

# County budget jumps 6.13%

## Two mayors absent for vote

By Joyce Cassin

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After a day of arguments for and against various budget items March 19, county council finally put the matter of the 2008 budget to a vote. It passed.

What the final figures mean to Northumberland County taxpayers is an increase of \$75.40 on a residential property valued at \$250,000, but this is only the county portion of the entire property tax bill. The municipal and educational taxes will be calculated into the equation by the individual municipalities once all municipal budgets are passed.

A recorded vote requested by Alnwick-Haldimand Township Mayor Bill Finley resulted in Warden Chris Herrington of Brighton and mayors Peter Delanty (Cobourg) and Mark Lovshin (Hamilton Township) voting in favour (13 weighted votes) of the 6.13-per-cent increase, with Mr. Finley and Port Hope Mayor Linda Thompson (seven weighted votes) voting against.

Councillors Marc Coombs (Cramahe Township) and Hector Macmillan (Trent Hills) were both absent (six weighted votes). Mr. Macmillan was out of town on vacation. Mr. Coombs left the meeting for work prior to the vote.

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During deliberations, Mr. Lovshin and Ms. Thompson put a motion on the floor to defer the budget decision until council members could absorb the changes and look for more cuts.

Treasurer Mike Buchanan says everything has been examined, right down to such tiny items as paper clips and other miscellaneous items to the tune of \$52,000.

But Mr. Lovshin agreed to take his motion off the floor after potential dates for budget discussions were discarded.

"I think we all came here today prepared to vote on the budget," Mr. Delanty said. "We all knew today was the day we were going to vote on the budget and I don't see why we can't go forward on it."

Had the budget decision been deferred, the next available date would have been April 23. Mr. Delanty said he would not be able to attend on that date, and insisted he be in attendance after a recommendation was made by Ms. Thompson to eliminate court costs.

"The (court) budget this year is \$410,000," Mr. Delanty said. "I'm prepared to say (cut from) \$100,000 to \$50,000, but let's be fair. I would really want that \$50,000 to remain in the budget for a sense of fairness."

He added that it cost Cobourg ratepayers \$381,000 last year for the privilege of having court in their town.

Five of the seven county municipalities have courts for which they are responsible for paying security costs. In order to make it fair, the previous council agreed to pay court costs at the county level as the courts serve the entire county, not just the five municipalities, Ms. Herrington said, and added she was on the previous council when the matter was voted on.

Also on the table was an increase in the price of garbage bag tags from the current \$2 to \$2.75 each. The change is estimated to result in a \$170,000 budget decrease. The bag tag price hike was approved.

Mr. Buchanan told council the 2008 budget includes a .87-per-cent increase in winter roads maintenance, .58-per-cent hike for broadband, 2.11 per cent for roads/bridges maintenance, and .22 per cent for Public Sector Accounting Board and debentures totaling 2.12 per cent, a total budget increase of 5.9 per cent in those five items alone.

There is a proposed study aimed at reducing future costs, and reserves are virtually non-existent, Mr. Buchanan said.

This year's budget allows for \$81.578-million in revenues with \$78.732-million in operational expenses and \$2.847-million in capital.

Previous county council deliberations had councillors suggesting they would prefer a two-per-cent increase but would settle for four in order to keep the tax levy at an affordable and acceptable level.