

Few changes as Regional Council passes budget for 2018

By Bill Rea

After some lengthy presentations, it didn't take long for Peel Regional Council to pass a budget for 2018 last Thursday.

It contains a Regional net tax levy increase of 2.6 per cent. This represents a 1.0 per cent property tax increase and a 6.5 per cent utility rate increase. This will result in an annual increase to the average residential property and small business property tax bills of \$47 and \$85 respectively. Additionally, the average home will see a \$41 increase to their utility bill, while the average small business will see an increase of \$99.

'The Region's annual budget process involves serious discussion and prudent and responsible decision making,' Regional Chair Frank Dale said. 'With the support and encouragement of Regional Council, the 2018 budget invests in better outcomes for residents and businesses as we continue to build a healthy, safe and connected community, strengthening a solid foundation to build a community for life. The 2018 budget ensures that we meet the needs of our residents regarding the exceptional level of service and safety they have become accustomed to today and into the future.'

Operating spending is slated to be \$2.4 billion and capital investments will come to about \$700 million. The Region said it will ensure sustainment of current service levels and address enhanced service levels to accommodate rapid population growth and an aging population, with a special focus on paramedic services and affordable housing support.

Along with meeting the capital and operating needs of the Region, the budget provides funding to the three local conservation authorities (Credit Valley Conservation Authority, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, and Halton Conservation Authority), Peel Regional Police and the Ontario Provincial Police.

The final deliberations last Thursday came after presentations regarding policing.

Inspector Ryan Carothers, commander of Caledon OPP, gave an update on the detachment's activities over the last year, pointing to the contract services provided in Caledon. They include bike patrols, court officers, a dedicated traffic unit, a domestic violence coordinator, a mental health crisis team (which he said operates 24/7), schools resource officers, 'which has been a hot topic lately,' he observed, calling it 'a vital component to public safety;' and victim services.

Carothers said priorities for 2018 will be focusing on things like addressing the 'Big 4' causes of traffic injuries; speeding, impaired driving, failure to use seatbelts, and distracted driving. He said dealing with these issues is a constant problem in Ontario.

There are also plans to increase commercial motor vehicle inspections, as well as driver education. He said that's been prompted by the recent 'carnage' caused by trucks on the road, adding that Caledon has one of the strongest teams in Ontario addressing this issue. He said there have been no truck-related fatalities on Caledon roads this year. 'knock on wood.'

Carothers said they are working on data so they know how to deploy foot patrols effectively.

As well, he said the Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere (RIDE) spot checks are being operated throughout town, all day, every day, and the detachment wants to reduce the incidents through enforcement, engagement and education. 'Unfortunately, it's a common theme,' he said.

The detachment also wants to increase its youth engagement, calling it 'vitaly important.' He pointed to the success of Che's Place, the youth centre in the Bolton Professional Building on Martha Street.

Carothers told councillors the detachment is making a difference in a number of areas. Collaboration with the Peel Branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association means they are able to respond to 9-1-1 calls, follow up on the people experiencing issues and connect them with the appropriate agencies. That helps reduce the chances of these people calling 9-1-1 the next day.

The Extended Service Office in Belfountain has been a benefit in a large area like Caledon. Carothers said it gives officers working on the west side of town a place to do their paperwork without having to drive back to the detachment.

He also said Caledon is regarded as a leader in traffic enforcement, which is a major concern in Caledon. He also stressed the importance of people telling them where the problem areas are. 'We can't be everywhere at all times,' he remarked.

Carothers also voiced his support for photo radar.

'It's usually technology that increases our efficiency,' he remarked.

He also praised the detachment's auxiliary program, which has 25 members and has contributed close to 5,500 hours at various events over the year.

Town Treasurer Heather Haire told Council there are no new projects proposed for 2018. The proposed police budget for Caledon comes to almost \$12.8 million, which is an increase of 1.52 per cent over last year.

Carothers told Councillor Annette Groves they are constantly investigating and reaching out to other police services to deal with human trafficking. He agreed it's a prevalent issue in the GTA right now.

?I'm a big advocate of photo radar too,? Mayor Allan Thompson told Carothers, adding if it's a municipal responsibility, then funds should be set aside.

Haire told him there are reserves in place, and they could explore possible avenues for getting the equipment.

Highlights in the budget include 39,000 more accessible transportation trips; two additional ambulances and more paramedics to address 6,000 additional 9-1-1 calls; additional beds in the Brampton Youth Shelter; service to 4,000 new households for waste collection and 4,750 new water customers; additional police staffing to maintain safe communities; and additional caregivers to address increasingly complex care needs for Peel Manor Long Term Care residents.