

## Budgets approved

Last minute cuts to the Town's operating budget means the Town's portion of residential property tax bill will increase by 6.2 per cent this year – which works out to \$22 more than last year for a Town tax bill of \$376 per \$100,000 of assessment.

When the Regional and education taxes are factored in, the increase is 2.7 per cent, or an additional \$27 per \$100,000 of assessment for a total tax bill of \$1,021.

Calling it a very difficult budget year – one in which it was hard to make cuts – Mayor Rick Bonnette brought a list of proposed cuts to the operating and capital budgets at Monday's Council meeting. He said while all of the projects he suggested be cut are worthwhile, they "just can't do everything," and it's "just a matter of how much taxpayers can afford to pay."

Councillors cut \$22,000 worth of projects suggested by Regional/Ward

two Councillor Jane Fogal to offset her proposal to add \$20,000 to the \$40,000 already approved to hire staff for the cultural roundtable. Although the cuts were approved, Council did not add the \$20,000 back into the budget. The cuts totalled \$88,400.

The cuts proposed by Bonnette also resulted in \$105,000 in reductions to the 2011 capital budget which now stands at \$13.1-million, and \$99.9-million for the 10-year forecast. The changes made on Monday result in an operating budget of \$30.5-million.

There could be further changes to the budgets when staff reports, before the end of February, on proposals to spend \$29.2-million to build three new ice [pads/arenas, including twinning of the Acton arena. Councillors balked at the potential huge debt load and asked staff to report on other options to balance corporate needs.



**ONE VOICE:** Members of the Acton Ministerial Association welcomed a large crowd to the annual Unity Service held at the Acton Legion on Sunday. – George Henderson photo

## Hospital cash request deferred

With hope an appeal to the Minister of Health will result in provincial cash to help pay for an emergency room expansion and CT scanner at Georgetown Hospital, Town Council deferred the hospital's request for \$4.5-million until Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette can make a plea for funding at Queen's Park.

It was standing room only, with some people in an overflow room, at the Civic Centre on Monday night as the Town hosted a public meeting to gauge support for the funding request. Of the delegates who spoke – some emotionally – 21 were in favour of the request and two were undecided. Seventeen people e-mailed their support of the request to the Town, three were opposed, and four suggested that if the money was granted, non-residents using the emergency department should pay a user fee.

Town Treasurer Ed DeSousa said if the Town borrowed the \$4.5-million over a 10-year term, it would add \$23.56 per year to the average tax bill.

One of the most impassioned pleas of the night came from Mike Sanderson, who still wonders if his mother would have lived if hours hadn't been wasted sending her to Milton for a CT scan after she

injured her head last summer. She died after being transferred to a Toronto hospital.

Sanderson said he's willing to write a cheque for his share and go door-to-door to raise more money. He said people spend more at Tim Horton's and McDonald's than what this project would add to their tax bills.

Georgetown hospital physician Dr. Wei Chu said he threw away his prepared speech when he recognised Sanderson in the Council Chambers as the son of the woman he treated last summer.

"I will never forget the look on Mike's face when he collapsed in front of me on his knees, crying, asking me if there was anything that we could have done to present this," Dr. Chu said, adding Sanderson repeated the question he asked last summer – if his mom would be alive today if there had been a CT scanner in Georgetown.

"I told him quite honestly, as I did on August 26, that I don't know the answer to that question, but I do know that it would have given her a chance."

Hospital CEO John Oliver said the ageing and outdated emergency department is designed to serve 14,000 patients a year, but currently sees 32,800. He said last year, 1,500 patients were transferred from Georgetown to other hospitals for CT scans.

In response to complaints that non-Halton Hills residents are stretching limited resources at Georgetown Hospital, Oliver said 71 per cent of the hospital's medical inpatients are from Georgetown, with 23 per cent from Brampton and Mississauga. He said 71 per cent of Halton Hills residents who require surgery leave the community – including to hospitals in Brampton and Mississauga for treatment.

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