

Caledon Council approves 2020 budget

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

Town Council began on Tuesday (Dec. 17) with a prayer and the singing of our national anthem, before members got into the heavy conversations surrounding the proposed 2020 Budget.

This meeting was the latest attempt from Council to organize and finalize the 2020 budget. It took until close to midnight, but the budget was finally approved, with an overall increase of 2.25 percent in 2020. Taking into account assumed tax impacts from both the Region of Peel and local school boards, the 'typical' household in Caledon is facing an increase of \$114 in property taxes next year.

Town Hall was packed full of concerned residents, awaiting to hear Council come together with a solution to lower the current percentage. Several delegations came forward to express their concern with council.

Caledon resident, Cheryl Connors expressed her frustration and concern with the proposed budget and the effects this budget will have on the community.

'Many municipal councils have a pattern of pushing through unpopular approvals at the most inconvenient times of the year, when most residents weren't paying attention to council decisions. Caledon Council is no exception,' says Connors.

She added, 'This is not the time for new capital projects that our population does not justify. This is where I feel that Council has lost touch with the regular people that live here. I haven't had a raise in five years, my hydro is going up, the cost of fruits and vegetables has gone up 7 percent in a year; we do not have an endless supply of money. You are taxing us out of our homes. Many of us, are seniors and we would love to retire in Caledon, but we're not going to be able to. Our high property taxes are killing us.'

Another local resident, Sherry Brioschi confronted Council about what she perceived to be some baffling numbers included in the document.

'You are not being smart with this roadmap. You are actually spending beyond your means. We are faced right now with a possible population increase of 91,000 people for the next 21 years, to 2041. And at this rate, you are going to go down a road of financial disaster,' says Brioschi in her presentation.

She added, 'We need to change course. And we have these discussions to come up with a solution.'

Ward 3 and 4 Area Coun. Nick DeBoer presented a new capital project at the last council meeting, on Dec 10, about ensuring the Caledon East Community Complex Phase 4 Detailed Design included plans for a library branch and a pool, for an estimated total of \$451,894.

Coun. DeBoer brought an amendment in regards to the detailed design he proposed last week, to remove the fund taken from the tax levy, and distribute it through the Library Development Charges Reserve of \$137,813, and the Recreation Development Charges Reserve of \$1,174,688, directing the fund for the non-growth portion of \$6,025,000 in the 2021 and 2022 budget.

'I know when we did the budget we had talked about doing the design, because Phase 3 is a part of this term's council projects, Phase 4 is the next one,' Coun. DeBoer said.

The intent was to have the design for the entire facility to be completed. Conversations further with Staff, it came to my attention that there would be potential back to back, so next term of council will be developing as part of the capital plan, Phase 4. By doing these two projects and building them together, staff suggested there are savings that will be had within the construction part of the

project, and by debenturing them, we will have a better way to deal with it over the long term, associated costs and associated with the facilities.?

Councillors went back and forth with agreeing and disagreeing, and finally came to a vote, carrying the motion to go forward with incorporating Phase 4 into the current phase, removing funding from the tax levy and debenturing the fund into the 2021 and 2022 budget.

Debentures seemed to be a solution for a couple amendments, to solely lower the tax increase for the community. Coun. DeBoer requested that the staff be directed to fund the non-growth portion in the amount of \$638,000 of tax levy funding for the term of council capital project Bolton Rotary Place Senior Centre Expansion in the 2021 and 2022 budgets and the staff to be directed to consider using debenture funding, opposed to funding the amount of \$212,667 of tax levy funding from the term of council of the capital project.

In the previous council meeting regarding the budget on Dec 10, Ward 5 Area Councillor Tony Rosa brought forward an amendment to remove the Large Fire Apparatus Replacement by removing the Pumper 306 from the project in the amount of \$745,000 funded by the tax levy and add it to the 2021 budget. After getting defeated, Ward 5 Regional Councillor Annette Groves brought it back to be discussed.

Each fire truck holds a lifespan of 15 to 20 years. Several vehicles have reached and over passed their life span. The struggle that council hurdled through, is when these trucks were previously purchased; they were purchased in bulk, opposed to spread out through the years. This meaning the replacements for the several fire apparatuses will come upon council at the same time, instead of separately.

?Budgets are difficult. It's definitely a challenge to meet needs of the residents and their concerns in bringing the tax rate down. But, I constantly remind myself that taxes equal services. Ultimately, you get what you paid for,? expresses Ward 2 Regional Councillor Johanna Downey. ?I am not comfortable with this situation, in that I have my fire Chief standing in front of me telling me that we're already behind, and that we're just going to have to pay for this next year anyways.?

She added, ?I am personally justified, and if every single one of my residents came to me and said why did my taxes go up, I can explain and I'm comfortable doing so. I am not willing to compromise community safety, for .5 on the budget. It's this year or next year.?

The motion was approved by majority of council.

With the removals of previous amendments brought forward on Dec 10, and the importance of others to remain, councillors came up with a final decision on the 2020 budget.

The final 2020 budget stands at a 3.92% for the Town portion and 2.31% blended rate, managing to reduce the budget by 2.05% from last week's meeting. The budget poses a 2.25% increase with an approximate \$114 property tax increase.

Here is a break-down of the budget:

\$43.2 million will be going into the Roads Capital Program and \$5.2 million in the Bridge Capital Program for road reconstruction, maintenance, surface treatment and environmental assessments. \$3.7 million for LED Streetlight Retrofit Phase 2 and Adaptive Controls Program, \$4.1 million to build the Albion Vaughan Acoustic Barrier and \$100,000 for a Streetlight Request Prioritization and Installation Program.

\$2.0 million for the continuation of annual stormwater capital investment program and additional resources to better plan for weather conditions.

\$17.5 million will be used to implement the Phase 4 Caledon Community East Community Centre and adding a library branch and pool. \$4.4 million for the expansion of the Caledon Seniors Centre Rotary place in Bolton, and \$1.3 million towards improving parks, sports field, playgrounds, trailways.

Two fire trucks will be replaced for \$1.4 million, and Caledon Village fire station will be gaining two new full-time firefighter positions.

Last but not least, \$500,000 will be used to proactively address illegal parking of tractor and commercial vehicles.

All councillors voted in agreement with the budget, except for Ward 1 Regional Councillor Ian Sinclair.

?The 2020 budget will guide the Town in continuing to build a vibrant and prosperous Caledon,? said Mayor Allan Thompson. ?Council, through a public collaborative process, fully debated a measurable, realistic budget that will help us continue to deliver quality municipal services to our growing communities, creating a future Caledon we can all be proud of.?

For more information of the budget please visit caledon.ca/budget.