

Council passes 2019 budget with 5.79 per cent local increase

Written By JOSHUA SANTOS

Caledon Town Council has passed a 5.79 per cent local increase in the 2019 budget.

Taxpayers will face a 2.66 per cent blended increase, taking into consideration the Region of Peel and School Boards tax impacts.

The Town estimates that homeowners of a house valued at \$590,000 will see a yearly increase of \$131.82.

This follows a tumultuous debate on where to spend \$7 million after removing proposed changes. That money comes from an overall fund of \$19.6 million tax funded capital program.

Council previously decided to remove \$6,959,500, that was initially designated for town hall and provincial offences expansions. They instead wanted to allocate those funds to additional capital projects.

About \$3,800,000 was to go to the reconstruction of Mississauga Road from Charleston to Beech Grove Sideroad, \$1,056,500 to major repairs and rehabilitation of asphalt roads, \$350,000 to additional roads for surface treatment, \$50,000 to additional asphalt walkway replacements, \$500,000 to clean-out of three additional storm water management ponds, \$200,000 to additional funding for the road safety (guardrail) program and \$1,000,000 to fully funding tormina fence replacement (phase 4 to 7) to complete the fence.

?We pulled out the addition to town hall and courts,? said Ward 3 and 4 area coun. Nick deBoer. ?This was the funding from that and this is staff's recommendation to continue try to get to a tax funded capital program of \$36 million eventually over the course of 10-years. We worked to get to \$20 million over the last 14. We continue to try and pick away at getting all these roads done.?

Ward 5 regional coun. Annette Groves on the other hand didn't think she can support spending the almost \$7 million on roads repairs.

?A lot of my residents, I will tell you, are having a really tough time with the tax increases, said Groves. ?I have a lot of my residents who are actually living below the poverty line.?

Groves understands the projects are good but can only support spending half of the \$7 million.

?I understand they are good projects but I can't support spending this \$7 million because really, at the end of the day, even if we spent half of that, I would be okay with spending half of that but I can't agree to spending the entire \$7 million.

Mayor Allan Thompson said if they want to find savings, they may find it in the operating budget.

?I understand this is the capital side, which makes it tough. If you want to bring costs down, that's where you probably need to look to shave it,? said Thompson.

Groves said if they want to find savings in the operating budget, then they start removing funding for some of the staff employees that they're asking for.

?I know we had these discussions at the Region of Peel,? said Groves. ?The regional councillors around the table will recall the discussion we had on budget at the region and some of the suggestions coming out of some of the folks at the regional table, is contracting positions.?

She said they're dealing with a lot of uncertainties and doesn't know where they're going to be six months from now.

?I'm just treading cautiously because I don't know what we're going to look like in six months from now. I don't know what's going to happen.?

Ward 3 and 4 regional coun. Jennifer Innis said they have a gap of projects that they have to fund through their capital side.

?Mayor Thompson is correct. If we want to make cuts it's through the operational side,? said Innis.

?We have to grow that capital side. We have to invest in our infrastructure. The number one thing, I think we all heard, during the recent election was our roads. Residents want and deserve investments in our roads.?

Ward 5 area coun. Tony Rosa hoped to have a conversation on what roads to prioritize when investing the approximate \$7 million.

He said he understand that they're investing in roads, and fully supports that, but said is worried that they're rushing with the program. He said they need to look at a long-range plan of how they're going to invest in roads.

?I would have hoped that the full \$7 million wouldn't be spent this year, said Rosa. ?That we would have been able to reduce some of that capital costs to bring down our Town of Caledon 6.1 per cent increase to a more manageable rate and that we can put a plan together on what the roads program will look like moving forward.

?I cannot support the full \$7 million being spent. We need to give some tax relief back to our residents and lower the 6.11 per cent.?

He said it's all rushed at one time and that they need to be responsible and bring the capital program down.

Mike Galloway, chief administrative officer for the Town of Caledon said these projects are not new. Some of them have been discussed a number of times and that internal budget discussions began last June.

?I know that some people that sat around this table for many years, will know that the tormina fence replacement has only been here for a decade and obviously, there has been a lot of discussion about storm water management over the last number of years,? said Galloway.

?I don't think we can say enough about the public consultation, as it relates to what's the number one issue, when it comes to feedback from residents, the business community as well as council, and some of the consultation that have been done, it definitely is the road network.?

Council ultimately decided to remove the \$200,000 designated to a road safety guard rail project and reduce the amount that was to go to the asphalt updating program.