

# Regional taxes likely to increase next year

By MELANIE HENNESSEY

The Champion

Halton residents can expect to see a tax hike again next year and another jump in their water and wastewater bills.

Preliminary figures put forward by Regional staff this week show the Halton portion of the average taxpayer's bill could go up by about \$47, or 4.1 per cent based on a \$250,000 assessment.

The projected increase on the water and wastewater side is approximately \$51, or 8.4 per cent.

Regional council approved the guidelines for preparing next year's budget at its meeting Wednesday. Those directions were also supported by the Region's budget review committee Monday, which met to look over the initial details of the 2006 budget.

Director of Financial Planning and Budgets Mark Scinocca outlined some of the items driving up the budget and taxes for the committee, like the \$5.3 million more needed for staff compensation and \$2 million more projected for OMB hearings.

## Many pressures on budget

Commissioner of Corporate Services and Treasurer Jane MacCaskill explained that, "There've been a number of new pressures that have come up" that are impacting the budget, but noted some new opportunities have also arisen, such as federal gas tax funding.

Mr. Scinocca said other pressures on the budget include things like the increased cost of GTA pooling (a system that helps Toronto pay for social services) and higher utility prices, along with the implementation of the Province's Places to Grow plan and the Region's Emergency Medical Services Master Plan.

The top 10 most expensive projects to be covered in the 2006 tax capital budget were also outlined at the committee meeting. A new bridge over 16 Mile Creek on Dundas Street topped the list at roughly \$12 million, followed by \$7.5 million for police facilities for the Burlington/Oakville division and \$6.8 million for James Snow Parkway construction in Milton.

A grade separation — more commonly called an underpass or overpass — at the rail crossing on Trafalgar Road in Milton also made the top 10 at \$4.5 million.

Regional and Milton Councillor Ron Furik noted he's glad that some local projects are on the list for next year.

"I'm happy to see we're getting our fair share," he said.

A report from Ms MacCaskill explained the projected 8.4 per cent water and wastewater rate increase.

"The main drivers of these increases are in response to changes in Provincial standards and legislation, responses to council's expectations for high-quality customer service and environmental standards as well as increases to the operating and capital program to reflect full life cycle costs of the Region's significant water and wastewater assets," it said.

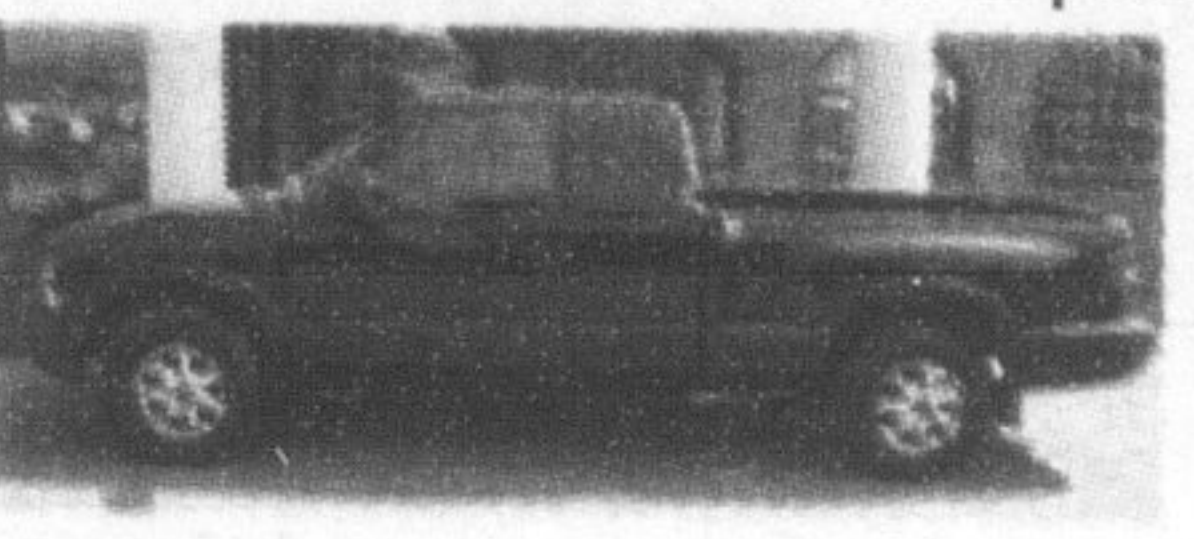
The directions council approved call for the 2006 tax-supported base budget to be prepared on the basis of a 2.4 per cent tax increase, not to exceed a 3.3 per cent hike, or about \$26. These numbers exclude the Halton Regional Police budget, which has a projected increase of six per cent next

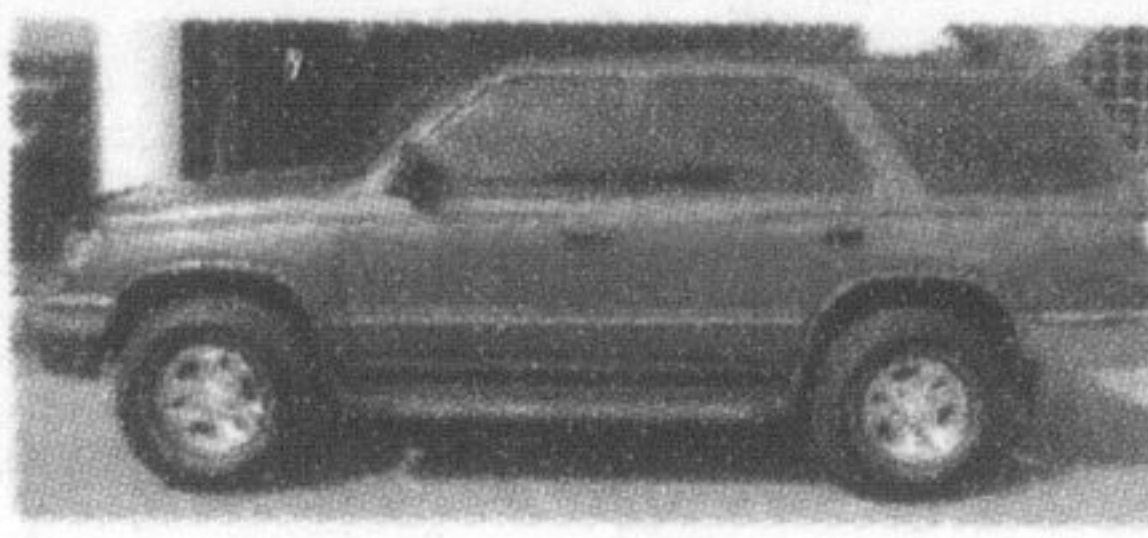
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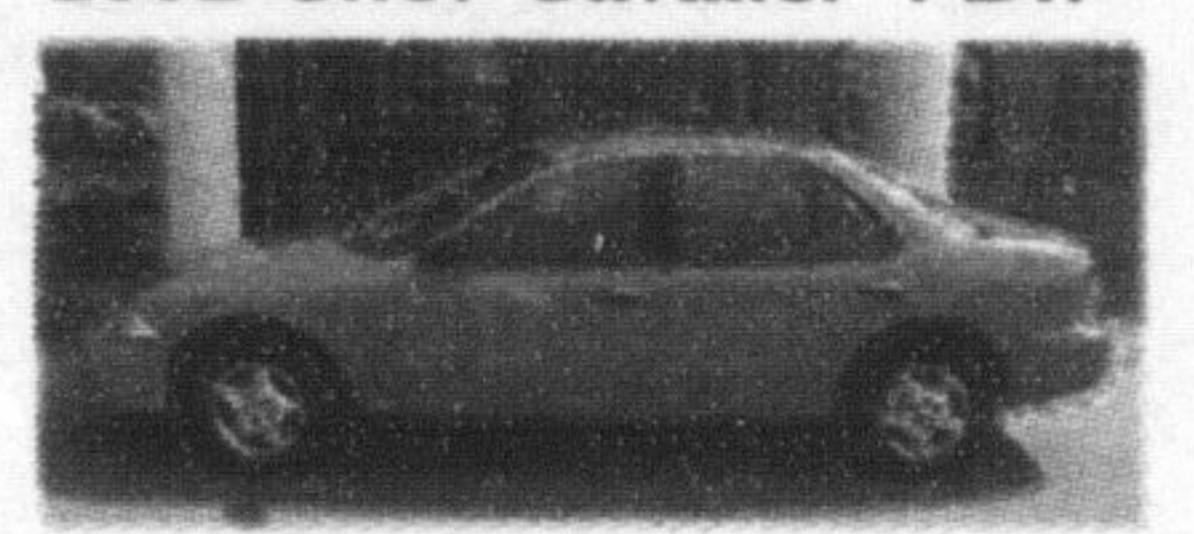
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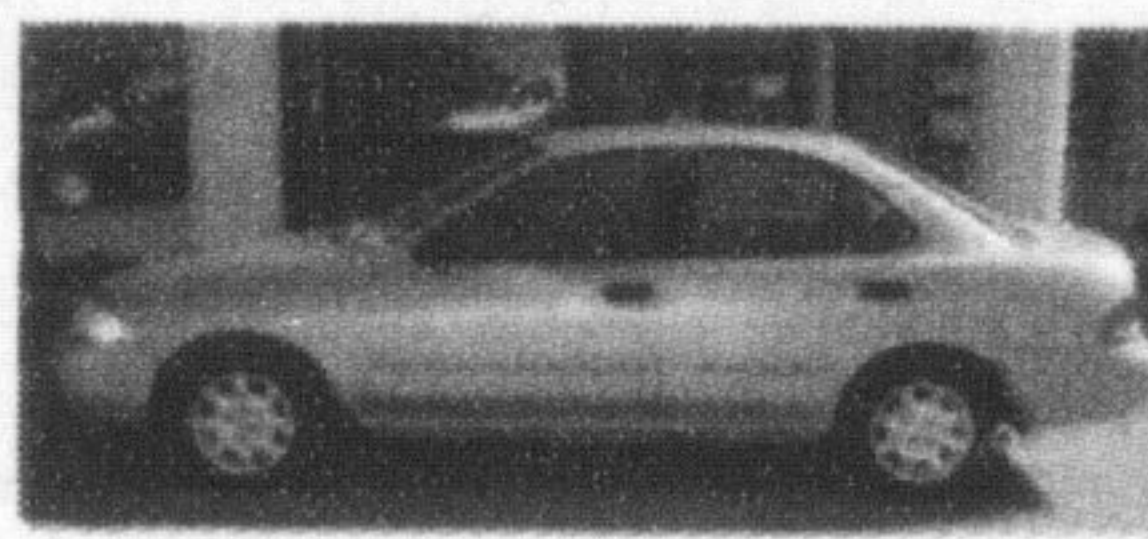
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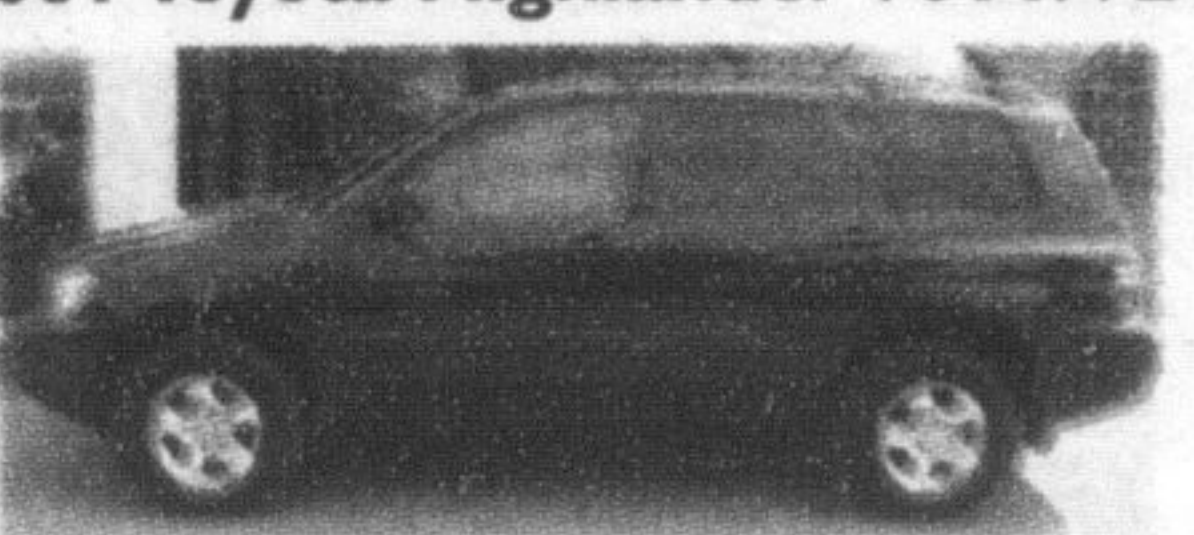
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