

# Region looks at privatizing services

By JASON MISNER

The Champion

Halton Region is putting out feelers to see if there are outside agencies that can provide laundry, maintenance and/or housekeeping services at its publicly-run long-term-care facilities.

The response will have a big impact on whether the Region potentially pushes ahead with the controversial move of privatizing some or all of those services, which are currently provided in-house.

The Region has started advertising — called an “expression of interest” — to see what the private sector has to offer, said Adelina Urbanski, Halton's commissioner of social and community services.

“We're looking at what the market has,” Ms Urbanski said. “When we hear back on expressions of interest, we'll be able to determine whether we proceed to the next step and how we proceed to the next step. If there are no suppliers of those services then there is no point.”

The Region is conducting an organizational structure study to determine if the laundry, maintenance and housekeeping departments would be more cost-efficient if contracted out rather than staying as staff positions. It would affect roughly 35 employees.

That study is being done because Halton will open two additional long-term-care facilities in Burlington and Oakville over the next year or so, and now is the best time to find the most cost-efficient way to run them.

It currently operates Allendale in Milton.

Any decision on contracting out laundry, maintenance and housekeeping will need regional council approval. A recommendation could go before the health and social services committee in July.

But Ms Urbanski stressed several times that no decision has been made about contracting out laundry, maintenance and/or housekeeping.

“I can't emphasize that enough, it really is strictly an investigation,” she said.

If a decision is made to contract out the services, Ms Urbanski said it would be imperative for the Region to develop appropriate standards of care.

“We would proceed to the next phase and sit down and say, ‘Okay, if laundry is contracted out what time of day do we want it to be, what kind of water do we use.’

“You get right into the nitty gritty detail.”

The issue of contracting out services hit a nerve last fall when it was revealed that the Region planned to lay off three positions in hairdressing and one in foot care effective January 2.

Around that time, the public was also informed the Region was going to study contracting out laundry, maintenance and/or housekeeping services.

At a meeting at Allendale with residents and families, they were especially upset there was no consultation before the decision was made to remove the hairdressing and foot care jobs. They were called an “intimate service” by some, and others expressed fear inexperienced workers would take over under a contract situation.

The Region reconsidered and decided to extend those positions until September. The idea was to give the workers enough time to find other employment.

Recently, the Region, through negotia-

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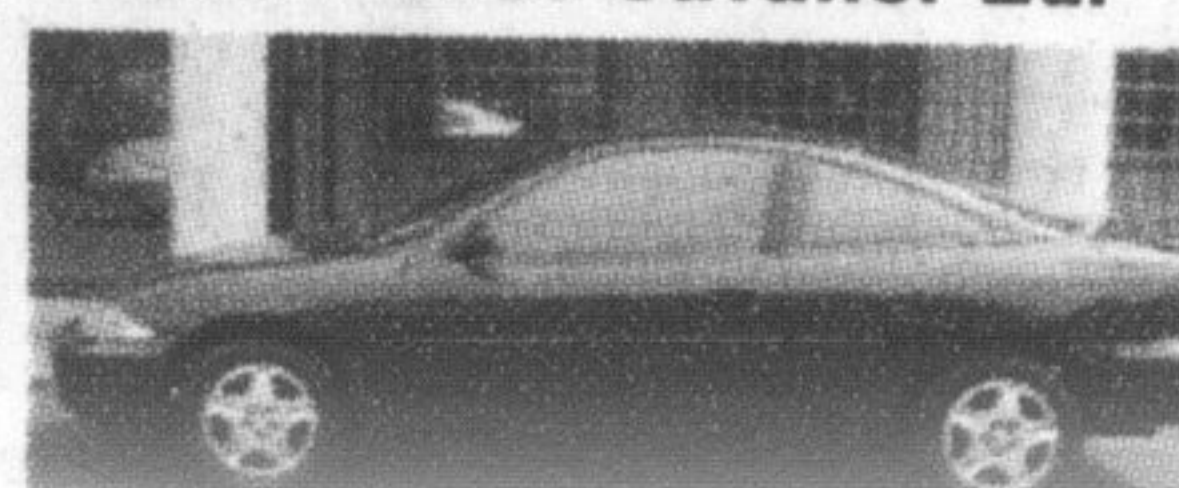
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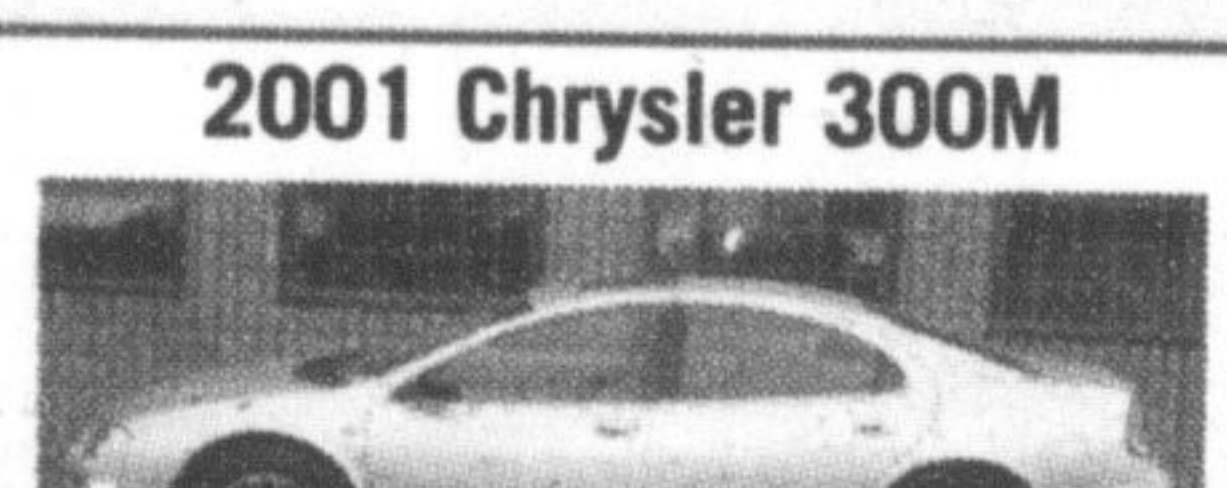
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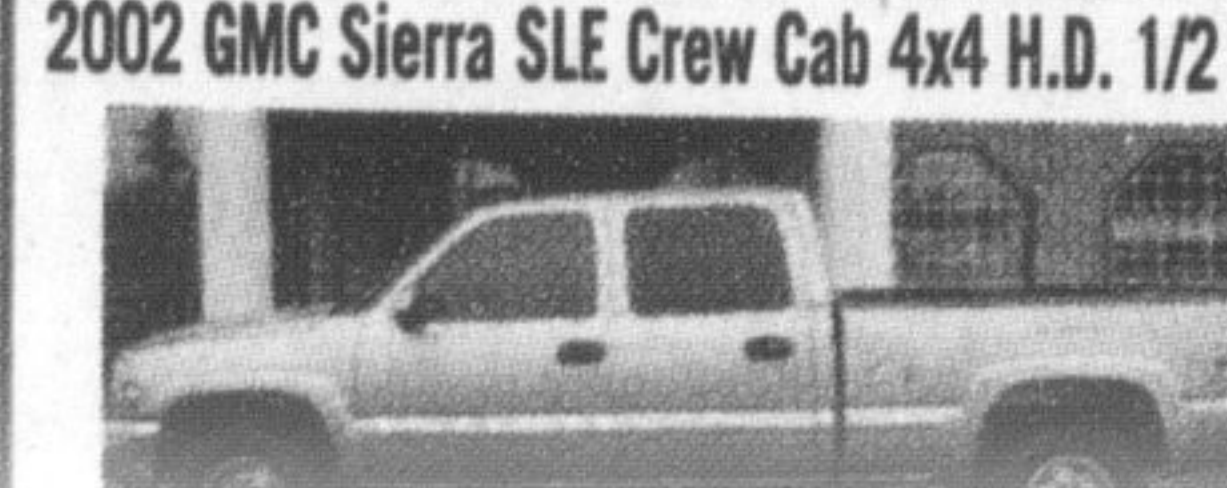
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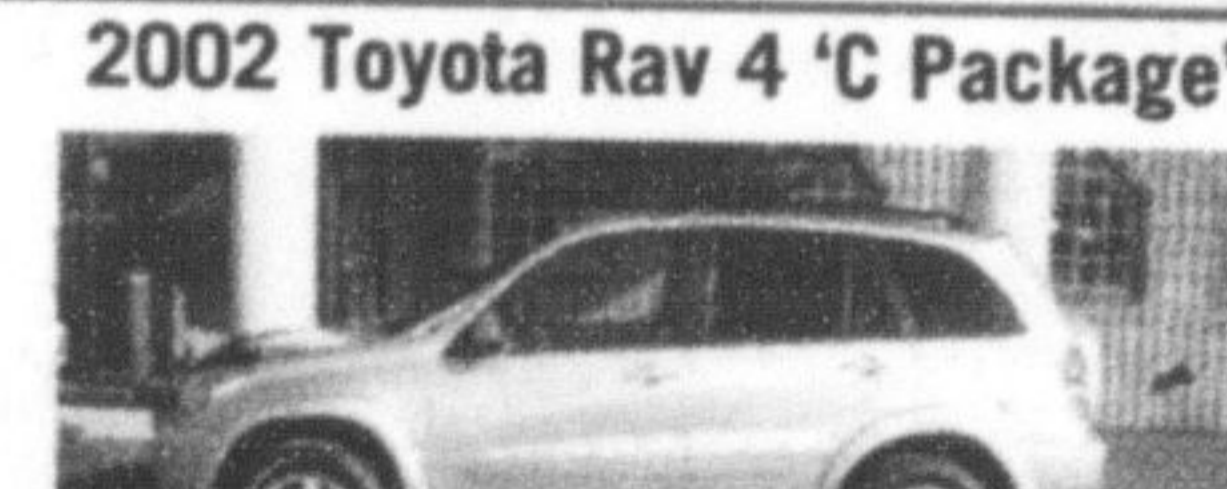
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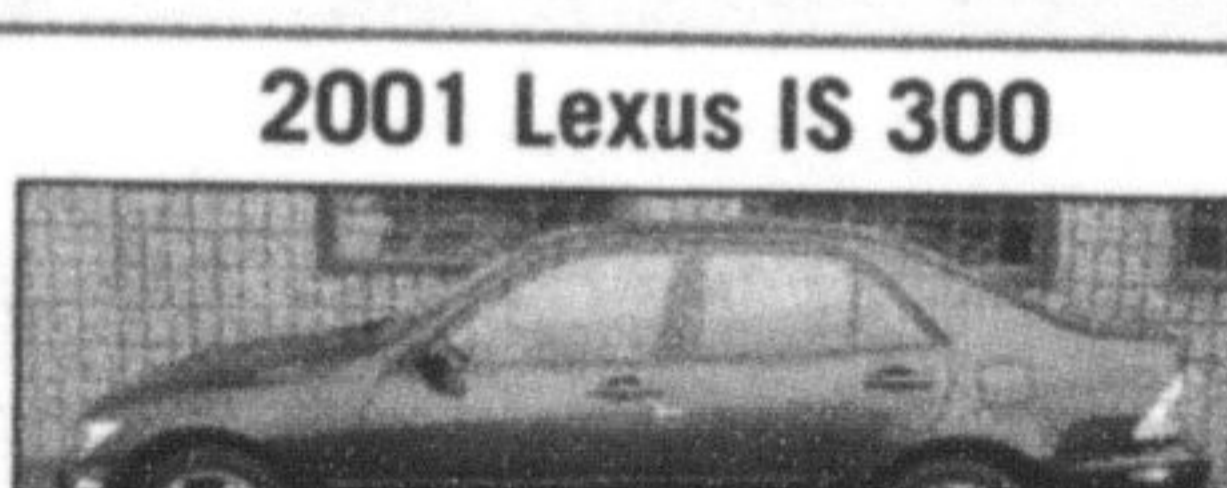
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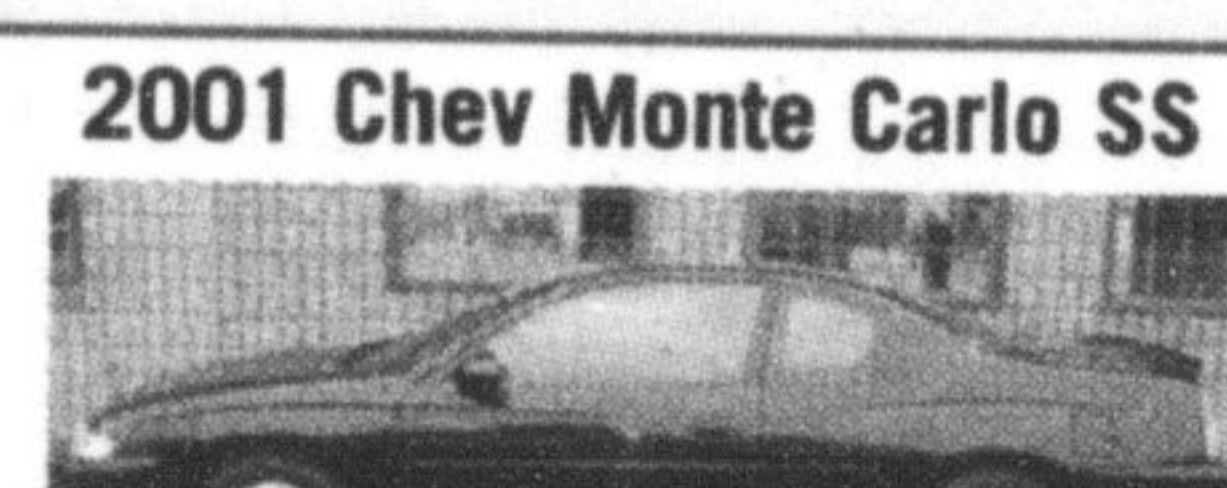
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