

MPP says Halton police force a model worth looking at

19—The Canadian Champion, Wednesday, June 12, 1996

By HOWARD MOZEL
Special to The Champion

With the countless complex options open to Queen's Park to reform policing in Ontario, the innovative Halton force is a model well worth investigating, says Gary Carr.

The Oakville South MPP made his comments recently following a recent presentation by Chief Peter Campbell to the Halton Police Services Board. While Mr. Carr's receptive stance was not a blanket endorsement of the local organization, he said he saw many positive aspects to Chief Campbell's report.

"I hope and pray that we make the right decisions," said Mr. Carr. "Many people are saying the regional model we have here is the best."

Halton Centre MPP Terence Young said he was also impressed by many of Halton's innovations, particularly the aggressive sharing of

resources with other law enforcement agencies.

"Doing more with less is more than just an expression," he said.

Chief Campbell's pitch dealt with not only funding constraints but also the momentum toward amalgamating police forces in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). He believes both issues are related and he wants MPPs to understand the measures Halton has implemented to make the force — in Board Chair Wendy Roberts' words — "innovative, caring and operationally sound."

Chief Campbell's point is perhaps best illustrated by the fact it costs the average Halton household only 50 cents a day to pay for policing — the cost of a doughnut, said the Chief. Efforts to achieve this have not been easy, he explained, but they've paid off.

Without inflation, the Halton force has kept spending at a level equal to that of 10 years ago and maintained a cost per capita well below the

provincial average. At the same time — thanks to major restructuring — police brass have been reduced and more officers put on the street.

With the rapid growth of Halton's population, however, the constable-resident ratio will suffer if funding is not maintained.

"If we don't get increases in our budgets we will continue to fall," said Chief Campbell. "There are concerns for the future." At the same time, Halton also boasted a 47.7 per cent crime clearance rate between 1988 and 1995 — again, above the 37 per cent national average.

Even so, Halton has 10 officers devoted annually to joint operations and must spend time and resources for a variety of mandated programs, from new weapons training to CPR. Also burdensome are the 800 different forms officers use. "We are a paper-driven organization," said Chief Campbell.

In spite of everything, a 1995 survey revealed

that 89 per cent of the public is satisfied with the work of the force.

Now being tossed into the mix is speculation that Halton could be absorbed into the GTA — its police force along with it. Made-in-Halton solutions are fine and good, however Mr. Young believes the big picture must be considered.

"We have to decide as a society what we want police to do," he said.

Chief Campbell explained that a single-GTA police service would involve more than 11,000 people and be one of the largest in North America. The cost of melding several forces into one of such unwieldy dimensions would be "tremendous," he said.

After all, incompatible communications systems and computers — not to mention cars and uniforms — would have to be homogenized. There are also the intangibles to consider, said Chief Campbell.

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