

First budget presentation looks at 4.98 per cent

By Bill Rea

It's very preliminary at this point, but Caledon councillors were given their first samplings Tuesday of a budget for 2014.

The presentation made by Town staff included provisions for a 4.98 per cent increase in the Town's share of the municipal property tax bill.

Town treasurer Fuwing Wong reminded councillors the Town also has the job of collecting property taxes for Peel Region, as well as the local school boards. Last year, the Town kept about 35 per cent of what it collected, passing the rest on to the other levels.

Wong also said if the current proposals goes through, it would add about \$88.08 to the tax bill of a Caledon home assessed at \$480,000 (again, that's just for the Town's share).

These figures were preliminary, and Mayor Marolyn Morrison was quick to make that point when asked for reaction.

?That's the first blush,? she said after the staff presentation, pointing out a lot of questions still need to be addressed.

?Will it end up there?? she asked. ?I don't know at this point. That's the first go-around.?

There are still several meetings to be held before the budget is passed.

Deputy Treasurer Peggy Tollett said budget flyers are being prepared and should be distributed to all Caledon homes by the end of October.

A Town Hall meeting on the budget is planned for Nov. 6 in the council chambers at Town Hall in Caledon East, starting at 7 p.m.

Individual departments are scheduled to make their presentations to council Nov. 18 and 19, and the current plan is to approve a final budget Dec. 3. That meeting is scheduled to start at 7 p.m.

Tollett said staff started with the 2013 budget as a base, and found there were unavoidable factors at work that added an overall increase of about \$800,000. They included salaries and cost-of-living increases that the Town is obliged to pay out, annualization of staff and services begun in 2013, and inflationary increases for utilities, etc. On the positive side, these factors were offset by net increases to revenues and one-time purchases in 2013 that will not have to be made next year, leaving the net pressures of about \$800,000.

She also said budget reductions have been found, to the tune of roughly \$900,000. They came from such areas as service delivery efficiencies, new fees and fee increases and the fact that each department was given a target for cutting their budgets, and Tollett said they did a good job when it came to meeting them.

She also said there were about \$800,000 in urgent, unmet needs that had to be addressed.

Wong also said staff was proposing a \$1.5 million increase to the base capital budget.

That resulted in a proposed budget increase of \$2.2 million, which adds up to the 4.98 per cent tax hike.