

Town sets interim tax rate

By Bill Rea

Caledon council last week approved its interim property tax levy for the early part of 2015.

There was also some talk of granting a bit more grace to residents who are a little late making their payments. However, staff said the rules are pretty clear, and there's not a lot of room for such moves.

The staff report that went before council pointed out that interim tax levies have to be collected so the municipality will have the necessary funds until the final tax rates are set. The report stated the Town's obligations include making the required payments to Peel Region and the local school boards.

Staff added that in keeping with past practices, the installments will be due the first Thursday of March and May. That will mean an anticipated \$66.1 million will be collected, with the understanding that about \$21.8 million of that will go to the Region and another \$20.6 million will go to the school boards.

It was Mayor Allan Thompson who brought up the issue of penalties for people who are late, wondering if there could be a grace period.

"I know we're not a bank, but we do serve our customers," he remarked, adding the current procedures can be very harsh, especially on seniors.

Town Treasurer Peggy Tollett told him the Town has no choice but to pay the Region its share by the due date. She added staff is trying to enforce bylaws that council put in place.

Thompson commented that other municipalities show some grace, adding this is a matter of perception, especially since things can sometimes get tight for seniors. He said he's heard a lot of complaints, adding the way staff is enforcing the rules is not going over well.

Councillor Doug Beffort wondered if the Town has the authority to contact taxpayers who are late, telling them they have a specified number of days before penalties are charged.

Tollett said that couldn't be done, adding there are a number of payment options if people are having trouble getting into Town Hall. They include pre-authorized payments, paying online, credit cards, etc.

Town CAO Doug Barnes added if grace periods are offered, then they have to be available to everyone.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli said he's been hearing the same sort of complaints Thompson was referring to. He also admitted he was once late getting his payment in, and had to pay the penalty. He's since gone with pre-authorized payments.

But he also stressed the need to seem to be customer-friendly. His idea was to set the due date a week before the money has to go to the Region, but Tollett said that wouldn't work either. She said the Town is required to send the Region's portion to them the day after the due date. The money for the school boards is paid quarterly, she added.