

Halton Council Chambers to get upgraded equipment

By **JASON MISNER**
The Champion

The occasional squinted eye and cupped ear will hopefully be a thing of the past once Halton Region brings on board \$85,000 worth of audio and visual upgrades to its Bronte Road headquarters.

By March, Halton's large Council Chambers and much smaller Halton Room — the two prime meeting areas where politicians discuss and set legislation — will be spruced up with new equipment to replace 12-year-old equipment that's no longer up to snuff.

"They'll get improved video, a more consistent, higher quality multi-dimensional presentation environment, better sound and (meetings) will be recorded in a higher quality format," said Ralph Blauel, director of technology services for Halton Region.

A recent report to councillors stated a survey of audio and visual equipment at other municipal buildings, like the City of Burlington, "identified gaps" with the services available at the Halton facility.

"The existing equipment, installed in 1991, no longer meets the requirements of staff and delegates who are making greater use of electronic media for their presentations," the report stated.

The audio/visual costs are part of the 2003 budget and the upgrades are many.

A second nine-foot by nine-foot projection screen will be installed in Council Chambers. There will be a screen on either side of the room for councillors, staff and the public to see presentations.

In the Halton Room, TV screens will be added in the event Council Chambers is full.

Staff will be hooked up with microphones in Council Chambers so they can sit at their table and speak rather than having to haul heavy binders to a podium.

Wireless mouse and keyboard equipment will be added to both rooms.

Also, the way meetings are recorded will change for the better.

More people are requesting transcripts of meetings. To provide a better product, Halton will digitally

record meetings. The change to the software will make it easier and more time-efficient for clerk department staff to transcribe the audio onto paper.

Currently cassette tapes record meetings in the Halton Room and VHS tapes record meetings in Council Chambers. Both are stored in a library.

"It also makes it more cost-effective to store a digital version of that audio and compile them in a library," Mr. Blauel said.

As part of their evaluation, he noted staff looked at installing TV screens at councillors' seats, like is the case in the City of Toronto, but the costs of around \$250,000 were far too prohibitive.

Halton Chair Joyce Savoline said the equipment improvements will be money well spent.

"You can only put off that kind of stuff for so long until it becomes more a detriment to something than a support."

Jason Misner can be reached at jmisner@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

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