

# Region seeking 0% tax increase in next budget

Acclaimed Carr says not having to campaign gave him time to work on budget

By Christina Commisso  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

The Region is on a roll.

For the second consecutive year — a year that saw some of the highest capital expenditure on infrastructure — Halton is looking at a zero per cent tax increase for 2011.

While the announcement will formally be made during the December inaugural meeting of council, that cat was let out of the bag early when outgoing Burlington Mayor Cam Jackson mentioned the tax freeze during a committee meeting last week.

Regional Chair Gary Carr, who was acclaimed early September, said not having to campaign during the election gave him the time needed to hash out a zero per cent budget with staff.

“At the budget direction meeting last July, council asked staff to come in at zero to three per cent (increase). When I was acclaimed, I immediately went back with Pat (Moyle), our CAO, and our treasurer and began putting something together.”

While the budget won't be presented to council for approval until the new year, Carr

said he'll be recommending freezing taxes for Regional programs and services. Meaning, if approved, the 2010 trend will continue and there will be no increase next year in property taxes for regional services, which include police, ambulance and regional roads.

But the former pro hockey player says he wasn't entirely sure the freeze-streak would continue. The Region's 2010 budget forecasted a 2.6 per cent hike for 2011.

“Last year a lot of councillors said, ‘Well, we're doing it this year, but next year we will have to begin increases.’ But we were able to do it,” said Carr, adding, “This year was the second largest capital expenditure for roads, wastewater and water.”

Carr said the special ingredient in zero per cent budget was development charges.

“We're making (developers) pay for the full cost of growth. We're able to allow tax payers to have a freeze, while all of our new infrastructure, our new roads and our upgrades are being paid for by development charges.”

He continued, “It's something new to the Region of Halton, it's never happened before,” referring to the entire cost of new growth being paid for through development charges.

Regional council will resume the budget review process in January.

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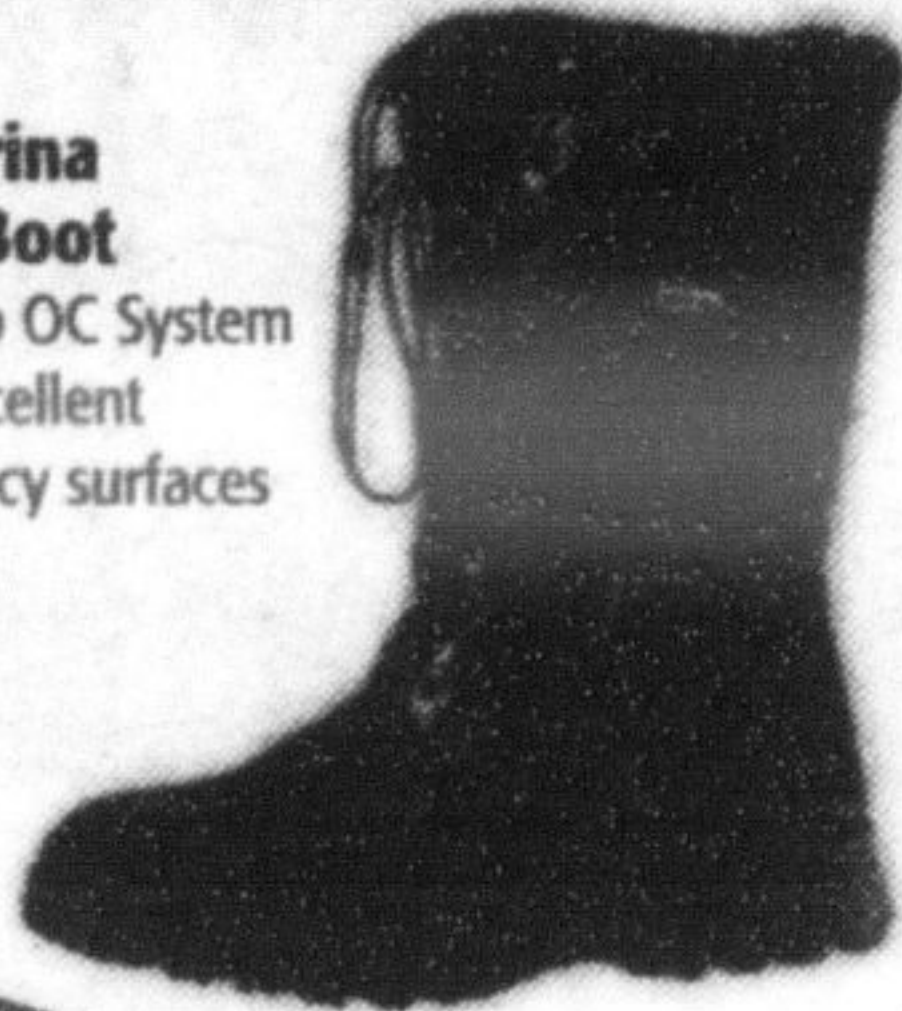
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