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Some Catholic trustees still unsure about campus

By Howard Mozel
SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

While the fears of most Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) trustees about the proposed joint Halton Regional Campus appear to have been allayed, some lingering doubts remain.

That prompted senior administration members at last Tuesday's board meeting to again take pains to explain that every effort has and will be made to ensure the continued autonomy and identity of the HCDSB despite sharing property and facilities with the campus'

other three partners.

To that end, trustees at the meeting were asked for input on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that has been carefully hammered out between the partners before being asked to vote on it at a future date.

According to Superintendent of Facility Management Services Giacomo Corbacio, the MOU "is not a binding agreement, but an expression of the participants' intent to proceed with the Halton Regional Campus project."

Corbacio assured trustees that all four partners must agree on everything

unanimously before the project becomes a reality.

"Staff believes that the concerns regarding autonomy, identity and catholicity are addressed in the MOU," he said, explaining that no one is legally bound by the MOU's terms until such time as formal agreements have been settled.

When Burlington Trustee Bob Van de Vrande expressed worry about possible "irreconcilable differences" between the HCDSB and the other partners, Chair Al Bailey said that, as Catholics, they must be strong enough to move forward and have faith.

In a nutshell, the government office "supercentre" concept is one which involves the creation of a major, 540,000-square-foot multi-use campus on the Bronzé Road property currently occupied by Halton Regional headquarters as well as adjacent land that is up for sale. If it comes to pass, the site would be a central location that would include four distinct, stand-alone areas of office space for the Region, Halton Regional Police, HCDSB and the Halton District School Board, housing about 1,900 staff.

It's estimated that the campus would cost approximately \$127 million but would result in an overall savings of more than \$20 million for taxpayers — as opposed to how much it would cost if each of the four partners pursued individual buildings.

The site would also include an outdoor community square and a multi-services facility linked to the office space that would house amenities to be shared by the four partners, such as a joint board/council chambers, cafeteria, daycare service, support services or perhaps even a Tim Hortons.

The project could prove to be an important step in solving overcrowding at the HCDSB's five cramped administrative facilities and save taxpayers even more money through a host of efficiencies. Still, doubts among some trustees remained, prompting Corbacio to say they're not alone and that the other partners have issues too.

"We all have our unique concerns and needs," he said, using as an example the police, who may not want to share a print shop for security reasons.

Because of these concerns, said Corbacio, a special article was added to the MOU. It states, "This MOU is based on the principle that the recognition and respect for the autonomy and identity of each participant, their beliefs, culture, culture sensitivity, icons, imagery, uniqueness and values are considered of primary importance in the design and operation of the Halton Regional Campus facility."

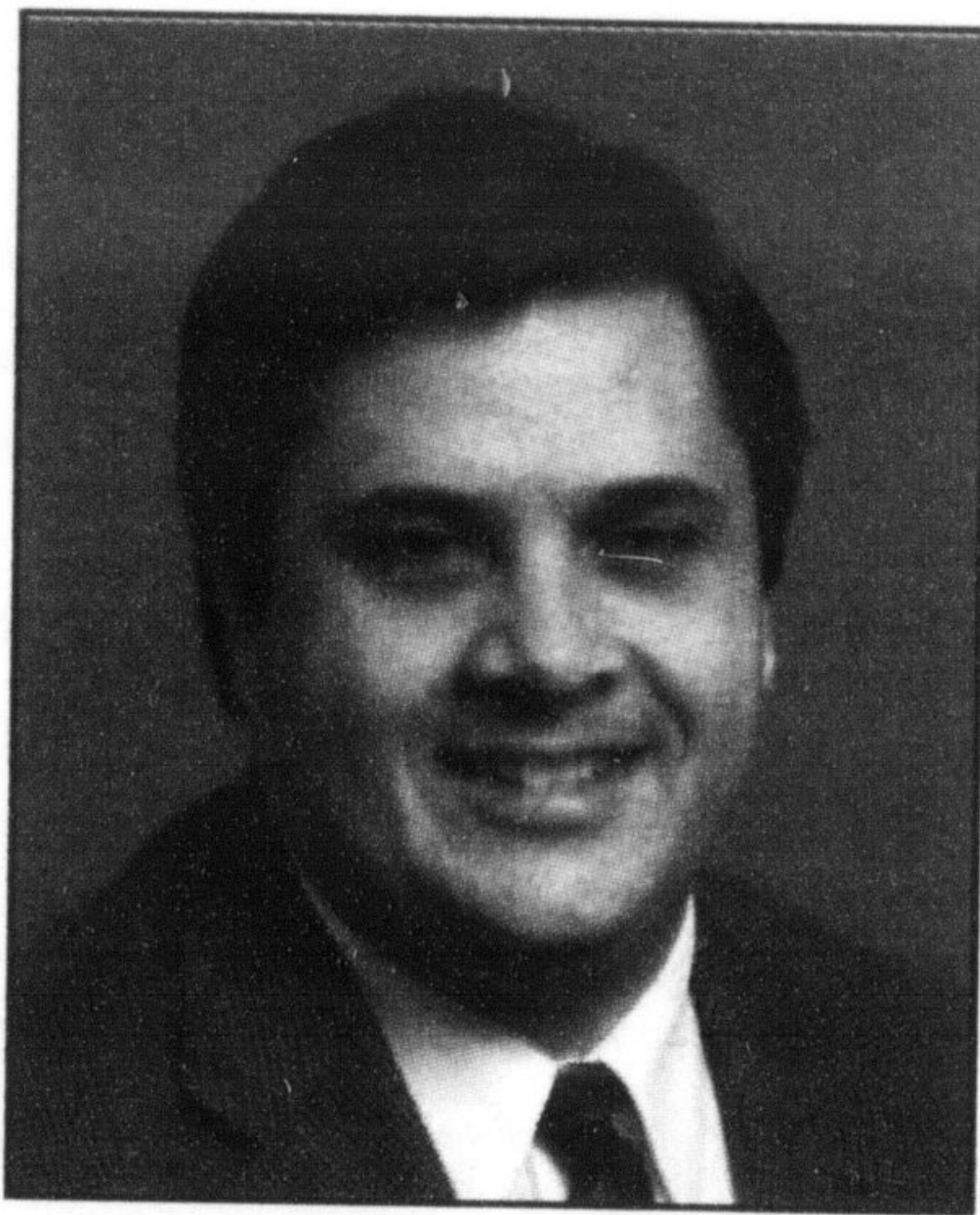
On the financial side, Corbacio explained the board will purchase its building and contribute to the shared facility — about 8.5 per cent of the costs. The board will also enter into a ground lease with the Region of \$10 for 99 years.

The next steps for the board include \$42,500 for pre-design this July, \$516,904 for design in February 2007 and \$9,778,682 for construction in early 2008, for a total of just over \$10.3 million.

If the board decides to terminate its relationship with the campus in the future, the Region will buy its building for the fair market value at the time.

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