

More houses coming

• from KRANTZ on page 3

tacted if further attempts to keep housing development within the urban boundary fail.

While those developers who are willing to pay will provide enough money to make the filtration project financially viable, Mr. Krantz' vision of hundreds of new homes and thousands of new Miltonians appears to be in jeopardy.

Burlington-based Zenon Environmental will initially absorb the \$1.9 million cost of the filtration project. Developers will contribute development charges to underwrite Zenon, and will begin building upon approval by the Ministry of Environment, expected late next year.

Zenon wants to use Milton as a demonstration project.

More than 100 property owners were contacted with regard to potential development, of which about 45 attended a meeting hosted by regional officials in April. Developers were told they would have to be willing to pay \$2,969 in a wastewater development surcharge per single family dwelling, \$16,000 per acre for partly serviced land in the Highway 401 business park, and \$32,000 per acre in the rest of Milton.

"Staff believe further negotiations with potential developers in Milton may achieve a better mix of projects that would be prepared to pre-pay," said a report by senior Halton staff.

Halton officials do not want to extend the servicing area outside Milton's current urban boundaries because of amendments required to the local and regional land use plans, zoning changes and potential legal complications.

Not a very promising report card

About six years ago, as a rookie reporter in Guelph, I covered my first school board budget meeting.

It was short, unspectacular, and I'm pretty sure I was the only spectator present.

Those were the days when school boards passed budgets in only a few hours, the public never complained about the standard

seven per cent tax hike and everyone took things like school buses and sports programs for granted.

Certainly, this year's Halton

doesn't give a damn about the members of the public it's supposed to serve.

Either way, dozens of spectators were hanging around the board office for hours while trustees debated budget motions behind closed doors.

Managing the money: C- I'm no accountant, and admittedly the thousands of figures in the school board budget are hard to get a good grasp on, but I've got some sneaking suspicions that the board played a bit of a shell game here.

You probably heard the figures. The trustees had to cut \$16 million out of their \$286 million budget for 1996.

What you may not have heard is that the \$286 million budget was almost \$6 million higher than last year's budget, and almost \$4 million higher than last year's actual spending.

If they had to get down to \$270 million and they spent \$282 million last year, that's only a four per cent cut. Seems hard to imagine it should've required the kind of drastic and draconian measures which ended up on the table.

The skeptic in me also surfaced strongly at one point in the process, when trustees agreed to cut \$500,000 from the budget which had been identified as "provision for taxes written off."

This is money the board puts in the budget to compensate for defaulted taxes, so during a break, I queried one of the superintendents about this cut.

"Does this mean you figure everybody's going to pay their taxes this year?" I asked.

Oh, no, he explained. In fact, the board always budgets \$1.5 million to compensate for unpaid taxes. But this year, "for safety's sake," he said, they'd hoped to bump that amount up to \$2 million. Hence, the easy and painless cut of the half-million dollars.

So...staff puts more money in the budget than they need, trustees cut it out in order to look fiscally responsible, and the public is left with the perception that the board is really bleeding. Meanwhile, nothing actually changes.

Sounds like a shell game to me.

Realism: F It's almost trite to talk about paradigm shifts in 1996. The paradigm shifted a few years back, and anyone who hasn't recognized that is already becoming part of the pavement as the steamroller of change moves over them.

Unfortunately, there seem to be a number of trustees around the Halton school board table who fall into that group.

The lack of realism became clear when trustees voted to include an extra \$925,000 worth of revenue in this year's budget. They hope to come up with that money by selling school bus advertising and negotiating with municipalities over pool operating costs.

Unfortunately, both of those schemes are much closer to vague dreams than concrete reality. No deal has been reached on either item, and the board has no way of knowing how much money they will get, if indeed, they do get any.

Adding this revenue to their budget is the household equivalent to running up the balance on your VISA card, with plans to pay it off when you get the raise you're going to ask for next month.

Trustee Sandy Van Harten probably put it best, when she criticized her colleagues around the table for passing these motions: "I definitely do not agree with counting your chickens before they've hatched. I'm not approving dreams tonight," she said.



Education Beat

with KIM ARNOTT

Board of Education budget process bore little resemblance to that first one in Guelph.

Trustees had to live with packed galleries, dozens of angry delegations and mountains of dissension as they waded through hours and hours of budget deliberations.

It wasn't a pleasant job, and I didn't envy them it.

But, as a taxpayer, I was also not particularly pleased with their performance.

Here's my brief report card on the budget job your elected officials have done:

Consideration of the public: D The Halton school board is either incredibly poor at communication and planning, or it just

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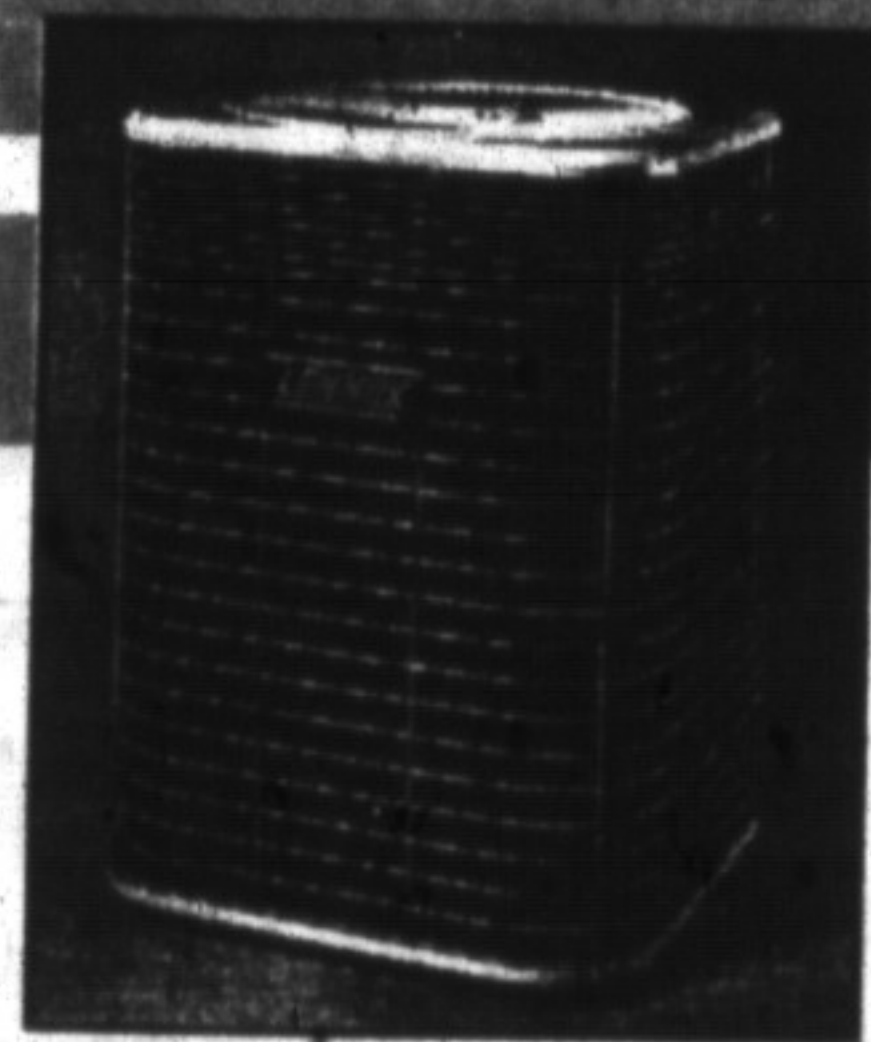
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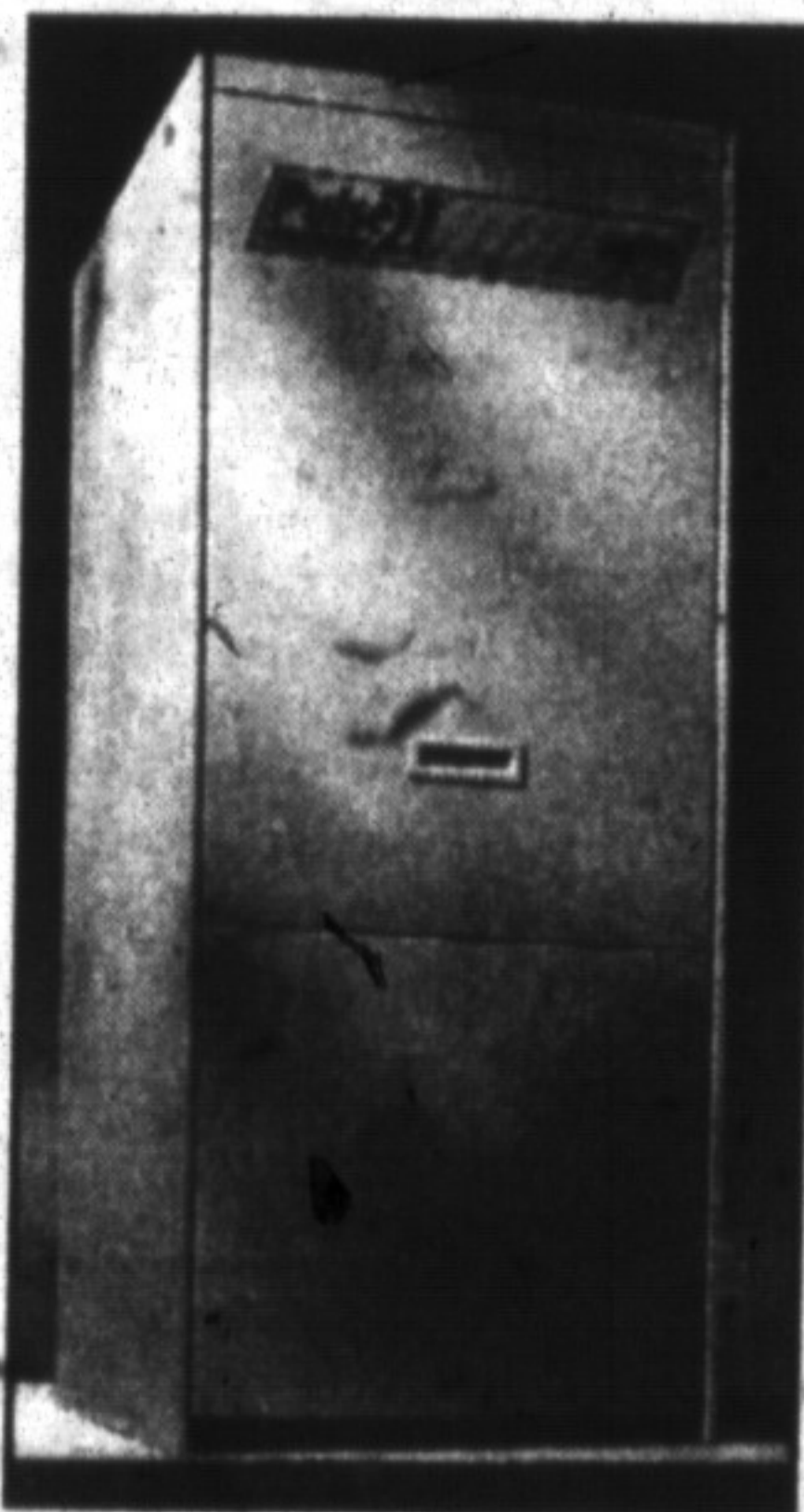
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