

Town's budget committee okays 2016 operating budget

By **Melanie Hennessey**
Special to The IFP

PROPERTY TAX IMPACT 2016 OPERATING BUDGET (Per \$100,000 of residential assessment)

	2015 Final Budget	2016 Preliminary Budget	\$ Change	% Change
Town	\$374	\$389	\$15	3.9%
Region *	\$318	\$324	\$6	1.9%
Education **	\$203	\$203	\$0	0.0%
Total	\$895	\$916	\$21	2.3%

Town of Halton Hills graphics

The Town's 2016 operating budget, which could bring about a \$60 tax increase for local residents, has received initial approval from local council members.

The \$42-million budget that covers everything from the cost of running facilities like arenas to staff salaries was endorsed unanimously on Monday by the Budget Committee, which is comprised of all members of council.

The potential 3.9 per cent increase— consisting of a base budget increase of 3.7 per cent and dedicated fire services levy of 0.2 per cent that will help fund the cost of hiring two new firefighters— would translate into an additional \$60 for the average Halton Hills home assessed at \$400,000.

Paired with the Region's potential tax increase of 1.9 per cent, or \$24, and a typical homeowner could be paying an extra \$84 in taxes next year.

While the daytime meeting at the Halton Hills Civic Centre offered local residents an opportunity to address the committee regarding the budget, there were no delegations.

Town Commissioner of

Finance and Treasurer Ed DeSousa told the committee about the key drivers of next year's operating budget, which include:

- An additional \$1.07 million needed for staff compensation adjustments
- Assessment growth of 0.75 per cent, or about \$375,000 in revenue for the Town
- Almost \$100,000 in extra operating costs for the Acton Arena addition
- A 4.6 per cent increase in Hydro charges for facilities totalling \$81,450
- An increase of \$60,000 in traffic signal maintenance to meet the Province's minimum maintenance standards
- An extension of the Georgetown library's

hours until 8:30 p.m. on Mondays, which will cost \$53,400.

"Since we are in the service delivery business, our biggest expense is compensation and benefits," noted DeSousa.

The operating budget is predominantly funded by property taxes, with a smaller portion being contributed by Town user fees.

DeSousa went on to present various charts to the committee that illustrate how Halton

Hills's taxes are competitive, and in some cases lower, when compared to other municipalities in the area.

During the meeting, the committee went through the budget by

department and asked staff for clarifications on certain details, but made no changes.

Included in the \$42-million budget is \$12.7 million for planning and infrastructure, \$6 million for fire services, \$5.7 million for community and corporate services, \$3.4 million for the finance department, \$3.3 million for library services, \$2.7 million for the office of the CAO and \$790,200 for council.

The budget was lauded by those around the table, like Ward 3 Councillor Moya Johnson,

who said she's happy to see funding included for extended Monday service at the Georgetown library branch.

"It's high time that the building is open all day on Mondays," she said, noting the current limited Monday hours have been a huge success.

Wards 3 & 4 Regional Councillor Jane Fogal shared similar sentiments.

"I think it's great to have our facilities used as much as possible," she said.

Mayor Rick Bonnette thanked DeSousa, se-

nior management and all Town staff involved in creating the budget.

"This has been one of the smoother budget processes we've had in recent years," he noted.

Fogal credited CAO Brent Marshall and staff for looking at the Town of Halton Hills as a whole corporation, not just individual departments.

"I think we're getting more out of our personnel, instead of just being in silos," she said. "It's moving the whole corporation forward."

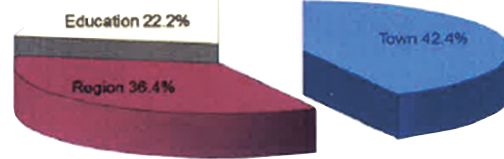
Ward 4 Councillor Ann Lawlor commended staff for the budget's format and alignment of the corporate ranking process with the Strategic Plan.

"It really was a pleasure to read," she said.

Of the tax dollars local residents pay, 42.4 per cent go to the Town, 36.4 per cent to the Region and 22.2 per cent to the local school boards.

Last week, town council approved the 2016 capital budget of \$12.7 million, which will fund the cost of building and renewing municipal facilities and infrastructure. Reserves are a major source of funding for capital projects, along with development charges.

Council will consider the operating budget at its meeting on Monday evening. Following approval, both budgets will be available at the Town's libraries and www.haltonhills.ca.



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