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Police spending review sought

By **BRAD REAUME**
The Champion

By all accepted standards, Halton Regional Police do a pretty cost-effective job. However, Burlington regional councillor Rob MacIssac doesn't accept the current standards and has called for a comprehensive review of the benchmarking.

Mr. MacIssac's position has evolved over several years observing in-fighting between the Halton police services board, which sets the police budget, and the regional council, which is beset with provincial funding cutbacks. For several years police have quoted the

ratios of officers to population, which is low compared to the same ratio in nearby municipalities.

"City and regional employees are not justified by the number of people in the city. If we did we'd be lynched," said Mr. MacIssac. "It might be one of many factors but it's not the sole determinant."

Mr. MacIssac suggested the numbers and types of crime need to be considered as well as the numbers of calls for police service. He suggested taking into account the effect of new technology on policing and the use of civilian employees.

"It's my understanding that the number of civilians employed by the Halton force is higher than in surrounding regions," he said. "I'd like to get the entire picture but the way the system is currently structured it is difficult to get the whole picture."

Mr. MacIssac said Halton Police Chief Peter Campbell agreed to meet with him to try to hammer out a different method for calculating the number of officers necessary for the Halton force. Halton police will add 10 officers to their ranks in the coming year, a cost which pushed policing costs higher than last year.

"I'd be quite content to have the final say (on the budget) but I don't need to have it," said Mr. MacIssac. "Whoever does have the final say should be elected by the public. There has to be a direct accountability between spending dollars and job security."

Currently the police services board gives the final nod on the annual police budget. Its members are largely appointed by the provincial government. Three Halton councillors also sit on the board.

"Regional appointees do not comprise the majority of the board and let's face it, people join these bodies and their representation acquires a life of its own," Mr. MacIssac said. "It's partly a function of human nature. Once you get involved in board details and purposes you start to lose your objectivity. It's human nature to want to fit in."

Mr. MacIssac pointed to the recently released Who Does What report by David Crombie and said it recommended police reform. He reiterated his desire to see accountability in the system, but said the province must address the issue for there to be any action. "For all the noise I've made on these issues, I'm thankful Peter Campbell is our chief. He has co-operated a great deal," said Mr. MacIssac. "Halton is lucky to have him. He has sympathy for the big picture."

Mr. MacIssac said the next step is for some dialogue to be set up with the police services board to establish a more realistic method for measuring the need for police services. He said Chief Campbell has committed to explore the methodology.

Mr. MacIssac said he doesn't think there will be any major changes to police services until the structural questions surrounding municipal reform are worked out.

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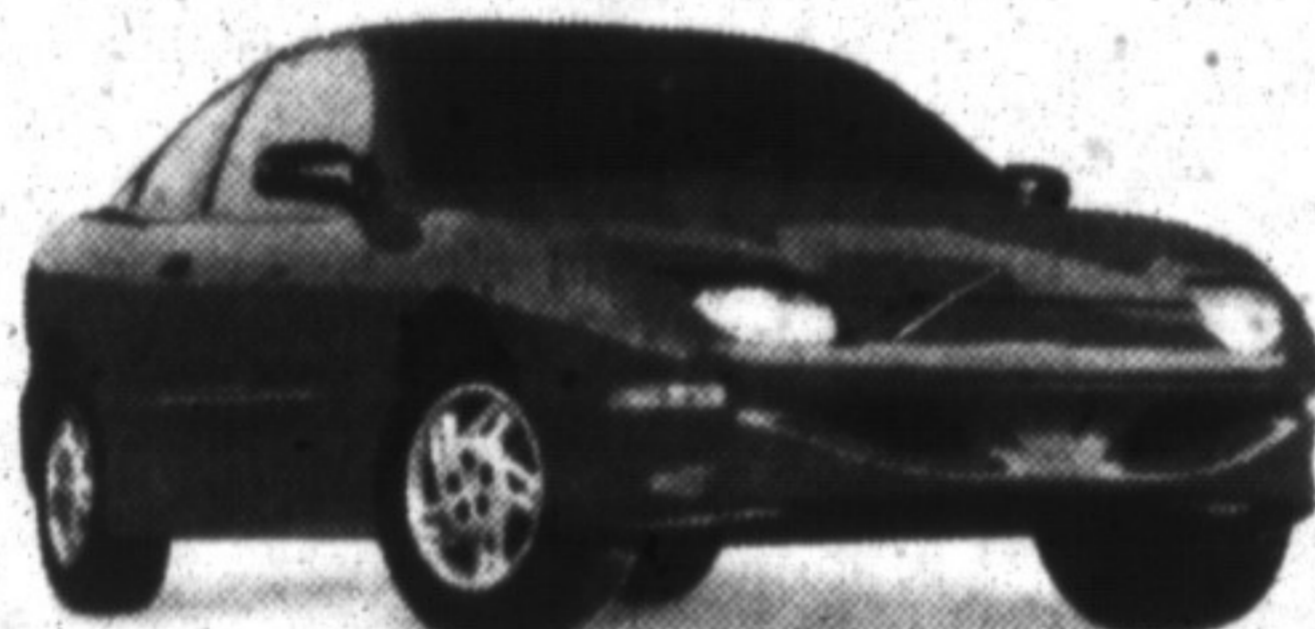
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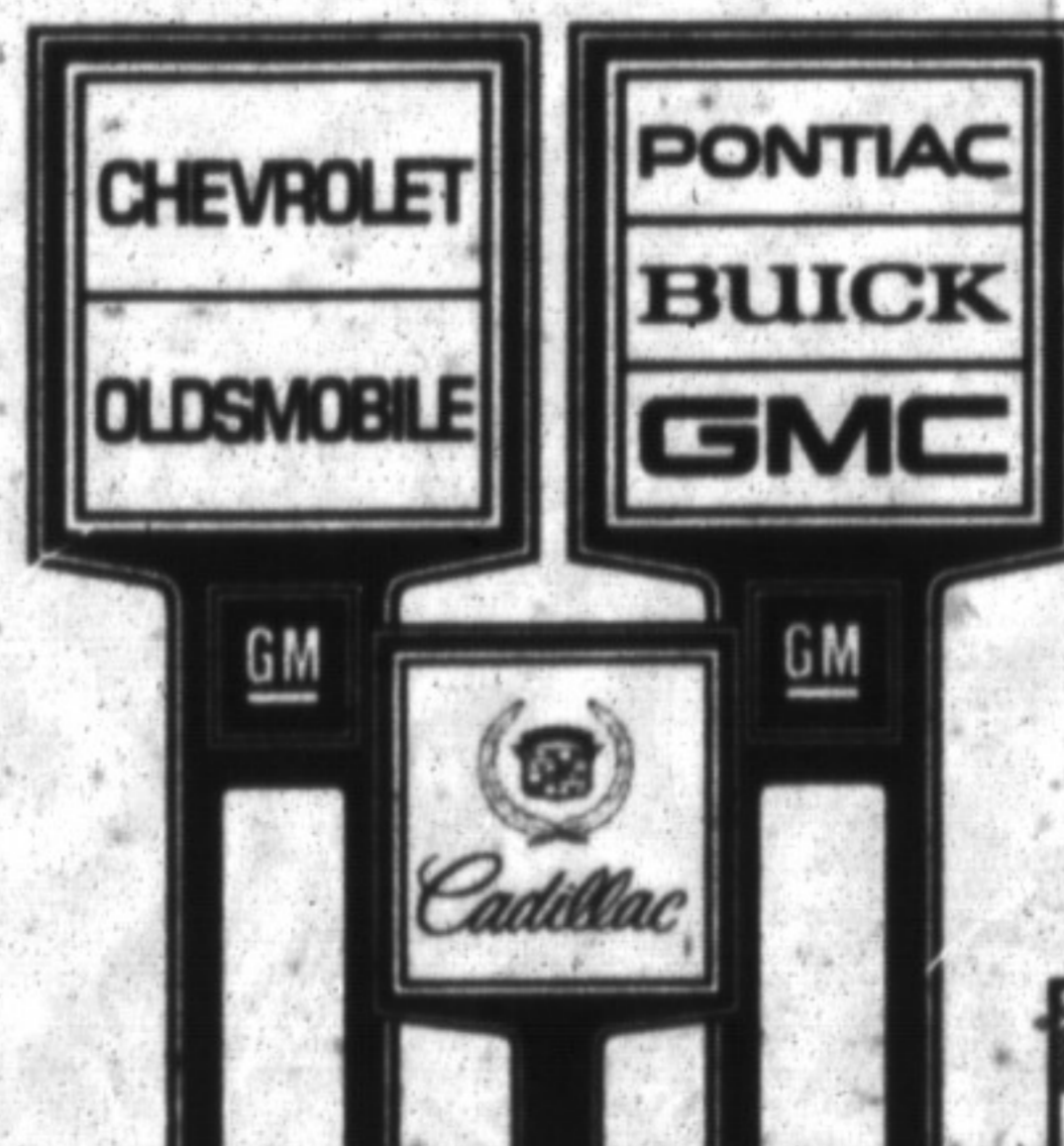
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