

Pay was comparatively lower

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members) have done a fair job."
Ms Savoline noted she would have fully supported a citizens' committee recommendation not to raise salaries.

Halton Hills Councillor Rick Bonnette said the change in salaries and the adding of benefits "puts us on a level playing field. But we're definitely not the highest paid in the GTA."

From his perspective, Mr. Bonnette said being a politician has become a full-time job.

"This year (term) at Halton Hills we've already had 115 meetings, and that's not including meetings at the Region."

Mr. Bonnette said removing the one-third status makes sense.

"We should be paying taxes like everyone else."

Burlington Councillor John Taylor was satisfied the issues were "thoroughly studied" by the committee and he felt comfortable

voting for the pay hike.

He said the financial impact from councillors earning more money isn't all that huge, noting that after taxes it amounts to about an extra \$6,000.

"It's fair but it's moderate," he said.

Regional council salaries vary in Ontario. In Peel Region, the chair earns more than \$132,000 per year and councillors more than \$40,000 — and it's 100 per cent taxable.

Speaking on behalf of the citizens' committee, member Murray Harris said there was "in-depth deliberation" about potential changes and that members took their roles seriously. They met for a total of 10 hours during three meetings in May.

He said there was a "twinge of embarrassment" when Halton salaries were compared to others. They found that councillors' salaries were about 20 per cent lower than those in regions like

Waterloo, York and Niagara.

The committee felt the regional chair's salary was far below what it should be for a demanding, full-time position that involves representing a community of some 350,000 people.

"The position is the public face of a corporation with a budget of \$500 million," said Mr. Harris. "We spent a lot of time trying to find the right fit for the regional chair."

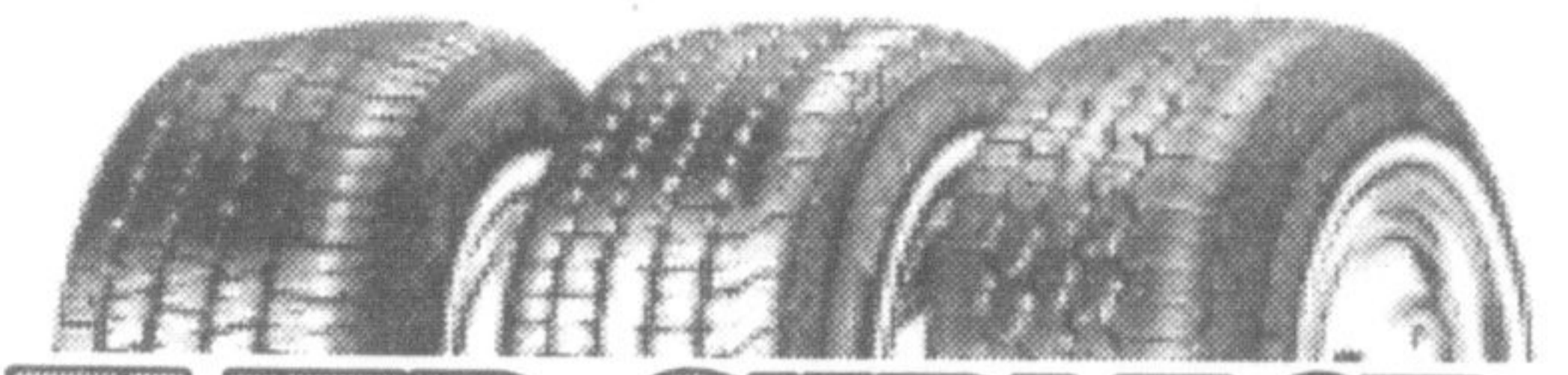
Mr. Harris added the committee also wanted to "ease the financial impediments that would deter citizens from campaigning for public office."

Regional council will also see their salaries reviewed every three years in the spring prior to a municipal election and councillors will get benefits, such as group life insurance and accidental death.

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