

Caledon currently looking at 2.08% overall hike ? Budget to be approved next week

By Bill Rea

Caledon councillors were in kind of a tinkering mood Tuesday when it came to the 2016 budget.

The result was a reduction in the proposed overall tax increase that Caledon residents are currently looking at.

The latest figures have the Town's portion of the property tax bill going up by 4.55 per cent. The total increase, which factors in the hikes from Peel Region and the education component, now stands at 2.08 per cent, according to Town Treasurer Peggy Tollett.

She added that proposed increase will add \$93.12 to the total tax bill for the average home in Caledon assessed at \$519,000.

As the lower-tier municipality, Caledon is responsible to collecting taxes for education, as well as for the Region. The Town kept 37 per cent of the taxes it collected in 2015, while 32 per cent went to the Region and the remaining 31 per cent went toward education.

The Region passed its budget last month, and the 1.92 per cent tax hike was a little lower than had been first anticipated. Tollett added it's assumed the education tax rate will not change, but those final figures won't be available until April or May.

The budget figures are still subject to change. Council is scheduled to finalize and approve the budget this coming Tuesday (Jan. 19).

Councillors started their deliberations Tuesday by purging a number of items to get the budget down.

Those items included design and environmental assessment, as well as urbanization of Columbia Way in Bolton. Public Works Director David Loveridge told Councillor Rob Mezzapelli that project was predicated on a federal Small Communities Fund Grant that didn't come through.

The also approved dropping plans for a retaining wall on Humber Station Road, propane conversion kits and some restoration work on an acoustic wall.

There were plans to buy three heavy single-axle plow trucks this year, but councillors elected to buy one per year for the next three.

Proposals to drop other items from the budget were defeated when they came to a vote.

They included plans to buy an asphalt spreader/roller/crack sealer for \$255,000.

Loveridge thought the acquisition was pro-active, commenting the Town is catching up on this work. He added it will not be representing an enhanced level of service. The job of sealing cracks in roads is currently contracted out to the Region, and Loveridge said that's expensive. He said there could be savings from this equipment.

Councillor Nick deBoer argued that maintaining buildings should take priority over equipment needs.

An effort to drop a \$100,000 allocation for a public transit feasibility study also failed.

Councillor Annette Groves supported the move, commenting she wanted to see public consultation before that kind of money is spent on a study.

Economic Development Manager Norm Lingard told Councillor Johanna Downey the study would be a benefit. But he added when businesses are showing interest in locating in Caledon, public transit is not high on their lists of concerns.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy stressed the need for planning for the future, but deBoer countered a study will simply confirm what's already known.

There was also an effort to drop an expenditure of \$21,800 to upgrade the Caledon Animal Shelter. Councillor Gord McClure favoured taking it out, commenting the shelter mainly serves people on the east side of town, but Mezzapelli was of a different mind.

"I think it's important to take care of Caledon's assets, regardless of where they are in Caledon," he said.

Councillor Doug Beffort added they were discussing an "insignificant amount."

Items that were added Tuesday included \$33,000 to be spent on skate and BMX park design for Alton and Caledon village, \$130,000 to complete parking lot paving projects in Inglewood and Cheltenham, \$135,952 for a captain and firefighter in Caledon village, and \$30,000 for water service in John Nichols Park in Mono Mills. This water used to create an ice pad. DeBoer said it's been done by the local firefighters in the past, but others in the community are ready to take on the task, But they need access to water.

As well, council approved adding \$175,000 for street tree replacement to counter damage done by the emerald ash borer.

"It's just the right thing to do," Mezzapelli commented.

Mezzapelli was successful in getting a \$50,000 expenditure to enhance the backstop at the ball diamond at Bolton North Hill Park.

He said \$15,000 of that will come from a contribution by the Bolton Braves.

He wasn't quite as successful when he tried to get a \$52,000 expenditure to replace fitness equipment at Caledon Centre for Recreation and Wellness.