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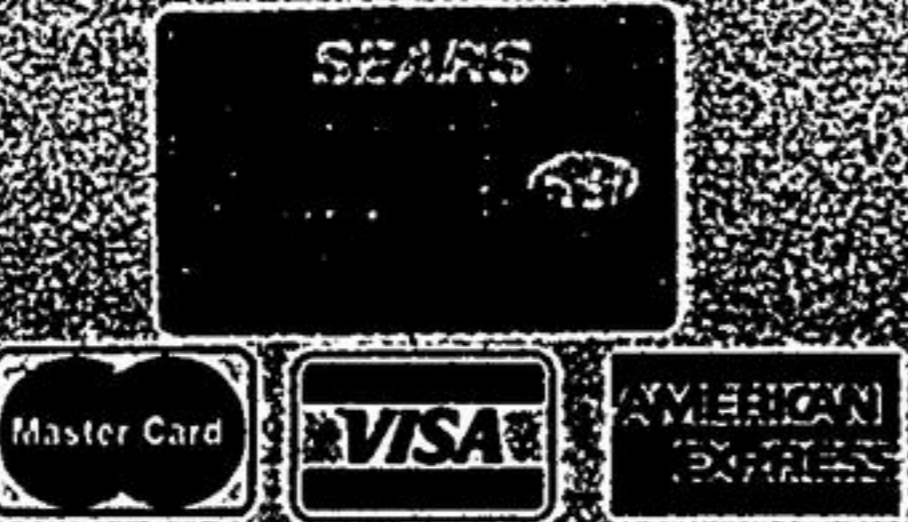
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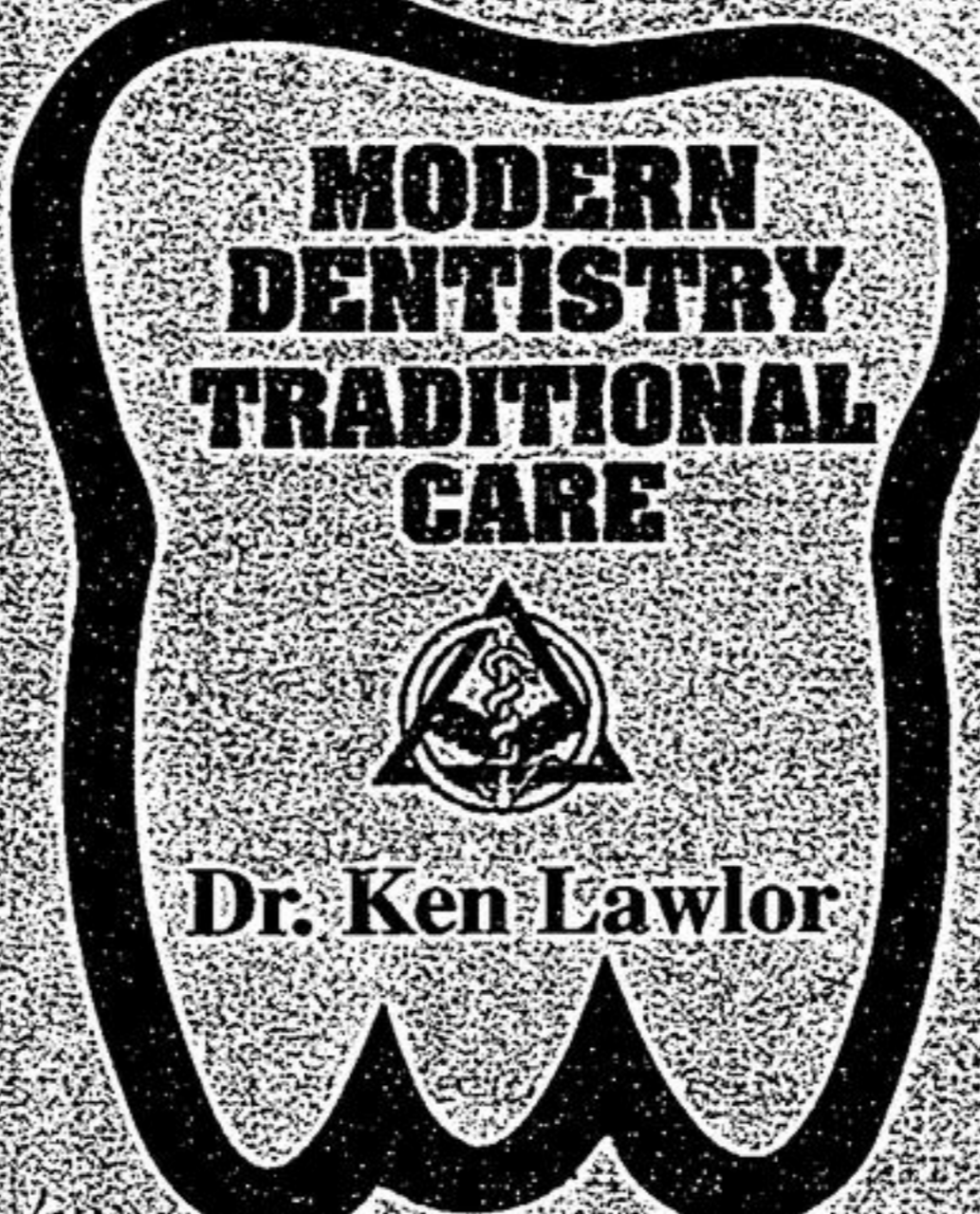
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Chopper would be used more over roads

From page 1.

traffic.
"We have had good success with the helicopter for pursuits and missing people, but 10 years ago we wouldn't have needed it for Hwy. 7. It just wasn't that congested with traffic," Middaugh said. "We can't do road patrols because it's too congested... The helicopter will be ideal for this type of work."

Last week, Middaugh presented a budget overview to the region's finance committee, outlining the \$94.5-million document that, if approved, would allow 30 new officers to be hired, including 24 front-line constables, five more to beef up the investigative services department and one new emergency response officer.

Eleven civilians would also be hired, including five new court security officers. Eight new cruisers would also be put on the road. The new recruits would bring the police force ranks to 1,157 officers — with 733 employed on the front lines.

"Policing is not a high priority with the public right now because we have a very reasonable crime rate," Middaugh said. "But people want to see a police officer because it is a comfortable feeling."

York Region's 2001 budget of \$959 million includes a 4.5-per-cent tax hike. Part of the \$60 increase will be directed toward the 9.6-per-cent budget increase the chief requested.

Regional chairperson Bill Fisch notes local taxpayers still spend less on their police force than neighbours in Durham, Peel, Halton, Hamilton and Niagara.

"People want their streets and communities safe. They want service and our police do not waste money," Fisch said, adding the force cut more than \$3 million from its original proposal. "Traffic continues to be a major issue, but people have to slow down. The region has the responsibility to build roads and make them as safe as possible, but people still have the ultimate responsibility to drive safely."

Meanwhile, the force will enhance its Streetbeat program with eight officers assigned to the region's secondary schools, acting as liaisons between the students and staff.

York Region council is expected to approve its budget on March 29.

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