

Final 2023 budget approved by Council]

By Zachary Roman

The Town of Caledon's budget for 2023 has been given the green light.

At Caledon Council's February 28 meeting, Council unanimously approved the 2023 budget after some final discussions.

Ward 3 Councillor Doug Maskell suggested an amendment to the budget, asking that the \$200,000 needed for the creation of Caledon's Economic Development Master Plan be funded from the Town's tax-funded capital contingency reserve.

"Rather than putting that onto the taxpayer through a tax levy, I'm asking that it be funded (through the reserve) at this time," said Maskell.

In Caledon's 2023 budget, the Economic Development Master Plan was proposed to be funded by the Town's tax-funded capital program. Town staff originally requested that the capital program be increased by \$456,000 in 2023, and after discussions the increase stood at \$356,000. Maskell's ask would bring the increase down to \$156,000.

Ward 4 Councillor Nick de Boer said Council has a goal and a need to raise its tax-funded capital program so the Town can manage its resources. He said in the past there were periods where the program was not increased, resulting in savings for taxpayers, but then later it had to increase all at once resulting in a big cost increase for taxpayers.

"We have to keep picking away, adding little bits and pieces to the capital program every year. I think that's important," said de Boer, noting he would not support Maskell's amendment.

Regional Councillor Mario Russo said he could see where both Maskell and de Boer are coming from, and asked what Maskell's amendment would mean for the taxpayer.

Staff made the calculations and showed Council it would mean a 2.28 per cent tax increase for Caledon residents instead of a 2.39 per cent increase. The savings for the average taxpayer if Maskell's amendment were to pass would be about \$6.14.

Russo said that amount is an acceptable increase to put forward and that it's important to save Caledon's reserve for "rainy days". He did not support Maskell's amendment and neither did Ward 1 Councillor Lynn Kiernan who called it "short-sighted."

Ward 5 Councillor Tony Rosa said he would support Maskell's amendment.

"I have no problem bringing the savings onto the resident; these are tough times out there," said Rosa. "I'm OK with such a small amount coming from our reserves, I don't think it's going to make a major impact on the reserves."

Councillor Maskell said as Caledon's 2022 reserves were \$87 million and are expected to be \$106 million by the end of 2023, taking \$200,000 out of them is not a significant ask.

Mayor Annette Groves said after participating in Caledon Community Services' Coldest Night of the Year walk recently, it's very apparent the struggles some people in Caledon are facing. She said passing on a few dollars of savings to the taxpayer would be a sign of leadership and good faith. Groves thanked Maskell for bringing forward the motion and said she'd be supporting it.

Councillor Maskell's motion to amend the budget was lost, with Councillors Christina Early, Dave Sheen, de Boer, Russo, and Kiernan voting against it.

Maskell also motioned to amend the budget by eliminating a \$12,000 Town operating expense relating to the attendance of Council

members at charitable events, suggesting Council's recent raise and expense increase provides Councillors with enough money for that purpose. This motion was opposed by all members of Council except Maskell.

Including the portions for the Region of Peel and school boards, Caledon's 2023 budget brings a tax increase for residents of 2.39 per cent. For the average household in Caledon, this is an increase of \$130 per year.

In a news release published on March 1, Groves thanked Council and Town staff for "delivering a budget that invests in our community needs, future growth and keeps the tax increase as low as possible."