

# Halton will pay GTA pooling cash, under protest

By MELANIE HENNESSEY

The Champion

It looks like Halton will make its full 2005 GTA pooling payment after all — but not very willingly.

At its meeting Wednesday, regional council approved a resolution expressing Halton's opposition to GTA pooling — a system that helps Toronto fund social services — and that, under protest, Halton will pay this year's pooling obligation.

It had been suggested in a motion at council last month that the Region cap Halton's 2005 pooling payments at a three per cent increase over the \$35.1 million it paid last year, which would've meant withholding about \$2.5 million. This would've been done through adjustments

to the planned December pooling payments and reconciliations. But, after staff reviewed the suggestion it recommended that this stand not be taken.

"The Province made it clear to all of us — they expect their payments and they'll get their payments. They have the means to do that," said Commissioner of Corporate Services and Treasurer Jane MacCaskill.

A report from Ms MacCaskill explained that if Halton didn't make its payment, the amount would become a debt owed to the Province, which could be recovered by any remedy or procedure available by law.

Almost \$39 million was approved in the Region's 2006 budget for pooling Wednesday, which equates to about \$201 for the average taxpayer.

The resolution council supported goes on to call for the Province to be informed that Halton objects to the pooling system having no exit strategy. It also highlights council's continued opposition to the pooling concept.

Amongst the councillors who endorsed the item was Milton Mayor Gord Krantz, who told The Champion that he's been one of the strongest advocates of Halton not having any part of GTA pooling.

"Sometimes you've got to really send a message (to the Province) — enough is enough when it comes to downloading," he said.

"I and many of us (politicians) work very, very hard to make sure our respective jurisdictions get a fair shake, and we're not in this instance."

Staff was directed to report back to council in April with recommendations to address coun-

cil's concerns with GTA pooling.

Earlier this year, Richmond Hill council approved a resolution to withhold its share of the pooling costs, estimated to be about \$15 million in York Region's levy.

Shortly after that, York Region passed a resolution to cap its 2005 pooling payments at a three per cent increase over its 2004 payments.

Regional Chairman Joyce Savoline has written to the Province in the past to voice Halton's opposition to GTA pooling.

Some of the issues the Region has with the system include its lack of accountability and predictability and lack of independent audit verification.

Melanie Hennessey can be reached at mhennessy@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

## Milton bingo hall closing its doors after 27 years in the community

By MELANIE HENNESSEY

The Champion

At the end of the month, Milton Bingo Country will call its last number.

The popular spot on Regional Road 25 is closing its doors after 27 years of serving the community and helping raise thousands of dollars for local charities.

The hall's assistant manager, Kim Wright, told The Champion that a letter she received from Bingo Country's head office says the Milton location is closing due

to "financial considerations."

"We've been told it's (the local branch) not making any money," she said.

Hall manager Greg Huether said he was "a little shocked" when he found out that the hall's shutting down.

"I didn't think it would happen this soon, but I know they've been struggling for a little while," he said.

In addition to putting 15 people out of work, the closure also means 27 local charities that benefit from revenues the hall gener-

ates will have to find a way to make up for the loss of funds.

Ms Wright noted that faithful Bingo Country customers aren't happy with the closure announcement either, who'll now have to drive out of town if they want to play.

The final bingo sessions will take place December 31 at 12:45, 4, 7 and 10 p.m.

Melanie Hennessey can be reached at mhennessy@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

## Region Web site changing

With the new year comes change to Halton Region's Web site address.

As of January 1, the Region will shorten its on-line name to www.halton.ca.

Simplifying the Web site address responds to feedback received from residents at town hall focus groups recently held by the Region to solicit input on the effectiveness of its various communication

channels and practices.

"In 2005 our Web site drew over 150,000 visits per month, so we know it is a very important source of information," said Halton CAO Brent Marshall.

Regional staff e-mail addresses will change to reflect the new address and will switch to the format of firstname.lastname@halton.ca.

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