

Fire damages tree at Dog Park at Prospect Park

By Alex Hilson

Halton Hills firefighters responded to a call at Prospect Park last Thursday, January 4 at 2 p.m. after a fire was set in a tree at the Dog Park. Damages required Town staff to remove part of the tree later that evening, finishing the clean up the next day. Part of the tree remains standing.

Garbage had been stuffed inside the tree, which someone had either intentionally or unintentionally set on fire. Firefighters had to plow their way to the park because the service entrance is at the top end of the field.

The Town will have to inspect the rest of the tree in the future to see

if it will live, and will be calling in an arborist to look it over. There were three major trunks, and because one of them is missing, it's now lopsided. It could mean removing the whole tree.

Jeff Leach, Co-Chair of Leash Free Halton Hills, formerly HH-DOG (Halton Hills Dog Owners Group), a volunteer organization that monitors, maintains and oversees both Prospect Park Dog Park in Acton and Cedarvale Park in Georgetown, said, "I don't know if it was a couple of teenagers and it was a cold day and they thought this was a good way to get warm, or maybe this was someone who just threw a couple cigarette butts and didn't

realize that there was some trash there. We don't know."

The Park is open again, but there could be a long-term impact if the tree has to be taken down. "We can't replace that kind of tree," said Leach. "I've already talked about getting an extra tree put in there because we had one taken out in the spring due to ash borer, and they were saying it could take up to three years to get another tree put in. So, if this big willow has to come out, its replacement could be quite some time out. Otherwise, we're going to have to raise money to buy it ourselves and then have someone else plant it. It's one of those things. We can't replace something that big."



Tree in local Dog Park after Town staff removed sections damaged by fire.

Halton Hills 2018 Budget synopsis presented to Council

By: Vivien Fleisher

Town Treasurer and Accounting Manager Moya Leighton gave a Power-Point synopsis of the 2018 budget process for the capital and operating budget at the last council meeting for 2017—a process that began in June. Highlights included five planning projects, like the Acton by-pass feasibility study and the active transportation plan; new infrastructure, including the Acton Youth Centre; replacement of vehicles, equipment etc.; and, repairs to facilities, roads, parks, trees, etc. Under Council's direction in August, the Town portion of the tax levy was set at 3.9 per cent and was met, in order to maintain the Town's fiscal health while delivering on their priorities. This has been part of their successful downward trend in the last three years. By October, business plan presentations to committees were made. Ward review briefings took place November and December, as well as budget committee meetings. A capital budget of \$18,934,900 was approved in November. Asset lifecycles and improved services were chief

considerations.

Priority areas were identified as better public engagement; improved customer service; and, a Cultural Masterplan with a Public Art Program. Additionally, a fire master plan, corporate energy plan, tax relief for seniors and youth centre operations were priorities.

The 2018 budget will be funded out of the 3.9 per cent tax levy, user fees and reserves, with a 2017 forecasted surplus of \$392,745 for a balanced budget. Included in the town portion of the bill is the region and education portions for a total increase of all three at 2.4 per cent. That means for a typical Halton Hills residence—roughly \$538,000—the total increase for the year works out to \$120.

Service delivery improvements include an updated payroll system, a new "Service Halton Hills" and support for growing infrastructure, while staffing requirements include a half-dozen contract positions that have become permanent, plus recommendations for new permanent and contract positions. The proposed budget for the Acton BIA is \$157,990.

The good news in

Mayor Bonnette's view includes the fact that Halton Hills is looking after their seniors and that the budget is balanced, with reserves being filled. He thanked staff for their diligent work, and reflected on years past when they saw increases of 4.9 per cent and 7.3 per cent, compared with the proposed 3.9 per cent. Councillor Lawlor felt several items would have a significant impact in terms of opportunities, like the sports park at the Gellert centre, and the Parks and Rec Strategic plan which allows for lots of public input. Tree replacement was top of mind also for the Councillor, who cited the devastation wrought by both the 2013 ice storm and the Emerald Ash borer. She finished by saying an item buried in the budget—the \$100,000 plus set aside for the municipal assistance program—benefits "effective partnerships between the town and non-profit organizations" and is "great value for the money" in that volunteer-run programs like sports organizations and cultural events will have an easier time with the small grants the town hands out from the program.



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