

# Tax breaks possible for rental units

By RICHARD VIVIAN  
The Champion

Affordable housing initiatives received a shot in the arm last Tuesday, with numerous developer incentive programs being investigated by Halton Region.

Members of Halton's health and social services committee approved a multi-tiered motion that will see the federal and provincial governments lobbied to reduce taxes for new rental units.

Local tax relief incentives may also be coming, with Regional staff set to investigate the possibility of a new property tax class specific to rental units.

"This is the first step toward the future. It's a big step and it will be a challenge," Halton Hills Councillor John Day told the committee.

Additional consideration will be given to the reduction or waiving of regional development charges (DCs) for rental units.

While generally supportive of the motion, several councillors expressed uneasiness about changing the DC structure.

"Eventually, everything goes to market rent. That's just the nature of it. People will either jack the rents for the second or third generation tenants or flip it as condo units," suggested Oakville Councillor Keith Bird. "This is hard to do unless the buildings are government owned. Rent capping doesn't work."

Stressed Councillor Rick Malboeuf, "We can't go back to collect those DCs."

But if the DC structure is altered, there will be legal contracts drawn up limiting

the property owner's ability to raise rents or sell the property as condo units, responded Adelina Urbanski, Halton's commissioner of social and community services.

"Staff will be monitoring those units with an annual review of rents in those buildings. It won't be just 'here's the money' and hope for the best," she told councillors.

With affordable housing money expected from the federal government — funding for about 400 units in Halton was announced May 30 — Regional staff were also given the duty of pursuing up to \$2 million in land purchases.

Regional council has yet to address the committee recommendations, but is expected to discuss the matter tomorrow.

# Water testing begins at Halton beaches

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Halton Region staff are hitting the beach — making sure the water is safe to swim for another summer.

Weekly water sampling started last week in anticipation of the seasonal heat.

"What we're really looking for is E. coli. That's the indicator of the fecal content," explained Dave Stronach of the Halton Region Health Department.

Water foul and their fecal matter are the main cause of beach closures throughout Halton, Mr. Stronach said, adding pollution in Lake Ontario also affects Burlington and Oakville beaches.

"It's really intermittent," he said of poor water samples. "Sometimes when the water foul are there it would be a problem, sometimes it wouldn't be. But really we just have to say it (beach) is closed. You can't sample every 10 minutes."

Water samples that show more than 100 E. coli per 100 ml are considered unacceptable for swimming.

"One hundred E. coli is not a huge number. You don't need much in the way of feces to do that," Mr. Stronach said.

Last year, Beachway Park in Burlington was closed for 28 non-consecutive days due to poor water. Boathouse Beach and Old Beach in Halton Hills also saw 42 and 35 full-day closures respectively. Oakville beaches were posted with signs indicating the water was unfit for swimming at all times.

Kelso Conservation Area is the only beach in the region that proved safe for swimming the entire season. In fact, Kelso beaches haven't been closed due to E. coli since 1996.

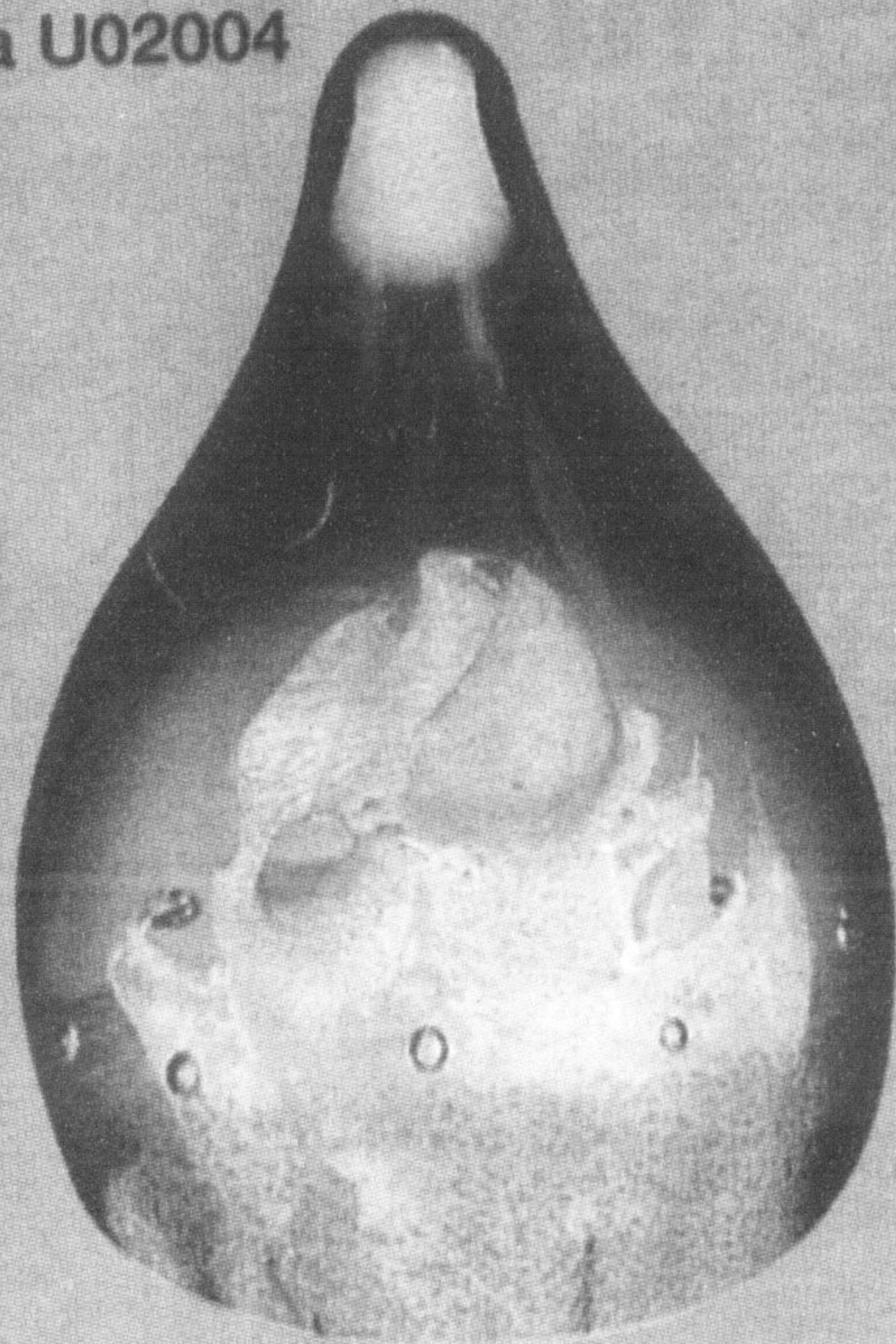
Credit for the good Kelso water belongs to two projects, said Mr. Stronach. A grant program offered by the Ministry of the Environment in 1996 saw improvements to numerous septic systems in the surrounding area. Some systems were thought to be contaminating the beaches.

But the strongest impact has come from the installation of a bird screen around the beach installed in 1997, he said.

To find out the status of beach areas throughout Halton, contact the Beach Hotline at (905) 825-6111 or 1-866-442-5866.

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