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Police seeking \$5.8 million budget hike for next year

By Christina Commisso
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Halton Regional Police are looking for a \$5.8 million budget increase in 2012.

Police Chief Gary Crowell said as the region grows so does the demand for policing.

"We're expected to do more for more people," he said during Thursday's administration and finance budget meeting.

The 2012 funding request shows a \$122.2 million budget expenditure.

Last year, after regional council approved a 6.9 per cent police budget hike, the Chief was asked to keep future budget increases around the rate of inflation. Coming in with a 3.2 per cent increase for 2012 — and \$1.2 million lower than what was forecasted in 2011 — did just that.

The budget was approved by the committee and will be forwarded to the budget review committee before going to regional council for final approval December 14.

Compensation is the priciest line item on the budget, making up about 85 per cent of expenses at \$109.6 million — a \$6.6 million increase from 2011. Of the increase, \$2.3 million is related to contract settlements. The agreement runs until December 31 and awarded wage increases of 9.2 per cent over three years. About \$1.5 million is allotted for new hires including 14 uniform officers, one civilian position and five civilian contract positions.

Crowell said changes in the justice system have made policing incredibly more complex and time-consuming. "The time spent by police on investigations, court preparations and taking a case through the justice system has skyrocketed."

Compared to 30 years ago, he said a break-and-enter charge takes 60 per cent more time, an impaired driving charge takes 250 per cent more time and a domestic violence call takes 960 per cent more time.

Crowell said he expects to save about \$450,000 through the uploading of court security and prisoner transportation costs from the municipalities to the Province, which begins in April.

Halton continues to maintain the lowest officer to population and cost per capita ratios of neighbouring police forces.

"We continue to have one of the lowest crime rates in the country," said Crowell. "I don't take full credit for that, but our service delivery model plays a role."

Burlington Councillor Paul Sharman raised concerns about the low police per population ratio as Halton's population continues to grow.

"Given the few number of cops, the increase in population presumably reflects the nature of crime as it exists. What's the probability the nature of crimes will change if we grow dramatically?"

Crowell said that could very well be a reality in Halton. "It's not only population growth, but also higher density, growth patterns and demographic changes," he said, adding that the growth could involve an increase to the officer ratio.

The 3.2 per cent police budget increase would result in a regional tax increase of about \$14, bringing the average regional taxes paid in Halton to about \$1,318, a 1.1 per cent increase from 2011.

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