

Town hires tax hounds

Milton will hire freelance property tax inspectors to make sure the municipality is getting its fair share of funds from various businesses and landowners in the community.

Monday night at general committee councillors approved the move, which will cost the town approximately \$20,000, but hopefully net it much more in taxation revenue that is falling through the cracks.

The town's consultant, David Powell, used to work the other side of the fence. He spent 24 years with Imperial Oil, devoted to cutting the giant petroleum company's taxes to a minimum.

During that time, "I watched the tax base being eroded in many municipalities," Mr. Powell said. "Every major corporation in Canada has tax agents." On the other hand, "there does not appear to be anybody there" to fight for the municipal share of the tax pie, except area provincial assessors, he noted, and they are "very short

staffed."

Last fall Milton commissioned Mr. Powell's company, Municipal Tax Equity Consultants Inc., to examine the various properties in the town owned by other government agencies and utilities. These bodies don't pay property taxes, but they do pay annual grants to municipal governments instead.

The grants are supposed to be indexed to current property taxes, but often changes to the properties have taken place which mean more taxes are owed than the grants represent. For example, if a government agency owns a vacant lot and starts renting it out to a farmer for cultivation, more money is due the municipal government in taxes. But such changes often go unreported.

In Caledon, an area Mr. Powell freely admitted was unusual in its high rate of uncollected taxes, he managed to recoup \$3 million for the municipality.

Last year, examining only Milton

properties owned by other government agencies, Mr. Powell found what he considers to be \$132,000 in tax revenue. Once education and Halton regional taxes are deducted, Milton will still wind up with \$30,000 annually for a \$10,000 finder's fee to Mr. Powell, provided all the new assessments hold up under any appeals by the landowners.

Mr. Powell said Monday night that more substantial sums are usually recovered in the commercial-industrial sector and in business taxes than by re-assessing other government agencies.

He couldn't name a sum he hopes to recover, but said "it will certainly be worthwhile taking a look at." He plans on conducting his study in September.

Since Halton Region and both the public and separate boards of education will benefit from any new tax revenue Mr. Powell finds, councillors voted to ask all three agencies to help fund the \$20,000 study.

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