

Halton wants to plan for belt tightening

By BRAD REAUME
The Champion

Halton Region is ready to commit to yet another major strategic planning exercise.

Despite reservations by some councillors concerning the value of the plan and its cost, especially in tough economic times, members of the administration and finance committee also voted last week to bring forward the completion date.

"We must talk to people about what the future of Halton is," said John Burke, regional chief administrative officer. "We need to work on an implementable plan. We have to move the talk into the walk."

"I've seen these strategic plans before but I've never seen one implemented," said Oakville councillor Kevin Flynn.

"I'd get a hernia just trying to pick-up all the strategic plans I've seen," said Milton Mayor Gord Krantz. "Assure me that we're going to accomplish something."

Burlington Mayor Walter Mulkeiwich supported the plan but demanded stricter guidelines.

"With streamlining between municipalities and streamlining in various departments, there needs to be a restructuring between levels of government," said the Burlington mayor, who cited a post social contract viewpoint in his thinking. "If we don't do these things differently we'll be dead in the water. There is no sense doing a strategic plan if we don't address these issues."

"This is probably the most important document that you are going to do," said regional chairman Peter Pomeroy.

"The last strategic plan, in 1991, was important but generic and we followed it. Nobody could have imagined the whole range of changes since then."

The issues are pre-determined thanks to the national economy and

a demand for tax reductions. People are willing to put politicians out of office until someone finally gets the message. If we are going to downsize, we need a plan."

Mr. Pomeroy explained that Halton needs to look at how governments are going to finance themselves. He said the world is moving toward public and private partnerships, with public money being used to leverage private support.

"The issue of government restructuring isn't proper for staff to initiate," said Mr. Burke. "That's political and in some respects out of local hands."

"Presently our future is being set by the issues. We're just bumping along waiting for the next missile to be shot."

Mr. Burke agreed that if there is no concrete focus in the strategic plan it will be a waste of time.

There were some concerns that beginning a strategic plan at this late stage in the present council's term will only hamstring the next group of councillors. The next municipal election is scheduled for November, 1994.

"This group of councillors has a good understanding of good times and bad," said Mr. Burke. "The new council won't be stuck with an old agenda, they'll get their agenda from the polls."

"This isn't just a strategic plan," said Mr. Mulkeiwich. "It's a plan for restructuring."

The plan has a component for focus groups but some councillors expressed reservations about the inclusion of special interest groups.

"I have a great deal of concern over letting special interest groups have such an impact on our plan. Let's find out what the taxpayer has to say," said Mr. Krantz.

The committee forwarded their recommendation that the strategic planning process begin to the full regional council which meets today (Wednesday).

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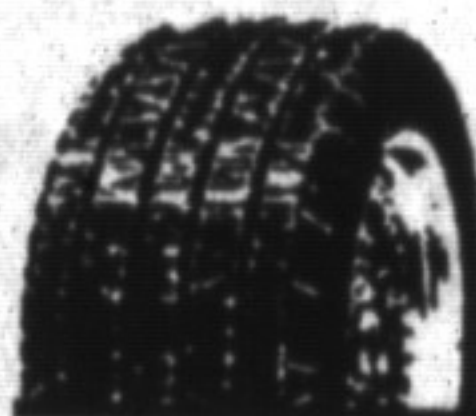
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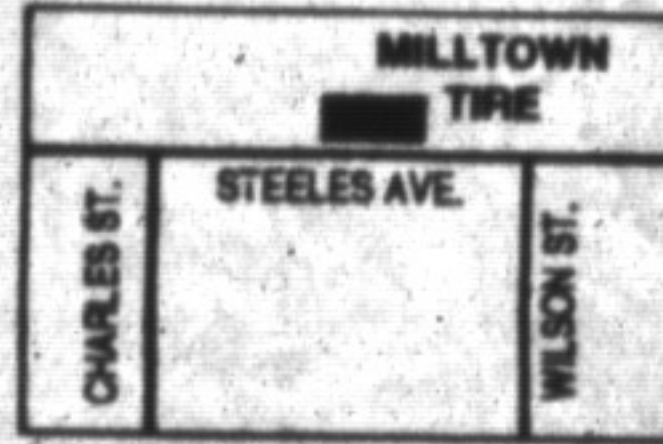
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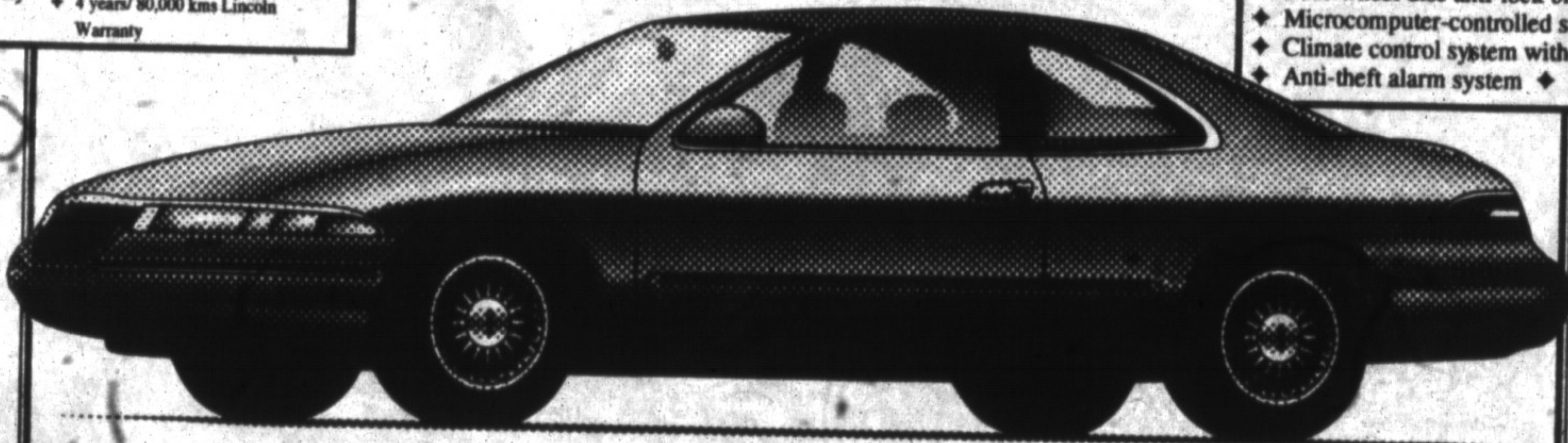
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