

# Correctional officer in court

A correctional officer accused of providing contraband to female inmates for sexual favours will return to Burlington court May 18.

The date was set last Tuesday during the accused's first court appearance at the Ontario Court of Justice in Burlington.

Halton Regional Police charged the adult male employee of the Vanier Institute for Women in Milton last month with four counts of breach of trust and three counts of sexual assault.

The identity of the correctional officer is being withheld to protect the safety of the victims, police said.

# Hefty police budget hike passes

By JASON MISNER  
The Champion

Total regional taxes are going up this year by an average of about \$94 now that the soaring Halton police budget has been given the green light.

And while approving the police budget hike of 13.1 per cent Wednesday, regional politicians, alarmed by bulging police budgets, sent a stern message that the Province must come to the table to ensure policing costs don't keep rising and are better controlled.

Next year's police budget is projected to see another double-digit increase of 11.9 per cent.

Council passed 15-2 the 2004 police budget of \$69.8 million. That's a slightly trimmed down budget after council sent it back for more savings in January.

It accounts for an average hike of \$33 for policing per average household this year compared to last year.

**"The budget is going to continue to grow at a very high rate."**

JOHN TAYLOR

It incorporates a new contract and includes funding for 19 unformed officers and 11 civilians, adding to the total current complement of nearly 500 officers.

A majority of the police budget is absorbed by salaries and benefits, beyond the control of the police services board.

Overall, combining the police budget and the regional tax levy hike of 1.6 per cent hike along with a 9.1 per cent rise in water and wastewater rates, total regional taxes will jump by slightly more than 5 per cent this year versus last year.

That means a house assessed at \$250,000 will pay about \$1,800 in taxes, up roughly \$94 from last year.

That doesn't include education taxes set by the province, expected by the end of May.

Regional council, meanwhile, unanimously passed a separate motion that the Region write to the Liberal government urging it to allow flexibility in the provision of service — like contracting out some services — as well as for a centralized bargaining agent across the province.

It's an effort to reduce the overall costs on the police force, which are borne by taxpayers.

### Krantz votes against hike

Milton Mayor Gord Krantz and Burlington Regional Councillor John Taylor voted against the police budget increase.

Mr. Krantz told council he wouldn't be acting responsibly by approving a budget with a double-digit increase.

"I will not be a rubber stamp," he said.

Mr. Taylor, a former seven-year member of the police services board, said after the council meeting there has been no allocation of 65 additional police officers the force is looking at hiring. He fears future budgets will soar as a result.

"That's not covered in the budget or the projections," he said. "The budget is going to continue to grow at a very high rate."

He also questioned why the Province has three representatives on the seven-member police services board.

"I don't understand, when the Province isn't contributing anything financially, why they have almost half the members on the board. Councillors are held more accountable to the budget, we should have a much stronger majority."

But Burlington Mayor Rob MacIsaac, who wants to see provincial changes to help reduce policing costs, cautioned if turned down, the police budget could be appealed to the Ontario Civilian Commission on Police Services, which could set a hike "worse than what we see today."

Halton Chief Ean Algar said after the meeting that in talking to other police chiefs, municipalities have expressed frustration over rising policing costs.

"The more people lobby for change, the (better) opportunity the Province will respond to legislative change."

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## Highlights of regional budget

- The hiring of 13 staff people for the health department, including an associate medical officer of health, to meet a number of needs such as food safety and emerging infectious diseases, like West Nile virus.

- About \$2.5 million in waste management improvements, among which include expanding rural roadside garbage and blue box collection in Burlington, Milton and Halton Hills.

- The takeover of roads with higher maintenance costs through a deal reached with the lower-tier municipalities last year.

- The opening of two new long-term care facilities this year, one each in Burlington and Oakville, at a cost of \$741,300.

- The opening of an ambulance centre in Burlington at a cost of \$183,100.

- Adjustments in salary and benefit for staff.

- Ozonation at water treatment plants to better treat drinking water.



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