

Deliberations begin following presentation of Caledon's 2026 Budget

By Riley Murphy

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Last week, the Town of Caledon presented the 2026 Budget, marking the beginning of the formal budget review process.

The presentation covered tax and levy increases, capital and operating budgets, budget initiatives, and more.

In the 2026 budget, there will be a three percent property tax increase and a one percent annual infrastructure levy increase.

The specific tax levy of one per cent was said to address the \$41.9 million infrastructure funding gap.

The 2026 Capital Budget is \$88 million, compared to the 2025 budget of \$56 million, and will support long-term assets such as roads, buildings, vehicles, as well as upgrades to equipment at recreation centres.

The 2026 Operating Budget will be \$167 million, up from \$146 million in 2025, and will fund community safety, parks, recreation and culture programming, and investments in road operations and services.

"The 2026 budget is built on sound financial management and maintains a modest tax increase that supports our daily operations while investing in priorities that will serve our residents into the future," shared Robert Cummings, Commissioner of Finance and Chief Financial Officer.

Cummings noted the primary factor of "the uncertainty around U.S. trade and the impact of tariffs," which he said created a drag on the recovery and growth of the economy this year and into 2026.

Now, he says the 2026 estimates will take into account slower growth.

The 2026 Budget for Community Services Commission featured Fire and Emergency Services, recreation services, service delivery, municipal law enforcement, and community engagement services.

Judith D'Souza Soares, Commissioner of Community Services, shared that in 2025, the Municipal Law Enforcement team saw an overall 13 per cent increase in complaints compared to 2024, with Parking and Property Maintenance accounting for 63 per cent of all cases.

To meet demands, enforcement coverage was expanded to include evenings, weekends, and holidays.

With the Illegal Land Use Task Force appointed in 2024, the assignment of two dedicated enforcement officers resulted in 42 per cent of closed files through compliance and 28 per cent proceeding to prosecution.

The Municipal Law Enforcement team will commit to advancing compliance in 2026 by focusing on illegal truck depots and expanding the Illegal Land Use Task Force to include illegal event centers, shared Soares.

Within the new department of Community Engagement Services, the Outdoor Maintenance Assistance Program moved to an annual offering in 2025, and funding was recently increased by \$50,000 to account for the growing number of seniors relying on it.

Dave Pelayo, Fire Chief of Caledon Fire and Emergency Services (CFES), presented on Fire and Emergency Services.

He shared that since the pandemic, they have seen a double-digit increase in call volumes every year, and for the first time in their history, they will surpass 4,100 incidents in 2025.

This year, Pelayo explained, they are updating their Fire Master Plan and constructing and completing the new Station 310, their first net-zero fire station.

Station 310 will also take into account all the steps put on the Provincial Government's cancer prevention checklist.

Some of CFES's capital projects will include replacing Emergency Protocol Radios, replacing bumper gear, as well as large and aging fire equipment, such as thermal imaging cameras, gas detectors, and power tools.

This budget will also include 30 sets of PPE for volunteer firefighters, ensuring they are adequately equipped and supported.

The budget for Engineering, Public Works, and Transportation included infrastructure renewal of roads, culverts, and bridges; fleet modernization and sustainability; energy efficiency and green initiatives; subwatershed and transportation studies; and corporate and community facility upgrades.

When it comes to culverts, Commissioner Domenica D'Amico of Engineering, Public Works and Transportation noted that they are 'ramping up' their ability to investigate culverts to address problems before they turn into emergency road closures or emergency responses.

'Our focus on the transportation division continues to be traffic safety and traffic calming, and a significant number of environmental assessments to inform our new program and ensure that our roads are built to be able to accommodate that future growth,' shared D'Amico

Recently, approved by Council, they are moving into concept design for the new theatre.

It was also shared that the design for the Caledon Courthouse is underway, with construction slated for 2026.

The Town is proposing the design and construction of a new Provincial Courthouse and OPP Expansion to replace the existing court space currently located at Town Hall.

The new courthouse will be constructed on the site north of the existing Police Station on Innis Lake Road.

The total for this would be \$24,000,000 for 2026 and \$9,512,570 for 2027, resulting in \$33,512,570.

It was also shared that criminal offences will not be heard at the Caledon courthouse, and that practice will continue at the Orangeville Courthouse.

D'Amico noted that there is expansion capability if they decide to pursue that option.

The courthouse expansion has appeared previously in the 2025 budget.

This year, the budget also focused on responses seen from the community, where Caledon residents identified Roads Operations, Municipal Law Enforcement, Parks, Recreation and Community Services, and Fire and Emergency Services as top priorities for the 2026 Budget.

The budget presentation also served as a space for local community groups and organizations to present their initiatives and budgets.

The Caledon Public Library (CPL) presented the growing demand for library services, noting that program participation is up 21 per

cent.

CPL's core capital needs revolve around Library Collections and Materials, Library IT Equipment, and Library Cybersecurity Infrastructure Enhancements.

They also noted various growth and self-improvement needs, noting service kiosks, furniture and fixtures, branch refurbishments, and more.

Colleen Lipp, CEO and Chief Librarian of Caledon Public Library, said vendors have informed them that the cost of books will increase as a result of tariffs.

CPL was previously notified that tax-funded capital would be capped at \$500,000, that there were no funds available to support the library's changes in service levels, and that there were no development charges to support eligible capital projects.

This resulted in the resubmission of CPL's 2026 budget.

?In order to stretch the available \$500,000 to support both collections and IT, difficult decisions will be required. This will effectively reduce funding collections to levels not seen since 2016,? says Lipp.

Lipp noted this would result in the cancellation of digital collections, delays in replacing workstations, delays in the growing collection of laptops available to the public, and more.

?We see this budget process as a collaboration that provides a really valuable opportunity for the library to advise Council of the identified need and demonstrate how the library can best contribute to Caledon's priorities, most notably community vitality and livability,? said Lipp.

The Caledon Chamber of Commerce (CCC) also presented its service level agreement for 2026 to 2028, noting that it has seen a large increase in membership over the years.

Going into 2026, they will provide business support and programs and create more networking opportunities for businesses.

Their request for 2026 to 2028 would increase their funding from \$10,000 to \$15,000 for the next three years and provide a 100 per cent rebate on rental costs.

CCC shared that this would allow them to continue to build their memberships and opportunities.

Headwaters Arts presented Growing the Arts in Caledon, and after speaking on the importance of arts to the community, they suggested multiple ways to grow Arts and Culture in Caledon.

The first is to establish a Caledon Arts Council to advocate for the arts and their benefits to the community; and second, that the Town to do a feasibility study for a dedicated grant program for arts organizations.

Their mission would be to foster the arts, with specific goals and activities jointly developed by the Town and the arts organization.

Lastly, Caledon Area Families for Inclusion (CAFFI) Community Support Network presented the current need for day and after-school programs for individuals aged 18 and older with multiple exceptionalities.

?These individuals have experienced limited access to community activities, and are currently not designed to support their needs,? said Mike Brunetto with CAFFI.

The Community Support Network has recently launched a PA Day program, a daytime recreational and life skills program designed for young adults 18 plus with special needs, that prioritizes those with complex or exceptional support requirements.

They are seeking continued support from the Town not only for their PA program but also for expansion into March Break, Summer Camps, and Holiday Camps, ultimately, leading to their proposed Full Day Adult Program for Exceptional Needs.

This would be an all-day, life-skills-integrated program designed for 21-plus, that continues to prioritize those with complex or exceptional support requirements.

Brunetto noted that in the involved families, he is seeing anxiety over wait lists for daytime and post-secondary services for young adults over the age of 18, as well as growing concerns regarding the quality of life after high school.

?All the services are currently tipped to one side, and what we are looking to do is try to get the balance,? he adds.

Following the presentation, Council and Staff will now have the opportunity to discuss priorities, investments and financial planning for the year ahead.

At the upcoming November 18 General Committee meeting, Council will have an opportunity to debate and propose amendments to the budget, as well as fees and charges.

Budget amendments approval will take place at the November 25th Council Meeting.