

Tax hike might not be as high as thought

By Bill Rea

It looks like the impact on Caledon taxpayers from the 2017 budget is going to be a little less than previously anticipated.

Caledon councillors were told Tuesday that is the result of some minor adjustments to the budget, as well as clarification of some of the figures coming from Peel Region.

Councillors, meeting in committee Tuesday, approved a budget calling for a tax increase of 4.68 per cent in the Town's portion of the property tax bill.

The Town, as a lower-tier municipality, is obligated to also collect the taxes for the Region, as well as the local school boards. The Town kept only 42.5 of the money it collected in 2016 from residential taxpayers. The Region got 36.2 per cent and the school boards took the other 21.3 per cent.

Town councillors were given their first presentation on the budget last month, and at that time, it was expected the Region would be increasing its tax impact in Caledon by about 2.02 per cent. But acting treasurer Heather Haire said the impact, based on revised figures from the Region, is not going to be as great. The increase is now expected to be only 1.32 per cent. Assuming there's no increase in the education component of the property tax bill (that won't be known for sure until the spring), the current figures point to an overall tax increase for Caledon residents of 2.45 per cent, down from the 2.7 per cent that had been predicted last month.

That means the tax bill is going up by \$113.08 for a home assessed at \$522,000.

Council is scheduled to ratify the budget Dec. 20.

Tuesday saw a couple of changes made to the budget.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli put forth a motion that pointed out a capital project involving fence replacement had been closed earlier in the year, leaving almost \$383,000 in reserves. He had some ideas on what to do with the money, including \$180,000 to be spent on tree replacement, \$64,000 to provide water and hydro service to Alton Village Square, \$15,000 for a junior playground at Alton Ball Park and \$100,000 to revise the scope of a study of curbs and sidewalks on Creditview Road in Cheltenham. His motion called for including a feasibility study design to extend the sidewalks. The provisions in that amendment involving Cheltenham were adjusted before it was approved.

"This is money we have in reserve for this purpose," he remarked.

Councillor Barb Shaughnessy was pleased with the provisions for Alton, pointing out water and hydro are "desperately" needed in the square.

"How can you go wrong with kids needing play parks?" she asked.

Shaughnessy tried to get \$45,000 added to expenditures for a Caledon village study, looking at land use, traffic and servicing, but in the end, the matter was referred back to Town staff.

She apologized to her colleagues for bringing this forward so late in the process, but pointed out the situation with Highway 10 running through the village has been an issue for years, and the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) has indicated it wants something on paper before it will act.

There were some arguments that this wasn't a lot of money to add to the budget (Haire said it would represent about another dollar to the average tax bill). But Councillor Nick deBoer wondered about the likelihood of anything useable coming from the study.

General Manager of Community Services Peggy Tollett told Mezzapelli there would be no money coming from MTO to fund such a study.

"We've got very little information," deBoer maintained, adding the matter required a staff report and some discussion.

"I don't think we're going to get anything out of it," Councillor Gord McClure added.

Councillor Johanna Downey could see value in principle with what Shaughnessy was trying to do, but she had problems with the way the matter was brought to the table.

"There's a process which we follow," she observed.

Mayor Allan Thompson agreed the matter was late in coming, but stressed the issue has been around for years.