

# Committee balks at cutting \$150,400 in agency grants

By **ROB KELLY**  
The Champion

Some Halton regional councillors aren't facing up to the need for tough budgeting decisions, said a visibly annoyed Ralph Scholtens Tuesday.

Councillor Scholtens, the Burlington representative who chairs the regional health and social services committee, vented his emotions after Tuesday's meeting, as it became apparent the committee was deeply split over a proposal to cut \$150,400 in grants to eight non-profit agencies.

"I am becoming increasingly more frustrated with the inability of some members of the committee to face some very hard decisions, and they have to be made," said Mr. Scholtens.

"Some of the (committee) members just aren't catching on," he continued.

"There are a lot of people paying lip service to zero (budget) increases, and now all of a sudden they're crawling back into their shells."

"Either we're going to cut \$150,000 or not. If not, I sure as hell hope they're not going to stand up in council and beat their breasts about (budget) increases because they will be lying through their teeth," Mr. Scholtens warned.

Halton Region hopes to increase property taxes by only 3.6 per cent in the 1993 budget, but social service costs, largely due to the recession, will jump by more than 10 per cent if the \$150,400 isn't trimmed from that department. Even with the proposed cut the cost will still rise by 8.8 per cent.

Halton gives financial subsidies to 43 non-profit agencies, most of which are small. But under the plan put forward Tuesday, eight of the larger ones would lose their regional grant entirely, thus the \$150,400 saving.

The rationale is that these agencies only obtain one per cent of their operating funds from Halton, so they will weather the cutbacks better than smaller non-profit groups. If instead all 43 groups were cut back equally, some might have to close, councillors worried.

The targeted non-profit groups are: The Burlington Association for Community Living, the North Halton Association for the Developmentally Handicapped, Community Living Oakville, The Big Brothers Association of Burlington and Hamilton-Wentworth, The Big Sisters Association of Hamilton and District, Community Resources of Halton, Halton Family Services and the Victorian Order of Nurses.

All but the Big Sisters group and the Victorian Order of Nurses made

presentations to the committee Tuesday, pleading not to have their subsidies cut, and they were supported by several committee members.

Burlington councillor Bob Wood said he wanted to see more options. "I'm just not comfortable with this committee making important decisions as a mathematical exercise."

"I don't want to cut \$150,000 from this part of the budget," Oakville Mayor Ann Mulvale said. "There has to be somewhere else where we can cut the money. We're taking it from people who can least afford it."

She noted that three of the targeted agencies serve mentally handicapped people (the North Halton

Association for the Developmentally Handicapped, Community Living Oakville, the Burlington Association for Community Living).

Burlington councillor Doug Greenaway said he "will not accept" that \$150,000 can't somehow be trimmed from the budget. "It's just a matter of how it's going to be spread out."

"I'd like the social services budget to be reduced by \$150,000," said regional chairman Peter Pomeroy, adding there's "no easy solution" and whatever decision is made will require "a hell of a lot of courage."

Unable to agree on a preliminary course of action, the committee will consider the matter again in a special budget meeting Tuesday (Jan. 19).

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