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# Town tax hike pegged at 6.5%

By **CYNTHIA GAMBLE**  
Staff Writer

Despite repeated comments over the last week of it being a tough budget year, Halton Hills budget committee approved the 2011 operating budget Tuesday night— after adding another \$168,000 worth of items and bumping a 5.9 per cent increase to 6.5 per cent.

Town staff had proposed a 5.9 per cent increase to 2011 taxes, that combined with Regional and education taxes would mean an overall 2.9 per cent increase on property tax bills.

But discussion moved quickly on the budget, with the majority of budget committee— all members of council— approving the budget in one night instead of using the three nights set aside. Opposing budget approval were Councillors Mike O'Leary, Bryan Lewis and Bob Inglis.

Approved was a \$30.6 million budget that will mean a 6.5 per cent (\$23 per \$100,000 of assessment) increase for Halton Hills property owners. Combined with proposed Region taxes of 1.4 per cent (\$6) and possibly no change to the education taxes, the overall tax increase will be 2.9 per cent (\$29/\$100,000 residential assessment).

The Town's portion includes a base budget increase of 3.7 per cent, a fire levy of 1.2 per cent, a special infrastruc-

ture levy of 1.0 per cent, and a library operating levy of 0.6 per cent.

If approved at the January 24 council meeting, the hiring a heritage planner/co-ordinator (\$98,500) could increase the budget. Also to be discussed on Jan. 24 is Halton Healthcare Services request for a \$4.5 million Town contribution for a hospital expansion, and while it's not part of the operating budget, an affirmative decision could further impact property taxes.

In his presentation to budget committee, Town Treasurer Ed DeSousa noted that 68 per cent of the Town's revenues comes from taxation, 10 per cent from user fees, 5 from building and development fees, and 17 per cent from corporate revenue and other sources (provincial grants).

"That taxation amount, compared to other municipalities, is rather high," he said, adding that user fees, which are considered "somewhat low", are being examined for a potential increase.

Additions to the budget included:

- \$40,000 to the Cultural Roundtable to be used as core funding so that it can continue to provide support service to more than 100 cultural and heritage organizations in Halton Hills. Committee members had made a presentation requesting \$60,000, but councillors were more receptive to \$40,000.

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