

Region currently looking at one per cent tax hike in budget

By Bill Rea

Peel Regional councillors are starting to hear what's being proposed for the 2018 budget.

Councillors were told by Regional staff last week that a tax increase of about one per cent is being proposed at this time. Mayor Allan Thompson also reported that staff is proposing a utility rate increase of about \$1.7 per cent.

Despite the proposed hikes, the Mayor said the rates paid in Peel are a lot lower than what is paid in other places in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

He also said not all the details and submissions are in yet. Councillors still have to hear what's being proposed by Peel Regional Police and the local conservation authorities.

He also commented on some of the pressures being applied to this year's budget, such as salary increases and the raises to the minimum wage, adding that he was prepared to have a bigger hit proposed.

'I think we've got a pretty good outcome on this,' he said.

'I think the Region always does what's asked of them by the councillors,' Councillor Barb Shaughnessy observed.

'I love listening to it because I just learn so much,' she said, adding staff has been listening to the councillors.

She added they have yet to go through the proposed budget line-by-line, also pointing out some outside agencies, such as the conservation authorities, don't seem to be following the budget plans as requested.

'Most councillors, including myself, are concerned,' she said.

She wasn't concerned about the proposed tax hike.

'I think it's pretty fair across the board,' she said, although she also agreed it's still preliminary. 'So far, so good.'

Councillor Jennifer Innis was also ready to go along with the one per cent increase.

'I think we all have to look within the cost of living,' she said, adding the Region does a good job of balancing the needs of a growing community with the tax base.

Councillor Annette Groves seemed satisfied with what she had heard so far.

'All in all, I thought it was a good budget,' she said, although she stressed things like water and wastewater infrastructure need priority. She said repairs are needed, as well as staff to make sure the system remains in good shape.

Groves pointed out the Region is now 45-years old, and the infrastructure is getting old, and money needs to be put aside to take care of it.