

Councillor calls for cop budget chop

By ROB KELLY

Oakville regional councillor Steve Sparling wants the police to crack down — on themselves.

Wednesday councillor Sparling warned that a move by Halton Regional Police to trim their 1992 budget request by three per cent was just not enough cost cutting, and he added that he isn't prepared to give up the fight to further roll back the proposed \$37.8 million package.

Regional police chief James Harding pitched the newly slashed budget to the regional budget committee Monday. The police position is that it's now a bare-bones document. Initially police had wanted roughly \$39 million from Halton taxpayers, a 12.6 per cent increase over 1991's \$34.6 million. But, following a request from regional councillors, they've pared that back to a 9.3 per cent hike — cutting about \$1.1 million.

Councillor Sparling was the only budget committee member to register strong dissatisfaction with the latest police initiative.

"Last year they got 9.5 per cent and this year they want 9.3 per cent. I take issue with the chief in what he believes is absolutely essential," Mr. Sparling said.

"It's totally unacceptable to me, to the taxpayers, to the people. It can't go on, especially in a deep recession. They have not pulled their weight," Mr. Sparling emphasized.

What police management has done, largely, is attempted to hold the line on wages. In fact, given inflation, they want rank and file police officers to take a cut in pay.

Instead of the originally planned 4 per cent increase in salaries the newly tendered budget serves up a one per cent raise. Rather than asking for almost \$1.5 million to cover salary adjustments, police only want \$375,000.

However, they haven't backed off their plan to hire 12 new officers in 1992, and that bothers Mr. Sparling.

He says the force should "delay implementation" of that "for as long as necessary."

But Sgt. Carey Smith, the regional police media relations officer, said Halton is understaffed when it comes to police officers. "The provincial average is one per 700 people and we're up at (one per) 809."

Sgt. Smith said Halton police have been playing catch-up for the last few years in an attempt to reach the provincially recommended staffing levels. "We're still below the ratio and the region's growing, crime is on the increase (up 8.7 per cent last year, according to police statistics).

"I'm not suggesting that throwing money at it cures a problem, but you have to have some resources," Sgt. Smith stressed.

"I've never said we don't need those officers," Mr. Sparling said. "But I believe we can't afford those officers." He said the annual cost of a dozen new officers, including bene-

fits, runs to roughly \$1 million per year, a figure Sgt. Smith did not dispute.

But Sgt. Smith did note that in a comparison of nine regional forces, Halton was "third cheapest" in terms of expense per taxpayer. Policing cost Halton's residents an average of \$114 each in 1991. In neighbouring Peel it was \$146 per head and in Hamilton \$144.

Asked if he was reasonably certain police officers are willing to accept a pay raise of only one per cent, Sgt. Smith chose his words carefully, but left the clear impression they are willing to compromise.

"The fairest thing I can say is that police officers are fully cognizant that there is a recession out there. A lot of people are out of work, laid off. It's almost an emergency situation. We're fully aware of that."

Police contract negotiations for a one-year deal are ongoing. The last contract expired in December.

Attitudes are changing

from AWARENESS on page 4 in court. They must prove at a special hearing that it is relevant to the case.

"Just because there's no law in place now doesn't mean the lawyers can go in and have a field day," she said.

Common sense is a person's best protection, said Acting Sergeant Marty Power. He also advised members of the audience to follow their instincts. "If something doesn't feel right get out of there."

Speaking on safety in the home and on the street, Acting Sergeant Power said some homeowners, especially in rural areas, still leave windows and doors unlocked. "Unfortunately in today's society you cannot do that."

He warned the crowd not to put their first names on mail boxes or in phone books, and not to allow a

stranger in need of a phone in their homes. "Offer to make the call yourself."

Should you return home to find windows and doors tampered with, don't go inside in case a thief is still there. "The difference could be your life," said Acting Sergeant Power.

Held in the wake of many recent acts of abuse to women and children in Halton, the forum's purpose was to help stop violence from becoming the norm in society.

Because violence in today's society is everybody's problem, Craig Pritchard, Drury's head of physical education, said he was disappointed more male students didn't attend the event.

Next month, the school plans to hold a forum on AIDS — a topic many students have been inquiring about, said Mr. Pritchard.

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