

Recommendation to eliminate school trustees' laptops rejected

Little support shown for cost-cutting measure

By Kim Arnott
SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

Halton Catholic school board trustees will keep their laptop computers despite an attempt by the chair of the board to eliminate them as a cost-cutting measure.

At a meeting of the Halton Catholic District School Board last week, board Chair Al Bailey brought forward a recommendation to scrap the policy that sees laptop computers supplied to trustees for the duration of their elected term.

Noting that the board is expecting to face very tight budgets over the coming few years, Bailey said, "This is my suggestion of what (trustees) can do to help."

In 2004, trustees approved a policy to provide laptops to members of the board in an attempt to save time and paper, as well as fax and courier costs. Arguments for the policy included the suggestion that the computers would make communication with trustees

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AL BAILEY

quicker and more efficient.

Bailey argued that the computers haven't resulted in any significant costs savings for the board.

"At a time when we're looking at where our budget money is going to go, supplying computers to us on a regular basis is not a feasible thing," he said.

But several of his fellow trustees questioned the logic of eliminating the laptops, which cost the board \$2,200 each to purchase.

"It is such a miniscule amount, com-

pared to the enormous budget the board deals with on an annual basis," said Burlington Trustee Joanne Matters.

The board's approved operating budget for 2006-07 is \$205.4 million.

Along with laptop computers, the board also supplies trustees with Internet access and a printer. Prior to the 2004 policy, the board provided trustees with fax machines and fax telephone lines.

The policy, which applies to all trustees, including student trustees appointed for a one-year term, says trustees must return their computers at the end of their terms, or purchase them at an agreed-upon depreciated price.

Bailey's defeated motion had suggested that the board continue to supply Internet access and a printer to trustees owning their own computers.

"As a budget item, this has to be .001 per cent of nothing," noted Burlington Trustee Bob Van de Vrande. "I don't think we should make a hasty decision here based on a cost thing, which I think is spurious at best."

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