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GREATER METRO

Hike taxes to keep aid programs, Metro told

By Bob Brent
 TORONTO STAR

Politicians should raise taxes before cutting programs that aid Metro's most vulnerable citizens — including seniors, children and assaulted women — representatives of more than 50 social service groups told councillors last night.

"We understand that there is a fiscal crisis," said Janet Conway of the Metro Network for Social Justice. "Community services are not optional. The need for them is increasing, not decreasing."

Social service advocates said Metro

taxpayers would see their tax bills increase by only 86 cents a month to absorb the cost of maintaining community services programs that are on the chopping block.

"You really are faced with only one choice in the next little while ... raising taxes," executive director Debbie Field of FoodShare Metro Toronto said.

"The reality is that more and more of our (residents) are in a really desperate situation."

Metro is struggling to cut \$79 million from its 1994 budget in response to

provincial funding cuts and falling revenues blamed on the recession.

The community services department has been asked to absorb an \$11.9 million budget cut equal to about 12 per cent of its \$101 million budget for programs that are not mandated by the province.

A committee of councillors and staff reviewed the proposed cuts after a public outcry over the possible elimination of 2,700 subsidized child-care spaces. The committee trimmed the target for the community services department to \$9.8 million.

That reduced target would still mean laying off the equivalent of 125 full-time staff members.

Metro's homes for the aged division would bear the greatest impact, with cuts of \$3.6 million and a layoffs equal to 101 full-time positions.

Such a cut would drastically reduce the quality of life for seniors who live in homes for the aged, Valerie Clarke told members of Metro's community service committee.

"(Staff) will only be able to treat the resident as a body, not as a person,"

said Clarke, who sits on the advisory committee of the Scarborough home where her 76-year-old mother Anne lived until her death last June.

The revised cuts would see annual day-care fees increase anywhere from \$264 to \$7,500 depending on a family's after-tax income.

Grants would also be cut to agencies that aid seniors with programs like Meals on Wheels and those that offer 24-hour telephone hotlines to help assaulted women. Major repairs to Metro hostels would be cancelled.