

Tough decisions loom on Halton Region budget

By **NORMAN NELSON**
Tough talk continues to flow from Halton Region regarding the upcoming municipal budget.

Just to keep Halton Region running the way it is next year, said finance commissioner Joe Rinaldo, will require a 14.5 per cent increase to ratepayers.

With politicians clamoring for tax increases to be kept nearer the five per cent inflation mark, he warned that cuts in services will have to be made.

To reduce the budget increase to the inflation rate from the current 14.5 per cent forecast requires a \$4.5 million cut.

Milton Mayor Gord Krantz said he'll gladly lead by example, but added that he expects other agencies

— such as the police, school boards and the conservation authorities — which draw their funding from the municipal tax base to follow the lead.

"I don't mind telling those agencies that as far as I'm concerned I want them to do the same thing as what we're attempting to do here," he said.

"When they come here in March or April or whenever it is and say they want a 15 or 20 per cent increase, I will not support it. I will not be a part of rubber stamping anything."

That could set up a confrontation next year as regional council, for all intents and purposes, is required by the Province to rubber stamp the budgets of those agencies.

The mood at Wednesday's finance

and administration meeting as the budget process began was sombre.

A few days earlier, Regional Chairman Peter Pomeroy, at a special press conference, had suggested a couple of cost cutting measures — such as the Region climbing off the

growth treadmill for a year in favor of shoring up existing services, and carefully monitoring all hiring.

Other councillor's say they had the same thing in mind, and wanted to tighten the belt even further.

Not only did the committee advo-

cate monitoring all hiring by the Region, but at Burlington Mayor Roly Bird's instigation, it also requested council look at staff reduction.

The committee also decided to look more over staff's shoulders in the preparation of the upcoming budget.

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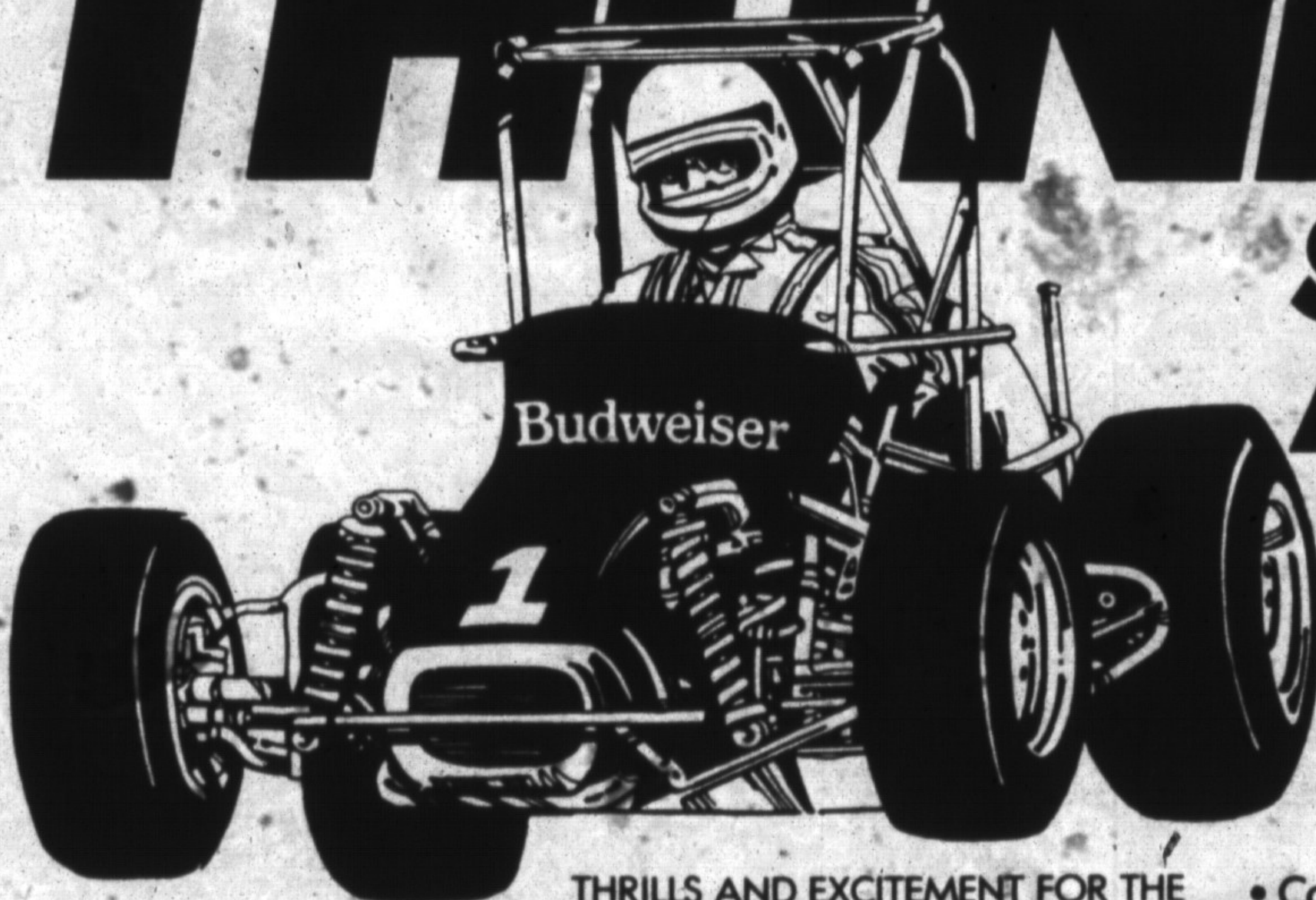
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