

Public school trustees raise taxes \$43 per household

By ANGELA BLACKBURN
Special to The Champion

Don Cassidy called the Halton Board of Education's budget a "trying issue" before tabling an increase of about \$43 on the average tax bill.

The finance committee chairman introduced the board's 1993 budget to trustees for consideration at a special meeting Wednesday night. Voting on the budget was to take place last night at a regular board meeting.

Wednesday, the finance committee tabled a \$291.3 million budget — representing a 2 per cent spending hike and a 3.43 per cent millrate rise for taxpayers.

To arrive at the millrate, the board combined its expenditure budget with Ministry of Education grants, which fell \$3.7 million short this year.

"Regardless of what some trustees may think of it, it's a budget consistent with what the finance committee asked administration to do," Mr. Cassidy said.

"I'm morally, ethically and agreeably willing to present this to the board for consideration."

In an attempt to save jobs and keep extra spending at 2 per cent, education director Bob Williams recently

went to the board's 4,000 full-time staff requesting a voluntary contribution of one day's pay.

The plea to raise \$1.2 million was an alternative to laying off 75 staff members. As of March 22, \$500,000 was donated.

Staff have been given until March 31 to make contributions before a proportional number of layoffs will be announced to balance any shortfall.

While Mr. Cassidy said "enough has been said about this document," the Burlington trustee took time to talk about the increased public participation in the budget process this year.

The process began in mid-January with two meetings slated to accommodate public delegations. The meetings were advertised by the board.

Mr. Cassidy also allowed an informal question period for the public following each finance committee meeting.

If he had to do it all over again, Mr. Cassidy said, he would be even more open with the public.

"I think the process should be a

public one. I think this was confirmed by the comments that were heard throughout. While not always constructive, everyone has the right within certain bounds of decorum to have a say."

The board's finance committee approved the budget March 22 for

recommendation to the board.

Wednesday's meeting was called to satisfy board by-laws that require all matters to go before the board first as information, then for voting.

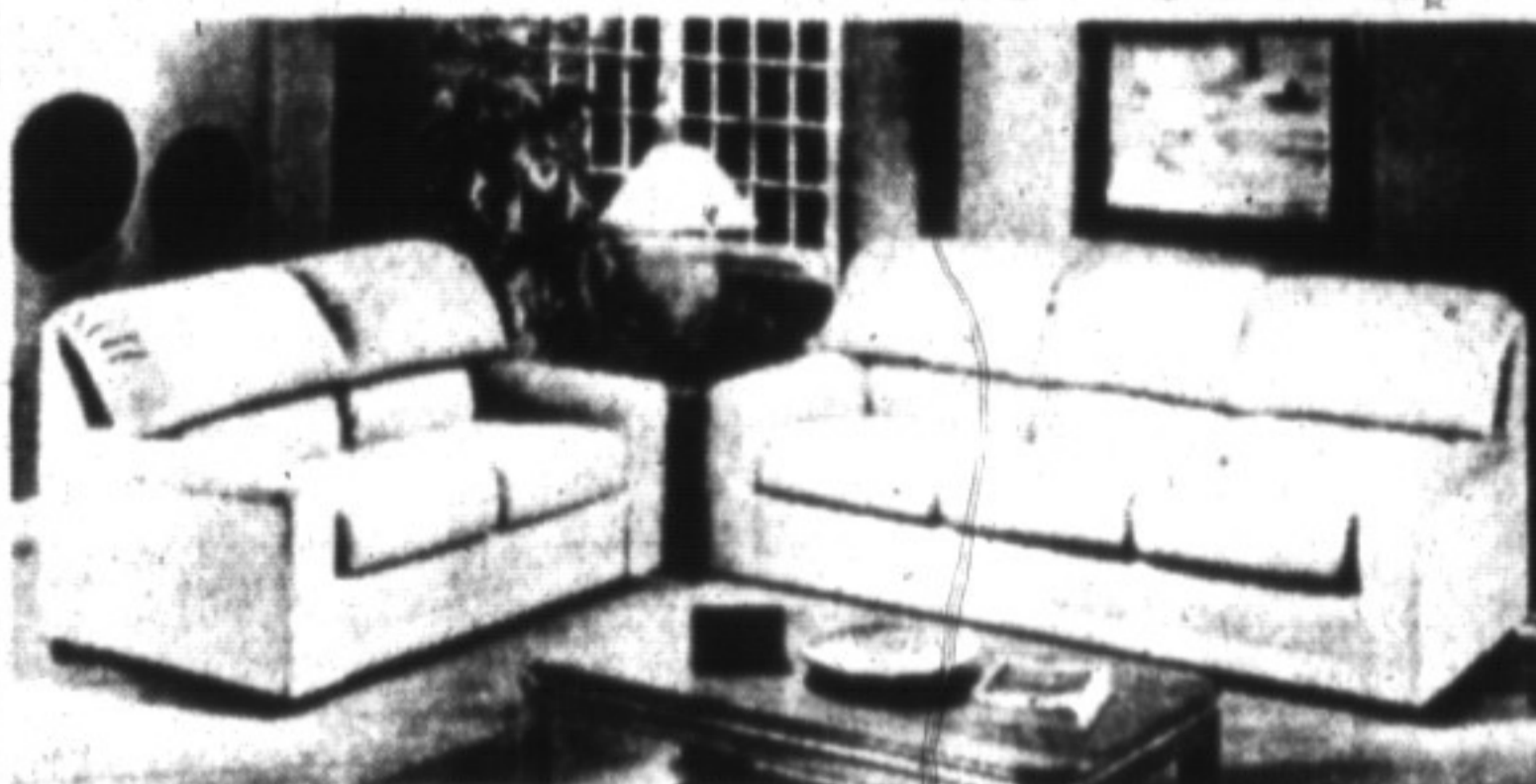
Debate and voting on the budget was slated for last night's regularly scheduled board meeting.



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