

Tax hike of 3.35 per cent being proposed

By Bill Rea

It's only preliminary at this stage, but Caledon taxpayers could be looking at a 3.35 per cent increase in their property taxes next year.

Those figures were presented Tuesday by Town staff to Caledon Council.

Town Treasurer Heather Haire said the Town is looking at increasing its share of taxes by 3.57 per cent. Peel Regional councillors received their first formal briefing on their budget a couple of weeks ago, and they are currently looking at an increase of about one per cent. It's assumed Regional Council will be approving its 2018 budget later this month. Town staff also reported they are currently working on the assumption there will be no change in the school board levy, although that won't be known for sure until the spring.

Staff also said the current figures will result in an overall tax increase of \$159.16 for the typical Caledon home assessed at \$554,000. Actually, the Town is proposing an increase to its share of 6.88 per cent, but Haire explained that's going to be offset by a reduction in the Broadband Levy charged by the Town to bring high-speed internet service to all residents. It results in \$300,000 being collected across the Town, but since assessments have increased, individual households will be charged less than last year.

Tuesday was the first formal presentation of the proposed budget, but Haire said others are planned. There will be a budget drop-in open house this coming Tuesday (Nov. 21) starting at 7 p.m. at Town Hall in Caledon East, and a general committee meeting of Council is planned for Dec. 5 at 1 p.m. for budget deliberations. The current hope is final consideration of the Town's budget will take place Dec. 12.

Haire explained there are a number of factors impacting on the budget, including inflation, impacts from the Province's plans to increase the minimum wage, salary increases and the growth in Town staff. She added municipal growth requires enhancements to the fleet and equipment of the Town. There are going to be additional operating expenses as new facilities, like the community centre in Valleywood, come on line. As well, Haire pointed to the need to keep capital infrastructure in repair.

Proposed service changes will mean an additional \$1.6 million in spending next year, and annualized costs of about \$2.49 million. On the other hand, Haire pointed out there has been assessment growth to the tune of some \$1.9 million that are helping to reduce the pressures on the budget. As well, new user fees, along with fee increases, are expected to add about \$40,000 to the Town's coffers.

The current proposals also call for some \$18.17 million in capital spending to be funded by taxes, amounting to about 39 per cent of the capital budget. The total capital expenditure is expected to be about \$46.28 million, with about 35 per cent of that being funded through development charges, nine per cent from debentures, eight per cent from gas tax funds, three per cent from reserves, two per cent from the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund and four per cent from other sources. There is also \$143,488 expected in funding from the aggregate levy.

The projects on the schedule include the new community centre, a turf field and track facility at Humberview Secondary School in Bolton (the cost of that project is being shared with the Peel District School Board), pumper and rescue truck replacement, expansion plans for the Caledon East Community Complex, etc.

Councillor Gord McClure was concerned that the Town's tax increase always is higher than the Region's. Haire explained the Region had a number of spending priorities that were uploaded to the Province, allowing them some more flexibility, while allowing more spending room for the Town.

"We still have the cheapest water and waste water rates in Canada," Mayor Allan Thompson added.