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Cost of various projects 'not a worry'— DeSousa

By **CYNTHIA GAMBLE**
Staff Writer

At first glance, the 2012 capital budget status report on last Monday night's council agenda would set taxpayers' wallets quivering with the red ink flowing on several projects including \$1.4 million on the library project.

But Town Treasurer Ed DeSousa assures that the projects are fully funded, and the Dec. 31, 2012 capital budget status report, approved by council at general committee, "is basically a snapshot" of the finances at that stage of the project.

Raising eyebrows were the \$12 million library renovation project, which was, at year's end on paper, \$1.4 million short and the Maple Ave. fire station project, \$396,000 over-spent.

In the case of the library account, it does not include funding from reserves, which "we only allocate funding from reserves twice a year," explained DeSousa. "In this case, it also involves the funding from the Green Municipal Fund (\$7,103,374 loan/grant announced in January), and that money had not yet been received, so it has not yet hit the books."

"This is not the final number (on the library project)," said the treasurer. "It's all timing. Until the project is closed and finished we don't know what the final costs are. ... The \$1.4 million doesn't worry me at this point."

But he hastened to add staff are constantly monitoring all projects and "if

we knew there was a significant problem along the way, we would go to Council."

Also at last Monday's meeting, council approved the Arena Steering Committee minutes, in which committee members approved a recommendation to increase the project budget by \$250,000 from \$16,808,130 to \$17,058,130. This was made on the advice of the construction manager after encountering soil and foundation issues early in the building phase.

"Once the project is complete (in the fall), and the costs are identified, then we will also identify the funding sources, and yes, there will be funds available," said DeSousa.

DeSousa said council must approve over-expenditures over \$15,000 as it did Monday night when staff asked for additional \$45,584 for phase one of the Wildwood Oakridge construction. The additional funds (2% of the \$2.5 million project) will come from the Capital Replacement Reserve.

When the library project is finally complete, there will be a report to the library board and to council on whether the project was over-spent or under-spent. DeSousa expects that report sometime this spring.

With regard to the fire station account, the Town is currently awaiting on a potential insurance settlement. DeSousa could not comment because lawyers are hashing out the matter, but added the fire station will be fully paid for either after the litigation or through a reserve/fire services levy.



ED DESOUSA

Town officials pleased with federal budget

Town of Halton Hills officials have given Thursday's federal budget the thumbs up.

A press release from the Town stated, "(The) budget is an important step forward for Halton Hills. We applaud the government for choosing to continue moving our communities ahead even as it meets its immediate fiscal challenges.

"Of particular significance in this context, is the government's decision to index the gas tax transfer at 2% annually beginning in 2014-2015. This measure alone—the first indexing of a municipal transfer—will ensure the fund keeps pace with inflation and will add another \$9 billion to the permanent gas tax fund over 20 years."

"By protecting the purchasing power of the gas tax transfer, and by extending program funding for 10 years, this

budget entrenches the principle of long-term sustainable infrastructure funding for Halton Hills," said Mayor Rick Bonnette.

"The work that was done by FCM (Federation of Canadian Municipalities) has paid off with the indexing of the gas tax. Halton Hills now receives about \$2 million a year from it. Having it protected from inflation will have benefits to our community," added Halton Hills Councillor and FCM board member Clark Somerville.

"What (the) budget does not contain is a definitive roadmap to erasing the infrastructure deficit. However, it does lay the foundation for continued inter-governmental collaboration as economic conditions improve to meet the challenges that need to be addressed in all of Halton Region."