

Regional budget brings 2.8 per cent property tax increase]

Mayor Groves happy with budget, except for lack of Caledon paramedic reporting station

By Zachary Roman

The Region of Peel has passed its 2023 budget.

The Region manages services such as running water, roads and traffic lights, waste management, affordable housing, immunization clinics and more.

The Region's Chief Financial Officer and Commissioner of Corporate Services, Gary Kent, said the 2023 Budget was a challenging one to develop due to economic volatility caused by inflation, supply chain issues, and the war in Ukraine. He said Bill 23, the More Homes Built Faster Act, also contributed to planning challenges.

Peel's 2023 budget includes operating expenditures of \$3.1 billion and capital expenditures of \$1.9 billion. The budget includes a 2.8 per cent property tax increase for Peel residents and a 7.9 per cent utility rate increase.

The average resident will see a \$144 increase in their property tax bill and \$58 increase in their utility bill. The average business will see a \$255 increase in their property tax bill and a \$152 increase in their utility bill.

According to the Region, some 'service enhancements' it's bringing to the table in 2023 include 100 affordable rental units for middle-income households and the ability to respond to 11,700 more paramedic response calls. It's also going to be piloting a zero-emission waste collection vehicle, doing 'critical infrastructure work' on water and wastewater services, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions through its capital investments.

The Region's Chief Administrative Officer, Janice Baker, said the Region is transitioning into the post-pandemic environment. During the peak of the pandemic, 1,800 temporary staff and 500 permanent regional staff were needed to implement the Region's public health response.

Baker echoed Kent's concerns about economic instability. 'Peel is facing a volatile economic environment with rising interest rates and heightened inflation creating yet more uncertainty and affordability challenges for Peel's most vulnerable population,' she said in a letter submitted as part of the executive summary of the Regional budget.

Since Bill 23 was not passed when the Region created its budget, the impacts of it on the Region are not yet known. Regional staff are doing research on the bill and will report back to Regional Council with the impacts of the bill as soon as possible.

In her letter, Baker said Peel's 2023 budget includes additional investments in affordable housing, paramedic response time, and seniors' services.

'The Region is very mindful of the economic challenges that both residents and businesses are facing,' wrote Baker. 'Peel implements a continuous improvement program focused on achieving cost savings and cost avoidance to ensure that taxpayers get value for their money.'

Caledon Mayor Annette Groves said in a February 8 interview that the Regional budget was a good budget for Caledon and that she was happy with it. However, there was one item she was unhappy with, and that's the fact there was no plan for a new paramedic reporting station in Caledon.

'They are looking to purchase a reporting station in Mississauga as well as a satellite station in Brampton,' said Groves. 'They do need a reporting station, in my opinion, in Caledon because we are scheduled to take quite a bit of growth. So, with that, we need to

plan ahead? I'm a little disappointed it wasn't in the budget.?

Groves said she's going to be continuing to advocate and have conversations at the Region to get a reporting station for Caledon.

Groves also said she's eager to learn what impact Bill 23 will have on the Region, specifically as it relates to projects in Caledon that need regional infrastructure funding. As Caledon is a smaller municipality that's set to take most of the 'greenfield' growth in Peel Region, Groves said the potential impacts of Bill 23 are a huge concern.