

Krantz says he won't support Region's hefty police budget

Mayor says he's not comfortable with increases

By **JASON MISNER**

The Champion

Milton Mayor Gord Krantz won't be surprised if he's a man on an island when he tells his regional political counterparts he can't support the revised budget from Halton Regional Police.

"It hasn't really changed much, I can tell you," he said, referring to the 0.3 per cent police budget reduction made at the recent police services board meeting.

Mr. Krantz said he has "no intention at all" of supporting the \$69.8-million 2004 police budget, which forms part of the overall regional budget.

Halton police shaved about \$200,000 off its proposed \$70-million budget after regional council sent it back to the police services board to find additional savings.

The budget hike dropped slightly to 13.1 per cent from 13.4 per cent, meaning policing costs for an average Halton home valued at \$250,000 would be about \$33 more this year versus last year.

Combining the regional tax levy — a 1.6 per cent hike was approved in January — the revised police budget and impacts from approved higher water and wastewater rates, total regional taxes for 2004 would jump by slightly more than 5 per cent.

The revised police budget will go before the 21-member regional council for approval April 21. The regional budget must be officially finalized by the end of April.

Mr. Krantz was one of two councillors

who voted against the budget last month. He said he wasn't overly optimistic the police budget would change a lot, so an overall tax hike of some 5 per cent was too much.

"It's great they trimmed \$200,000 off of it," he said of the police budget. "I'd be hard-pressed to suggest that every effort wasn't made. But I'm not comfortable with those kinds of increases. The public sooner or later is going to cry enough is enough."

Police Chief Ean Algar said this is the toughest budget he's crafted — it includes addressing a rising crime rate in Halton — and he recognizes the financial pressure taxpayers are facing.

"(Regional councillors) have a responsibility to the taxpayer," he said.

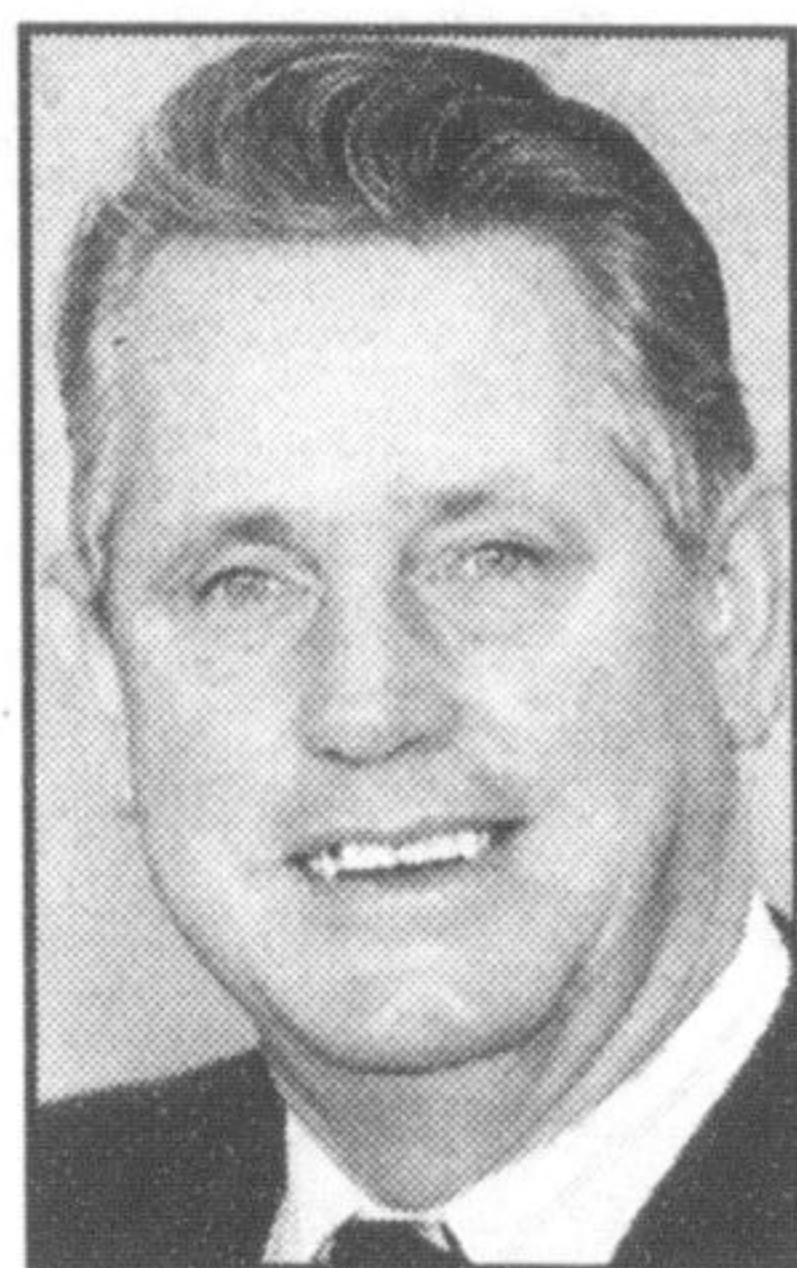
Asked what regional council might think of the budget, he said, "I'm not going to second guess them."

Regional councillors think the police budget will be passed by council, but are worried about rising costs for policing.

Burlington Mayor and Regional Councillor Rob MacIsaac said he would support the budget but there needs to be "innovative" thinking when dealing with future police budgets.

"I have profound concerns about the escalation of policing costs in Halton," he said. "There needs to be a fundamental change in the way police budgets" are submitted.

For example, Mr. MacIsaac said perhaps



Gord Krantz

regional staff could manage Halton police buildings rather than having separate police staff doing that.

"We need much better integration of administrative services between the police and the Region."

Milton Regional Councillor Ron Furik said he would support the budget, but added: "I'll expect they keep it (budget increase) much lower next time."

Halton Chair Joyce Savoline said she will make her decision after she has seen the police budget revisions.

"I want to see the staff report and understand the implications."

But she said she's pleased to see Halton police found savings "because they've got some major challenges. I had no pre-conceived idea of how the police services board might be able to make any changes."

Halton Hills Mayor and Regional Councillor Rick Bonnette said the decrease "shows good faith on behalf of the police services board and I'd be willing to support it."

The hike, he said, amounts to an extra 10 to 15 cents per day per household and he feels "the public will buy into that."

Mr. Bonnette said he doesn't have a problem with police reviewing its budget. He said any time there is a budget with a proposed double-digit increase "you have to go back and look at it."

The budget can be appealed by the Halton police services board to the Ontario Civilian Commission on Police Services if the Region doesn't approve it.

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



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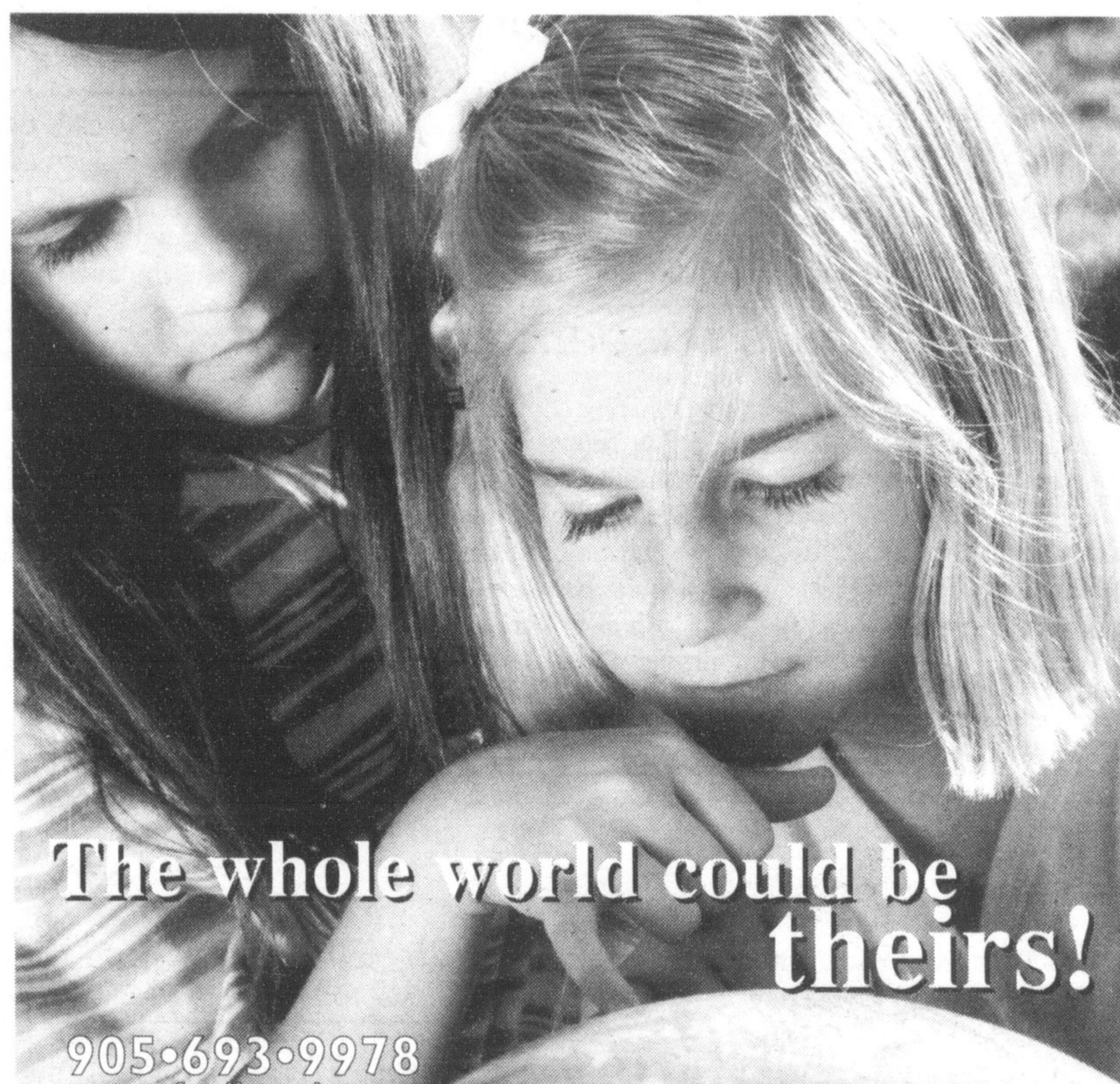
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