

Councillors reflect on proposed 2026 Budget

By Riley Murphy

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The Town of Caledon presented the preliminary 2026 Budget on November 5 marking the beginning of the formal budget review process.

Council will have the opportunity to debate and propose amendments to the Budget at the upcoming General Committee meeting on November 18. Approval of Budget amendments is slated for the Council meeting on November 25.

Council now has the opportunity to discuss and deliberate.

“As a Councillor deeply committed to responsible governance and the well-being of our community, I recognize the importance of investing in critical infrastructure and cultural amenities that will serve Caledon's growing population,” says Regional Councillor Christina Early. “That said, the proposed \$24 million courthouse expansion and the sizeable investment in a new theatre are significant expenditures that demand careful scrutiny.”

She notes that on September 9 Council supported a motion calling for a thorough report and detailed business case analysis before committing to projects of this scale.

Early says it is essential that they fully understand the costs, benefits, and long-term impacts to ensure taxpayer dollars are prudently spent.

“While there are many important elements in the 2026 Budget, I share the community's expectation that every major investment be transparent, justified, and aligned with our priorities,” she adds, noting she has begun a detailed analysis of the Budget and will be rigorously reviewing the proposals, asking challenging questions, and listening carefully to residents' voices.

“Our community deserves leadership that balances vision with fiscal discipline and openness. As we approach the amendment and adoption phases this month, I intend to advocate for thorough analysis and prudent decision-making so that Caledon's growth is supported by sustainable investments that truly reflect the needs and values of its people,” says Early.

Regional Councillor Mario Russo says that while initially combing through the Budget, he says that “the ‘Mayor's Budget’ as presented is in fact the ‘Town of Caledon's Staff Budget’.

Russo says this is because the Budget includes hundreds of requests from different departments; staff members make requests to their Commissioner, who then brings those requests to Council as part of the overall Budget.

He notes the complex process, and says that many asks are deferred or amended to fit into the current Budget, “that if supported as is will impose a 3% increase plus 1% to our State of Good Repair levy,” adds Russo.

“This is where we as Council are now challenged, with what appears before us. I feel this Budget is very responsible and well thought out; however, as presented, this still negates some additional asks we heard from those excellent delegations last week and some other items we may feel important in our wards,” he says.

This, he adds, is what makes it challenging.

Russo says the balance of wants and needs in the growing community, with the recognition that residents face financial pressures,

makes any increase difficult.

‘Value for money is what we strive to achieve through this Budget,’ he says, adding that he is sure there will be future discussion on items that will be debated, deferred, or amended further, as well as potentially added items.

Russo says, for him personally, the decision boils down to whether the item is needed now, and whether his ‘family’s dollars that we contribute to this tax base’ would be best spent supporting said initiatives.

He says tough but necessary decisions are ahead, and he believes Staff did an ‘excellent job’ in sorting the asks into the most necessary ones that ‘advance’ the Town into 2026 and beyond.

‘I’m hoping and going through each item before us to try and find a few efficiencies that can achieve that balance mentioned and still save our taxpayer a few more dollars,’ he adds.

Councillor Cosimo Napoli stated, ‘Given the current economic climate and the challenges many residents are facing, I believe our staff has worked diligently to present a responsible and balanced budget.’

Napoli says that it is a plan that recognizes both the financial pressures on households and the need to continue investing in essential community services.

He shares he believes it’s important to keep the tax levy increase as low as possible, as families continue to manage the effects of inflation.

‘There are a few significant projects included that are vital to Caledon’s growth and safety, notably the courthouse and the new firehall. While these are substantial investments, they are necessary to support our community’s needs now and into the future,’ he says.

Napoli states that a key focus of the Budget is maintaining current infrastructure and that proactive maintenance is crucial.

‘Delaying this work would only increase costs over time. As we continue through the budget review process, Council will look carefully at where adjustments can be made to ensure we remain fiscally responsible while meeting community priorities,’ he says.

Councillor Dave Sheen shared that, to his knowledge, ‘Council and the community have not been consulted’ on the \$24 million project to build a new Provincial Courthouse and OPP Expansion to replace the existing court space currently located at Town Hall.

‘Nor do we know what happens to the Town Hall space being vacated, likely triggering another capital project,’ says Sheen.

‘We don’t know what judicial resources will be allocated to Caledon by the Province,’ he adds.

‘The Budget is committing \$1.5 million this year toward a Performing Arts Centre and even with no feasibility assessment in place, another \$18.25 million is already set aside for 2027. These are exactly the questions a staff report and needs analysis would answer before committing these funds,’ says Sheen.

He also adds that there is a disconnect.

The Caledon Public Library, he notes, faces service cuts in the Budget.

‘Meanwhile, residents continually raise concerns about traffic safety and illegal truck yards, yet little to no funding is allocated to address these issues. Nearly \$40 million in undocumented capital projects are in the Budget while services and community priorities go underfunded. To me, that’s not aligned with our principle of serving the greatest number of people.’

Councillor Doug Maskell shared that in the Budget, "there was a determined effort to mitigate the impact on the taxpayer during these uncertain times."

He shares it is his hope that through the amendment process on November 18, the tax increase can be reduced to 2% with a 1% infrastructure levy.

He notes that the "dramatic increase" in the Capital budget was driven by two significant projects: the new Provincial Offences Court at \$14,000,000 and the Stormwater Improvements at \$19,000,000.

"Through the prudent use of reserve funds and provincial grants almost 85% of these budgeted costs have been covered without a significant impact on the tax levy," says Maskell. "I look forward to working with my colleagues to deliver an amended budget that meets the needs of our growing and diverse community, while respecting the taxpayer."

Councillor Tony Rosa says, "The CFO and finance department presented a fiscally responsible budget," and he believes there is room for amendments that could reduce the tax increase proposed for 2026.

"I recognize that Staff took the responses and feedback they received from residents seriously and included their priorities in the proposed Budget. Looking forward to further budget deliberations and approving a fair budget for the community," he says.