

Anger that Town turned down for grant

By Bill Rea

The Town has decided how it's going to spend about \$182,000 of capital funding that was set aside in this year's budget.

But there was some frustration expressed as councillors were told a Provincial grant request had been turned down. There were some concerns that the Town was being penalized for being run efficiently.

Council passed the 2014 budget in December, with last-minute additions to the capital program, which were made without changing the planned tax increase of 4.98 per cent.

Town Treasurer Fuwing Wong sent a report to council last week, with the recommended projects. They include \$55,000 being added to come up with Community Improvement Plans for six villages, \$10,000 to replace the public address system at Caledon Community Complex, \$40,000 for an economic development tourism study, \$54,000 for energy-efficient lighting upgrades at the Caledon Centre for Recreation and Wellness, \$8,700 for a generator at Caledon Animal Shelter and \$15,000 for fencing and a leash-free park at the shelter.

Wong's report mentioned a Small, Rural and Northern Municipalities' Infrastructure Fund of \$100 million, which was announced in the Province's 2013 budget. The Town put in a request for a grant to facilitate rehabilitation work on a bridge on Willoughby Road, north of Highpoint Sideroad. This was described as a 'shovel-ready' project, and the report said preliminary estimates had it costing about \$880,000.

The report said the grant request was rejected by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. The letter announcing the rejection stated there had been about 350 requests for money, and 'other applicants with highly critical projects had more challenging economic conditions (as measured by property assessments and incomes).'

Council approved the staff recommendation to put the Willoughby bridge project into the capital budget, replacing planned bridge work on Dominion Street.

Wong told councillors it appeared that the Ministry just looked at assessments and incomes when deciding where the grants go. The amount or state of the municipality's infrastructure was not an issue. He also pointed out the Town has worked hard at increasing its tax-funded capital program, but it looks like there was no credit for that.

Mayor Marolyn Morrison commented that it looks like the Province is rewarding poorly-run, debt-loaded municipalities, adding the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) agree that's not fair. She said a lot of municipalities were turned down because they're deemed to be too well run. 'Caledon isn't the only one,' she said.

Councillor Richard Whitehead pointed out the reality is the Province only has so much money, adding it has spent the last 40 years not funding Caledon, and that's not likely to change. Economic development has to be the Town's priority and he said the Province has to stop interfering with that.

'Please Province,' he said, 'stop interfering with us in our pursuit of local economic development.'

Councillor Richard Paterak was even more critical of the Province, commenting it has problems of its own making.

He also pointed out about 80.5 per cent of the land in Caledon is frozen because of provincial regulation. Paterak said he didn't want that to change, but stressed the Province has to appreciate what the Town is being asked to do with the other 19.5 per cent.