

Dufferin likely to approve \$2M grant to Headwaters hospital

By Wes Keller

Dufferin County council is expected to approve a Committee of the Whole resolution to grant Headwaters Health Care Centre \$500,000 yearly for the next four years.

The grants, which would total \$2-million toward the hospital's \$14-million equipment campaign, is slated to be voted on at council's Dec. 14 meeting.

Despite the commitment to the hospital, council has been able to reduce the increase in the levy to about 3.4 per cent. Treasurer Alan Selby said in an interview outside the council chambers that the hike would be offset by about 1.1 per cent of new growth, so the average net increase to existing properties would be about 2.3 per cent.

He said the average levy is about \$1,100, so the average increase for 2014 would be \$25. But that is an average, and would vary according to individual assessments.

The committee and council met in back-to-back sessions earlier this month.

The \$500,000 for the hospital would hike the operating budget but other approved changes partially offset that by \$250,000. Among the operating changes, by increasing the liability insurance deductible by \$15,000 a claim ? to \$25,000 from \$10,000 ? the premium for coverage is reduced by approximately \$100,000.

The downside is that the increase in deductible means the county has budgeted \$52,500, up from \$27,500, for insurance claims expenses which reduces the premium savings to about \$75,000. As well, it reduced repayment of reserves borrowed to cover a \$4-million health unit share by \$125,000, from the previously budgeted \$250,000.

On the capital side of things, approximately \$1.5-million was removed from planned roads projects, and a budget item of \$250,000 for Stanton Hotel relocation was reduced to \$50,000.

The roadwork deleted for now comprised a \$900,000 Gas Tax reserve meant to cover costs of access to Dufferin Eco Energy Park (DEEP) and also about \$600,000 for County Road 12 resurfacing. The \$900,000 is actually being transferred to roads capital, so it will be spent.

Selby noted that "because this (Gas Tax) action will reduce the amount in the Public Works Capital Budget, Roads, that is coming from Development Charges, some necessary minor adjustments will be made by Treasury staff to Development Charges amounts, and to the Gas Tax amount, so that a net budget change to the Tax Levy of exactly \$900,000 is realized."

Other deletions and reductions lowered the capital levy by more than \$400,000. The largest item among those was a budgeted \$113,000 for improvements to the Primrose Works building, followed by deletion of \$75,000 for the trails program.

Also, the contribution of \$100,000 toward a reserve for Dufferin Oaks roof replacement was halved to \$50,000, and replacement of the Oaks vehicle was deferred for a savings of \$20,000 in 2014.

With respect to roads, Selby said outside council that the budget is approximately the same as it was in 2010, so there's no headway being made.

Where the county stands on infrastructure will be known in March 2014 when the Asset Management Plan accounting becomes public.