

Utility bills up \$10 in regional budget, for pipes

By ANGELA BLACKBURN
The Champion

Halton Region's 1995 operating budget got the preliminary nod from the former regional council, but made a tour of the Region's standing committees last week before appearing before the new regional council today for final approval.

The budget holds no property tax increases but hikes water/wastewater user fees by 3.1 per cent — adding \$10.50 to the average household's tax bill.

The water rate increase will result in \$9.46 million being spent on upgrading aging water infrastructure (still \$1.43 million short of identified 1995 needs) and will pay most of a five-year, \$4.6 million watermain upgrade plan.

That upgrade is needed to ensure adequate water supply for firefighting, predominantly in Burlington, where earlier this year firefighters couldn't access sufficient water to battle a house fire.

In the final analysis 1995 regional taxes — property taxes and user rates

combined — will be \$741.46 for the average Halton residence. That means \$387.85 in property taxes and \$353.61 in water/wastewater user rates.

The regional budget meets a no tax increase target set by council, deemed to be the preferred option over a staff-recommended 1.5 per cent increase that would have accommodated inflation but tacked \$2.34 on the property tax bill.

The water/waste water user rate hikes mean taxpayers will cough up about \$5 extra a year to pay for water system infrastructure upgrades and another \$5/year for fire protection security.

The treasurer said the Region's \$199 million 1995 budget holds no decreases in services, but will see staffing cutbacks at Allendale, the Region's home for the aged, primarily because of reduced provincial funding.

In 1995, the Region's overall staff will shrink again to 994 — almost a 10 per cent reduction since the 1993 level of 1,081.

Last week standing committees

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Bonnie Ewart, Halton's Social Services Director

reviewed departmental budgets. The health department brought in no budgetary increases, while the social services department's budget dropped 1.4 per cent.

Halton's health budget is \$28.5 million, however funding is provided provincially for all but the \$8.2 million general health program. Within that, \$6.7 million is for staffing and that's funded in a 75/25 provincial/regional ratio, leaving the Region to pay \$1.7 million. And, Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Bob Nosal reported a 12 per cent staff decrease — from 131 in 1990 to 115 in 1995.

With 54 per cent of the social services budget devoted to welfare, Ms Ewart said a levelling of cases is expected in 1995. "I think what will happen in 1995/96 is that the decline will settle at a base, but that base will be considerably higher than what it was (in the late 1980s)," said Ms Ewart. Changes that now allow wel-

fare recipients to work and still be subsidized to a degree could mean welfare cheque numbers are up but the average cost per cheque is down.

With 1,500 subsidized child care spaces available through the region, there's still a waiting list of about 200, however that compares favourably to a waiting list that has been 600 to 1,000 in recent years.

Allendale, Halton's home for the aged, is a potential concern. A change in provincial funding formulas — and the provincial government's potential clawback of an assistance subsidy connected to that change — could create a \$1.7 million shortfall at Allendale this year, paving the way to hard decisions on closing beds or finding alternate funding.

At Allendale, about nine full-time equivalent job reductions will be created by not filling vacancies and cutting part-time nursing hours.

Some regional staff will be added, but to programs fully funded by the province. The jobs relate to tobacco bylaw enforcement, Hepatitis B immunization, welfare fraud investigation and social assistance cases.

Funding at \$169,000 for the Pegasus handicapped transportation service will continue, however the service will be reviewed this year.

Under the public works capital plan, treasurer Joe Rinaldo said area municipalities won't finalize their roadworks priorities until the spring. Should any priorities not be accommodated in the Region's 1995 plan, council will look to pre-approve them

for 1996 so they can be done.

The additional funds to be devoted to infrastructure upgrades are a top priority with Mr. Rinaldo.

"If we don't do it today, all you're doing is deferring the liability to future residents and if you keep compounding it, it's probably going to cost you more," he told councillors.

Oakville Councillor Kathy Graham said she had no problem justifying a \$10 per year cost hike to Oakville residents complaining about rusty, smelly water. She said they would be "grateful" for the upgrades.

The only growth in the administration and finance budget is \$100,000 related to the Region's one-third cost sharing with the federal and provincial governments on the Bronte Waterfront development.

Mr. Rinaldo said assessment growth expected at one per cent is coming onboard at 1.19 per cent, and will help maintain the flatlining of property taxes.

Milton reworking development approvals

By ANGELA BLACKBURN
The Champion

In efforts to do development business better, the Town of Milton is streamlining the site plan process.

"In most cases, development plans can add to the Town's (tax) assessment base, therefore a thorough but prompt process is necessary," said Town planner Mel Iovio.

It's through site plans, often registered against a property's title, that the municipality can ensure that new building compliments local development plans and the surrounding neighborhood.

After only a year on the books, the Town's current site plan process was once again revised with a view to hastening it.

"I started to become very concerned with what's happening in the municipality in terms of industrial/commercial development and redevelopment," said Mayor Gord Krantz. "In my opinion, we were getting bogged down and something had to be done to revise the process."

The Mayor said he was receiving complaints about the slow pace. "Things were slowing down and getting caught up in red tape. I hope that's eliminated."

Among the changes is the exemption of minor additions or developments from the site plan procedure. The processing of site plans was also deemed to be a "corporate priority" for all Town departments; and, the Site Plan Committee, which reviews individual cases, was pared from six to three overseeing departments.

The new scheme also divides developments into three categories, those of a minor nature which qualify for an exemption; moderate plans which call for a review but not necessarily registration of the plan on title to the land; and, the more significant variety which require site plan registration against property title. Site plan agreements will also clearly spell out responsibilities of developers and accompanying time schedules.

"The changes will really enhance the planning process," Mr. Iovio told councillors, adding, it wouldn't compromise but strengthen the Town's ability to make developers stick to their commitments.

INFORMATION

TOWN OF HALTON HILLS

TEMPORARY CLOSURES

Certain Municipal Offices will close at 1:30 p.m. on Friday, December 23, 1994 and will remain closed until 8:30 a.m. on Monday, January 2, 1995.

These temporary closures accommodate the statutory holidays and realize some financial savings. We apologize for any inconvenience which this may cause you.

If you require further information, please contact the Clerk's Office at 873-2600, during regular business hours (until December 22, 1994).

SUMMARY OF CLOSURES:

CIVIC CENTRE
 * general inquiries for Mayor's Office and all departments, including the following:
 * birth and death registrations * business and lottery licensing
 * customer payments (e.g. taxes) * marriage licences
 * building inspections * zoning inquiries
 * by-law enforcement * parking tickets
 * engineering services
 * recreation program inquiries and registrations

SWIMMING POOLS (Acton and Georgetown)

THEATRE AND CULTURAL CENTRE

FIRE DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS
 * Administration
 * Training, Education and Research
 * Fire Prevention and Inspections

PUBLIC LIBRARIES * refer to openings (below)

THE FOLLOWING SERVICES WILL REMAIN OPEN FOR NORMAL OPERATIONS:

PUBLIC WORKS (873-2600)
 * refuse collection
 * winter control activities

ARENAS
 * Acton Arena (853-0020)
 * Georgetown Memorial Arena (877-9612)
 * Gordon Alcott Memorial Arena (877-8488)

ANIMAL CONTROL (877-6235)

FIRE DEPARTMENT
 * Information (877-1133)

FOR EMERGENCIES:
 * FIRE/POLICE/AMBULANCE: DIAL 9-1-1

PUBLIC LIBRARY
 * Acton and Georgetown Branches will be open on December 28 (10:30 a.m. - 8:30 p.m.), December 29 (10:30 a.m. - 8:30 p.m.) and December 30 (10:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.)

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