

High inflation impacting cost of municipal services: Town staff

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Town of Caledon staff recently began presentations on Caledon's proposed 2024 budget.

On January 17, a General Committee meeting of Caledon Council was held to discuss the proposed budget.

Caledon's CFO Robert Cummings started the conversation by sharing results from a survey the Town conducted on the Budget. It received 180 responses, and Cummings said residents valued fire and emergency services and roads operation as the most important Town services.

He said the response to the survey was small but in line with surveys held in recent years.

Cummings said high inflation since the pandemic is impacting the cost of operations and service delivery in 2024. He said Caledon is facing significant pressure with cost increases, especially in areas like insurance (17 per cent increase), natural gas (4.5 per cent increase), and non-residential construction (6.6 per cent increase).

The Town is also proposing a 2.5 per cent cost of living salary increase for non-union-eligible staff, which Cummings said will support recruitment and retention of staff.

Catherine McLean, Caledon's Commissioner of Community and Human Services, said Caledon will be completing its Recreation and Culture Strategic Plan in 2024. She also said it will be planning for a new community centre and fire station in Mayfield West.

McLean said Caledon is looking to permanently offer its aquatic leadership program at no charge ? this program was implemented to train people to work as lifeguards and swim teachers in Caledon's recreation facilities and saw success.

The proposed 2024 budget also includes the addition of five full-time firefighters at the Valleywood fire station, and replacement of fitness equipment at the Caledon Centre for Recreation and Wellness.

Caledon Fire will also look to replace two tankers and one squad truck this year as they have reached the end of their life cycle. Caledon Fire Chief Dave Pelayo said new trucks are beneficial as they have new safety features, increased water capacity, reduced carbon footprints, and anti-lock braking systems.

Rita Juliao, Caledon's acting Commissioner of Engineering, Public Works and Transportation, said in 2024 Caledon will work on a Stormwater Master Plan and continuing to implement the Resilient Caledon community climate change action plan. She said Caledon will be working to ?green? its fleet and buildings, and expand transit partnerships.

Six new full-time employees in the areas of environment, transportation, and service were requested in the 2024 budget. Juliao said Caledon will be looking to streamline development approvals, have growth pay for growth, and build complete communities.

Juliao said Caledon is spending \$26.4 million on roads and infrastructure this year, about \$19 million of which is going towards repair and maintenance.

Caledon Public Library CEO Colleen Lipp said the Library is looking to expand its ?Library of Things? and collections in languages other than English. It's also planning for a new library branch in Mayfield West, to reimagine its brand and logo, and start a student employment program.

Ward 1 Councillor Lynn Kiernan said she applauds Town staff's commitment to maintaining the Town's infrastructure.

Regional Councillor, Wards 4, 5, and 6 Mario Russo said he would like to see Town staff inform residents how unavoidable budget increases work at a future presentation.

Mayor Annette Groves said it's been a challenging year for everyone and that she's really happy with the proposed 2024 budget given all of the pressures Caledon is facing.

Caledon residents are faced with a proposed 3.5 per cent property tax increase this year.

In the proposed 2024 budget there's nearly \$6 million in unavoidable operating budget increases ? budget items approved in previous years of Council that have a 2024 impact.

Inflationary pressures account for a \$2.5 million increase in the Town's expenses. New staff and/or programs, and increased service levels, account for just over a \$1 million increase in expenses.

The Town will earn \$3.5 million in tax revenue from new homes and businesses in Caledon in 2024. It's also drawing over \$1.6 million from its operating contingency reserve to offset operating budget increases on the taxpayer. The Town's next budget meeting is scheduled for February 14. More information about the Town of Caledon's 2024 budget process is available online at the following link: caledon.ca/en/government/budget-and-finances.aspx.