

Peel Region looking to keep tax hike at 2.2 per cent

By Bill Rea

It looks like Peel Region is going to keep its tax increase for 2017 in the area of two per cent.

Regional councillors were given their first presentation of the proposed budget last week, and they were told the plan is have a tax hike at 2.2 per cent. Chief Financial Officer Steve VanOfwegen said that will mean an extra \$41 added to the property tax bill for a home assessed at \$474,000.

As well, the budget is calling for a utility rate increase of five per cent. That means homes on municipal water and sewers will be charged an additional \$33.

The Town has put forth a budget that is currently calling for an overall tax increase of 2.7 per cent. Acting treasurer Heather Haire told Town councillors last month that increase was predicated on no rate increase for the local school boards and the Region coming in at a 2.02 per cent hike.

She explained this week the figures coming from the Region are based on the costs of Peel Regional Police in Brampton and Mississauga. She said those figures will be taken out for Caledon and the costs of OPP will be plugged in. That should bring down the Regional numbers, as far as Caledon is concerned.

Haire also said she is seeking clarification from the Region, but for now they are assuming the 2.02 per cent increase is going to hold.

As a lower-tier municipality, the Town is responsible for collecting taxes for Peel Region, as well as the local school boards.

According to information supplied by the Town's Finance and Infrastructure Services Department, the Town kept only 42.5 of the taxes it collected in 2016 from residential payers. The Region got 36.2 per cent and the school boards took the other 21.3 per cent. The Region is looking at a budget of roughly \$3 billion this year, with about \$2.2 billion of that going toward operating expenses. The remaining \$800 million will be for capital spending.

VanOfwegen said the Region is getting help this year through Provincial uploading of social services. Almost half of the proposed increase is through an infrastructure levy.

He also said property taxes account for about 44 per cent of the revenue the Region takes in. Grants and subsidies account for about 25 per cent of the income with 17 per cent from utility charges and the remaining 14 per cent from other sources.

'This budget helps to meet many of the challenges we face,' Regional Chair Frank Dale commented, adding it respects the taxpayer too. 'I think it's an excellent budget.'

There were some concerns from councillors over about the five per cent utility rate increase. Brampton Councillor Grant Gibson said he expected to get a lot of calls from constituents about that, especially since that are already dealing with high rates for hydro. VanOfwegen told him the hydro costs are a main driver of the utility increase, accounting for about one-third of it. Most of the increase, however, is going toward maintaining infrastructure.

Dale suggested some explanation of these rates should be enclosed in water bills that are to be sent out.

'I think it was a pretty good budget,' Mayor Allan Thompson remarked.

He pointed out the Region's operating costs seem under control, and the capital numbers were better than he was expecting.

He also noted the up load of social services to the Province.

'The big winner here is the taxpayer,' he said.

'I think those guys did an amazing job,' Councillor Barb Shaughnessy declared.

She said staff at the Region listened to councillors.

'I thought people would be pleased with the effort that was put into it,' she added.

'I was impressed by the budget,' Councillor Jennifer Innis commented, adding staff was dedicated to keeping things lean.

She was also comfortable with the proposed tax hike.

'I think it's a reasonable request,' she said.

'I was quite pleased with the budget,' was the reaction from Councillor Annette Groves, praising staff for the way they explained the utility rate increase, pointing out it was nine per cent last year. 'At the end of the day, we're still lower than the other regions.'

'I think the Region staff always does a fulsome job,' Councillor Johanna Downey commented. 'It's a good budget and I think it ensures that all the needs are met.'