

Planned tax hike cut

By Bill Rea

The tinkering continues as Caledon councillors Tuesday were able to trim a bit from the proposed 2018 budget.

The latest figures call for a blended tax increase of less than three per cent, including the anticipated tax hike from Peel Region's budget, which was passed last month, and the assumption that there will be no change in the education levy set by the Province.

Town staff said that won't be known for sure until the spring.

The plan is to formally approve the budget this coming Tuesday (Dec. 12), but there have been indications there are going to be suggestions for further changes made at that time.

Councillors went into Tuesday's meeting looking at an overall tax increase of 3.23 per cent, but after debating a series of suggested amendments, they were able to get it down to 2.83. If those figures hold, it will mean the tax bill for the average Caledon home assessed at \$554,000 will go up by \$134.61 in 2018.

Town Treasurer Heather Haire told councillors there had been last minute pressures applied to the budget. The Town was informed Nov. 20 that money coming from the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund (OMPF) had been reduced by \$173,400. The Province's contribution to the overall fund has increased, but because of an updating of the Rural and Small Community Measure, the Town's grant dropped from \$1.1563 million to \$982,900. Haire said those calculations were based on 2016 Census data. She also explained further reductions to the Town's share of OMPF are expected over the next couple of years. Word of this year's reduction came very late in the budget process, so staff recommended using reserves to cover the shortfall, but Haire said it should result in additional budget pressures next year.

The items councillors spiked from the budget Tuesday included a surface treatment program for roads, that would have cost \$500,000.

Councillor Nick deBoer put forth this amendment, observing there's a pilot program underway with tar and chip being applied, and he suggested it be studied after the winter, when the surface treatment idea could be reconsidered.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy observed that studying a program after just one year is not going to provide a complete picture.

Councillor Doug Beffort observed a big issue in his ward is roads, as he pointed out they are deteriorating fast. He appreciated the desire to cut costs, but he said he has residents who want something done.

But Mayor Allan Thompson was against this cut, commenting there are bad roads all over town, and the surface treatment will help improve conditions.

Councillor Annette Groves commented tar and chip is a Band-Aid solution, adding it's better to look at something more long-term.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli said he wanted to see the \$500,000 go toward roads, but he also thought it was important to have the pilot project run through its course.

"The pilot needs to play itself out," he said.

General Manager of Finance and Infrastructure Services Fuwing Wong said the pilot project involves Boston Mills Road, and part of the effort is to determine how the material holds up during winter.

DeBoer's amendment called for the surface treatment program to be considered in a future budget, but Beffort didn't see the point of waiting another year. He successfully put forth an amendment to the amendment calling for it to be reconsidered after the pilot project was complete.

Councillors also agreed to postpone hiring business analyst next year, removing the \$116,000 budgetted expenditure.

A proposed amendment from deBoer to cut some \$239,000 on the service levels for the new community centre in Southfields Village failed after lengthy debate.

Mezzapelli was not in favour of that, pointing out staff thought it wise to increase the service levels over three years, rather than have a one-time hit in the budget later.

Thompson agreed that staff had done as council directed, adding reducing the amount would put additional burdens on the next council.

"To me, this is just bad forward thinking," he commented.

But Beffort and Shaughnessy both said residents are concerned they are being expected to pay for something that does not yet exist.

DeBoer was more successful in getting his colleagues to go along with adding \$45,000 in spending on accessibility improvements to Westview Park in Palgrave. That would be combined with \$40,000 coming from the local Rotary club.

Thompson pointed out this would be timely, since the Rotary funding will only be available for a year.

Shaughnessy tried to get \$100,000 committed to a Caledon Village Highway 10 Corridor Land Use and Transportation Feasibility

Study.

She said she tried to get in this into the 2017 budget, adding it's been on the table since 2014.

?It's been frozen in time,? she said.

Shaughnessy added the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) has been calling on the Town to bring forth a study, and they would see if they could support work in the village. If the study isn't done, she said it will all be just talk.

She added Caledon village has been devastated by the highway running through it, and deserves revitalization.

?This is a necessity,? she declared. ?We need to move forward.?

Beffort pointed out the number of gravel trucks running through the village is bound to increase, adding both MTO and the Region want to support the Town on this, but can't do it without the study.

General Manager of Community Services Peggy Tollett said the Region conducted a workshop on the issue, and a report should be coming in the new year, and deBoer suggested waiting until that work is complete.

Tollett also told Thompson the Town doesn't have the staff to do the study being proposed, so the job would have to go to consultants.

Shaughnessy was more successful when it came to getting \$15,000 set aside for an arts and culture feasibility study for the old Alton School, with \$15,000 to come from the Peel District School Board, although that was approved after considerable discussion.

?I never worked so hard for \$15,000 in my life,? Shaughnessy chuckled at one point.

There was some discussion as to whether the school board was ready to provide its share of the funds, but Trustee Stan Cameron, who was at Tuesday's meeting, confirmed it's in the 2018 budget.

Groves tried unsuccessfully to remove a planned \$300,000 expenditure for boiler replacement at Caledon Centre for Recreation and Wellness in Bolton.

?I just think it's a lot of money,? she said, adding she didn't think the project is urgently needed.

Tollett said it's an issue of repairs and getting replacement parts, adding it's getting costly. She also said it's part of life-cycle replacement, adding there are problems that are being seen.

Beffort was able to get \$8,000 added for LED?lighting around the Alton Library and Recreation Centre. He said this is a focal point in the hamlet, used by a lot of community groups.

?It's \$8,000 well spent,? he declared.