

Third committee gives Region budget green light

Approves 3.6 per cent increase of Halton taxes

By MELANIE HENNESSEY

The Champion

Halton's 2006 budget has now received the thumbs up from all three committees of regional council.

At its meeting Thursday, the administration and finance committee supported its relevant portion of next year's budget that calls for a 3.6 per cent tax increase, or about \$48 for the average homeowner based on a \$300,000 assessment.

In approving its section of the document, the committee endorsed both the police budget that calls for more than \$80 million and Conservation Halton (CH) budget, which requests over \$4 million from the Region — an approximate 24 per cent increase over last year.

Halton Regional Police Chief Ean Algar presented the details of the police budget to the committee and the major areas driving it up by 9.6 per cent in 2006, such as staff compensation.

Oakville Councillor and Halton police services board Chair Keith Bird noted the budget "represents the diligent efforts of the chief and staff."

CH board Chair Brian Penman and vice-chair John Vice also appeared before the committee to go over its budget.

At last year's administration and finance committee budget deliberations, CH's budget format came under fire, with committee members saying it was difficult to understand.

Since then, CH has set up a finance committee and developed a budget presentation format and guiding budget principles to clarify its process.

Mr. Penman noted a lot of time was invested in revamping the budget format, but said he feels it's resulted in a better understanding of the conservation authority's budget. Committee members applauded the changes made.

"I think we have a new understanding and working relationship," said Burlington Councillor John Taylor.

Oakville Mayor Ann Mulvale remarked that it's a "responsible turnaround."

Mr. Bird said he thinks there will be mutual benefit for both parties, meaning the Region and CH, as a result of the changes made. "I think we're on the way to building a bridge," he said.

The 2006 budget will go before the budget review committee Monday and regional council December 14.

The potential 3.6 per cent tax increase reflects a 2.6 per cent jump in costs for regional services, or \$24.15, and a six per cent hike in expenses for police services, or \$24.09. Together, this makes up the recommended total \$48.24 regional tax increase.

Currently, it's proposed that a typical household will pay \$1,392.44 in Halton taxes next year — \$959.65 for regional services and \$432.79 for police.

Included in that approximate \$960 for the Region is \$308 for social and community services, \$201 for GTA pooling (a system that helps Toronto pay for social services), \$147 for planning and transportation, \$115 for waste management, \$69 for ambulance services and \$46 for public health.

The average taxpayer will also pay about \$650 for water and wastewater next year. This number is up by 7.2 per cent this year, which works out to an extra \$43.62 for the average person based on an annual consumption of 300 cubic metres.

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Search on for new police chief

The Halton Regional Police Services Board has begun the process to identify and select a new chief of police to replace Ean Algar when he retires next year.

At a special meeting held Wednesday, the board decided that in the best interests of the service and the community, applications from a broad recruitment pool will be sought. Applications will therefore be invited from both internal and external candidates.

"It must be noted that this decision was taken by the board in full recognition of the existence of very talented and highly-qualified individuals within the Halton Regional Police Service," said Police Services Board Chairman Keith Bird.

Selection will be based on qualifications developed through a review of the needs of the service and the community.

To assist the board in the selection process, the Toronto consulting firm of Ray & Berndtson Lovas Stanley has been hired.

"Ray & Berndtson has assisted other boards in the appointment of senior police executives across Canada," said Mr. Bird.

The selection process will begin early in the new year with a successor to Chief Algar to be identified around the middle to end of May 2006.

The Halton Regional Police Services Board is a seven-member civilian board that governs the Halton police.

Under the Police Services Act, the board is responsible for providing adequate and effective police services to the citizens of Halton.

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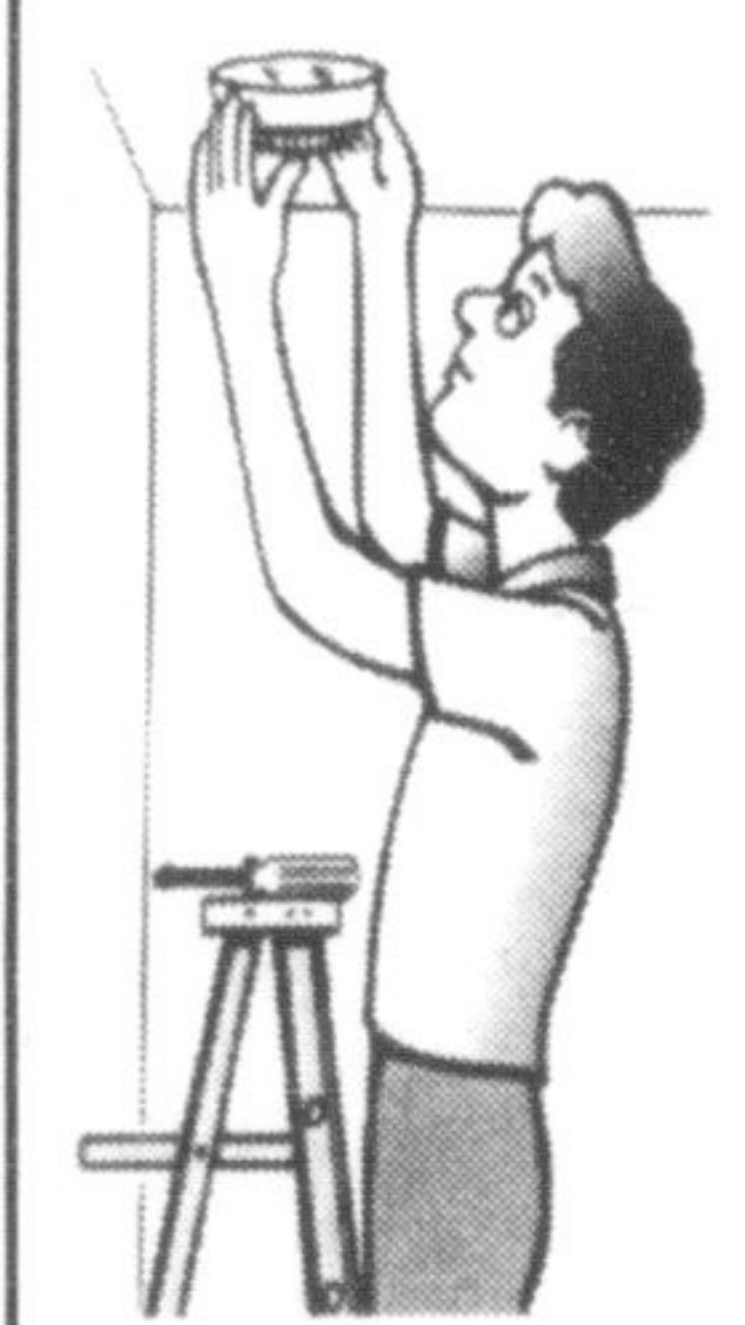
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