

Peel Regional council approves its 2015 budget

By Bill Rea

Peel Regional council last week approved the 2015 operating and capital budgets.

The budget included a property tax increase, representing another \$33 on the average residential home (assessed at \$452,500) and a \$58 increase for the average small business (assessed at \$534,300). Regional council also approved a seven per cent increase in utility rates representing an increase of \$39 for the average household and \$98 for the average small business. Peel utility rates are still the lowest in the Greater Toronto Area.

Caledon's Treasurer Peggy Tollett said that will work out to a 1.9 per cent increase for Caledon taxpayers, which is what was forecast

?'It's a good news budget for Caledon,' Mayor Allan Thompson commented.

'The Region of Peel is facing a number of key strategic issues that will have far reaching impacts on our community and the 2015 budget underscores Peel Regional council's commitment to addressing and meeting the needs of our residents and businesses,' said Regional Chair Frank Dale. 'This budget demonstrates council's commitment to remaining fiscally responsible while allocating enough resources to meet our needs.'

'This is a budget that is financially responsible, focused on the needs of the residents and respects the taxpayer,' said Regional Councillor Chris Fonseca of Mississauga, who chairs the Enterprise Programs and Service section of Regional Council.

This was the first budget for several of Caledon's Regional representatives, including Barb Shaughnessy.

She reflected that the previous council had called on staff to bring in the budget as low as possible.

'I thought they had fairly done that,' she commented. 'I think they did the previous council wanted. They did what they were told to do.'

Shaughnessy also expressed how impressed she was with the Regional staff, calling their work competent and diligent.

'They seem to be on top of everything,' she said.

'It's a fiscally, financially responsible budget,' Councillor Annette Groves commented, observing it keeps services at their current levels while keeping the tax hike below inflation. 'It's a good budget for the residents of Peel, as none of the service levels have been cut and the increases have been kept minimal.'

'I thought it was pretty well prepared,' was Councillor Jennifer Innis's reaction to the budget, commenting that staff did a good job addressing the concerns.

She agreed the seven per cent utility hike was high, but the costs to taxpayers are still lower than other municipalities. She added the Region is going to be well positioned to provide the infrastructure needed for coming growth.

'They showed a lot of foresight, planning long-term,' she added.

Innis was pleased that \$1.25 million has been set aside for municipal servicing at Bolton Camp.

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority made its budget presentation at last week's meeting, stating the improvement at the Bolton facility will be a leading accessible regional attraction that provides innovative recreation, education and family programs. They will include youth innovation, as well as employment and training programs, pop-up shops and markets, festival and event space, fitness and recreation activities, food and art activities.

'I think that's going to be a big asset,' Innis declared. 'I'm very excited about the Bolton Camp.'

Councillor Johanna Downey also had praise for staff for balancing the needs of the community.

'The proposed increases are easily justified, as they forecast for incoming growth and build capital,' she observed, predicting there will be some difficult challenges moving forward.

'The Region of Peel is on a solid financial footing as identified and reaffirmed by our AAA credit rating, with less than 50 per cent of our Budget being funded through property taxes,' Dale added.

The Town of Caledon is expected to approve its 2015 budget this coming Tuesday (March 3).