

Council looking at 2.7 per cent blended tax hike

By Bill Rea

The Town has started its deliberations for the 2017 budget, and as things now stand, taxpayers are looking at an overall tax increase of 2.7 per cent.

That could still change, as the scheduled date for the approval of the budget is still more than a month away.

Town staff Tuesday presented councillors with their budget proposals, which call for an increase of 4.68 per cent in the Town's share of the property tax bill.

As a lower-tier municipality, the Town is responsible for collecting taxes for Peel Region, as well as the local school boards.

According to information supplied by the Town's Finance and Infrastructure Services Department, the Town kept only 42.5 of the money it collected in 2016 from residential taxpayers. The Region got 36.2 per cent and the school boards took the other 21.3 per cent.

Acting treasurer Heather Haire told councillors staff was proceeding on the assumption the Regional budget, which is due for passage next month, will include a tax increase of 2.02 per cent, and they're assuming education taxes will remain unchanged. Based on those assumptions, Haire said they have concluded the overall tax hike will be 2.7 per cent.

That means \$124.63 will be added to the tax bill of the average home in Caledon assessed at \$522,000.

And Mayor Allan Thompson said the news could have been a lot worse for taxpayers, based on what was previously suggested.

'I think we've come a long way from what was first proposed,' he commented, adding the initially proposed tax increase was almost double what staff presented Tuesday. 'Just shy of 10 (per cent).'

He said something like that would have been a considerable burden for people on fixed incomes, considering the high price of hydro these days. They had to consider what residents can afford.

'Nobody likes tax increases,' Thompson observed, but he added the municipalities aren't getting help from the Province, while there might be some assistance coming from the federal government. 'We have to deal with what the reality is.'

'There's no fat coming with what's being proposed,' he added. 'I think staff has done a really good job of getting it whittled down.' Haire pointed out there are a number of pressures on the budget, including inflation, which staff assumed would be 1.7 per cent for the purposes of preparing the budget. There is also increased staffing costs, with cost of living adjustments to salaries and negotiated wage settlements. There are also costs associated with growth, requiring more staff and equipment to maintain a level of service and operate new facilities related to recreation and fire.

There are also complications associated with capital infrastructure and the fact some of it is aging

As well, there are debt issues. The Town is planning to debenture some \$4.1 million to pay for the enhanced roads program.

There are plans to increase some fees, which are expected to bring in about \$70,000 more in revenue. Haire also said staff has found some service delivery efficiencies, which should result in about \$912,000 in savings.

The proposed operating budget currently calls for about \$85 million in spending, meaning additional funding of roughly \$1.85 million is required.

As well, Haire announced the tax-funded capital program for the coming year is expected to cost around \$14.8 million, representing an increase of about \$1.3 million.

'The Town of Caledon's proposed 2017 budget provides the foundation to continue to build and maintain a strong and prosperous Caledon,' Thompson commented. 'We are looking forward to engaging with our residents to talk more about this budget at our Coffee with Council sessions throughout the community and at the budget open house at Town Hall.'

The Town will be hosting an open house Nov. 23 at Town Hall in Caledon East, starting at 7 p.m. Town staff from each department will be available in an open house forum for one-on-one discussion. Small group or individual discussions are a great way to get involved and understand details of projects that will guide Town activities.

There are also Coffee with Council sessions in the works. This is an opportunity to have a conversation with the Mayor and councillors on municipal matters, including the budget.

Sessions are planned for Nov. 18 at Mayfield Recreation Centre from 5 to 7 p.m.; Nov. 19 at Lloyd Wilson Arena from 9 to 11 a.m., and Caledon Centre for Recreation and Wellness from 1 to 3 p.m.; and Nov. 22 at Bolton Rotary Senior's Centre from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

The budget will also be discussed at several meetings of council, including Nov. 15 at 9:30 a.m. (operating budget) and 1 p.m. (capital budget), Dec. 6 at 1 p.m. and Dec. 20 at 7 p.m.

Residents wishing to appear before council to share concerns or ask questions are invited to attend the Dec. 6 meeting at Town Hall.

Note that all meetings are open to the public and that Town Hall and the council chambers are fully accessible and inclusive spaces.
All information on the 2017 budget will be posted to caledon.ca/budget