

Residents will pay 2.83 per cent more in taxes

By Bill Rea

There were a few last-minute changes, but none of them impacted on the final figures.

Caledon Council Tuesday night ratified basically the same budget it had approved last week in committee. It calls for a blended property tax increase of 2.83 per cent, which means the bill for at the average Caledon home assessed at \$554,000 will be increasing by \$134.61 next year.

One of the changes dealt with the efforts of Bolton resident Tony Rosa and other arts groups around town to get support for an arts centre in Caledon. He made a delegation to council Tuesday, expressing disappointment, but not surprise, that the budget doesn't contain funds for such an effort. He said he has been working on this for three years, and he expressed his desire to go before Council in April with a reworked proposal involving partnerships with businesses and non-profit agencies. He added he has been approached by a Bolton family named Nicolini willing to partner.

"I'm not prepared to put three years of work on the back burner," he told councillors, as he was seeking their approval for exploring the options. "This can't only be my voice. It needs to be a team approach."

Council eventually supported Rosa's efforts to explore a partnership opportunity with the Nicolini family, as well as with other potential partners.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy thought the tax increase was too high, and made unsuccessful attempts to get two items removed. One was a \$477,800 proposed expenditure for the new community centre in Southfields Village. Town staff said this represents one-third of the net annualized operating costs for the facility.

But Shaughnessy said some of her constituents had the idea that people are going to be hired to staff a facility that doesn't yet exist. But Councillor Rob Mezzapelli countered that staff had explained a total cost of \$1.36 million was being spread over three years. "It was very clearly laid out," he said, adding it will avoid having an additional expense imposed on the new council that will be elected next fall.

Mayor Allan Thompson added not annualizing the cost will mean an automatic two per cent increase for the new council to deal with.

Shaughnessy said she had no problem with setting money aside, but said the way it was explained to residents gave them the wrong idea.

Shaughnessy also wanted an expenditure of a little more than \$62,000 dropped. It will cover a customer service administrator in the recreation Support Services Division. She was concerned this was going to be for the new Southfields facility, but General Manager of Community Services Peggy Tollett told her the position will be dealing with all recreation facilities.

Councillor Nick deBoer was able to get his colleagues to go along with asking the Town's library board to provide an update on the Wireless Internet Hotspots program by the end of June. He said that will come at no cost to the Town.

The increase in the Town's share of taxes is going to be 5.97 per cent, but the total hike will only be 2.83 per cent, once the increase in Peel Region's portion is factored in. That's based on the assumption there will be no change in the rates charged for education, and that won't be known for sure until the spring.

There were concerns that the 5.97 per cent hike was too high.

Shaughnessy said her residents in Ward 1 won't like it.

"They're not getting anything," she declared.

She had tried at committee to get \$100,000 committed to a Caledon Village Highway 10 Corridor Land Use and Transportation Feasibility Study, and she reiterated Tuesday that it's badly needed.

"It's a very divided council," Shaughnessy charged, adding she can see a tax revolt coming.

Councillor Annette Groves also had trouble with the increase to the Town's share, pointing out there are people who are struggling and would have trouble handling such a hike.

But the other councillors all supported it.

"I think it's a very fair budget," Thompson said, considering the pressures that have been imposed on the town, such as the increase in the minimum wage and the changes to grants coming from the Province. "We covered off the needs to handle the growth coming forward."