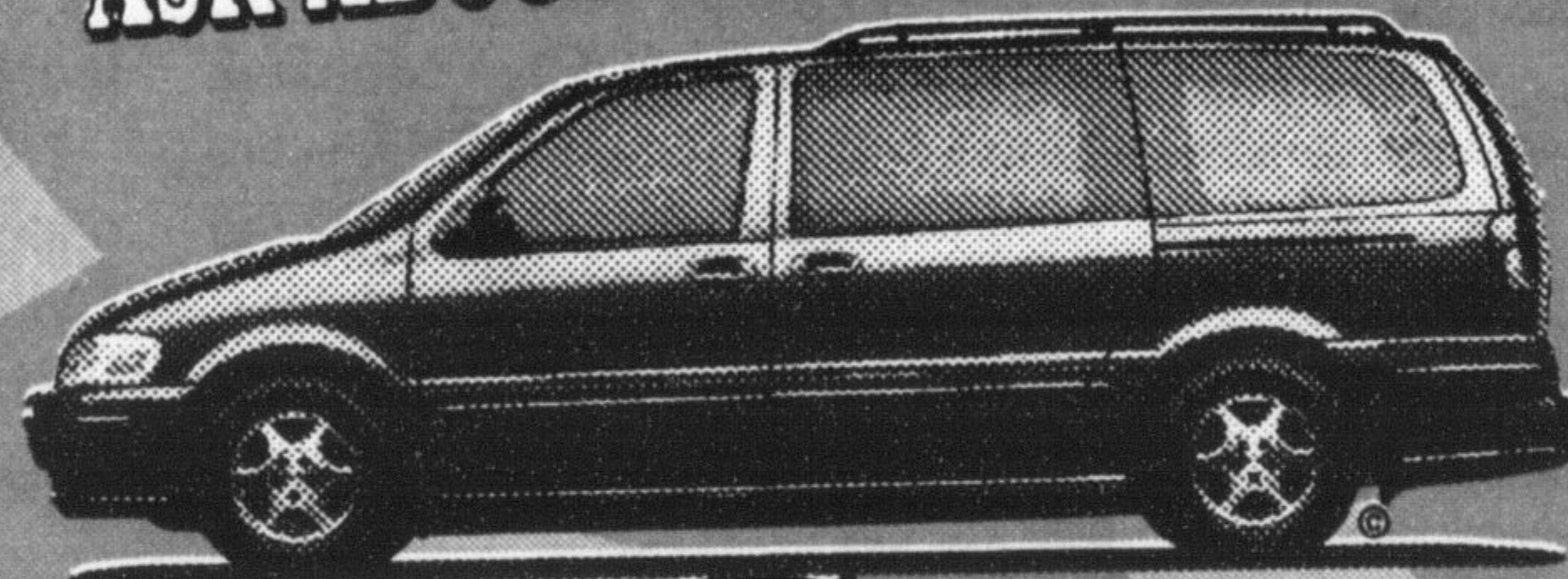
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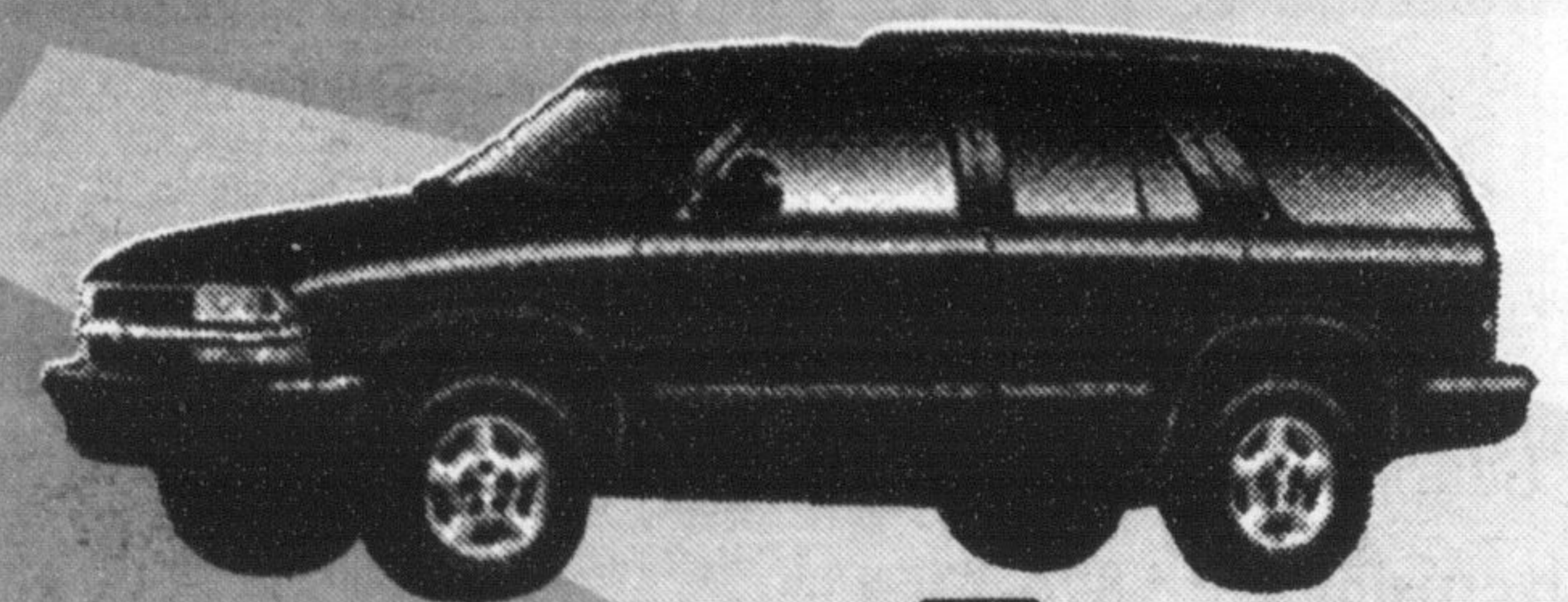
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