

# GTA towns seek 1/3 funding formula

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At a special meeting of GTA mayors held last Friday, the mayors gave the Province a March 1 deadline to respond to a \$250 million request for funding after the recent ice storm.

The resolution of the mayors, including Bonnette, came moments after Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Linda Jeffrey, who had just met with the mayors, suggested it could take months to make a decision on funding and to get money flowing to communities hit hard by the storm.

Jeffrey has already received motions from a number of municipalities in the GTA, including Halton Hills, Mississauga, Brampton and Toronto, to have them declared disaster areas so they can be eligible for provincial disaster relief funding.

The mayors are not only asking for funding from the Province, but also from the Federal government. They are calling for both those levels of government, and the affected municipality, to each contribute a third of the cost. They would like to hear back from Ottawa by March 1 as well.



ED DESOUSA

"It makes more sense to work at this collectively rather than individually," Bonnette told The Independent & Free Press on Friday. He added it would be reasonable for the Province, Federal governments and municipality to each cover 1/3 of the costs.

"Otherwise it's going to be a burden on the taxpayer," said Bonnette. However the mayor added, "The mayors for the most part feel we're going to get very little from the Ontario Disaster Relief Assistance Program, just from history and the criteria."

The mayors are also asking the Provincial and Federal governments to establish new programs and expand existing ones to address disaster mitigation for forestry, erosion control, winter storms, tree canopy and other severe storms.

The Town of Halton Hills is estimating its cost to clean up from the storm and

Halton Hills Hydro's tally to restore power at \$3.7 million. None of the Hydro costs are eligible for disaster relief funding.

However, Halton Hills Hydro will honour its commitment to the Town to provide a \$1.13 million dividend (the Town is the Hydro's sole shareholder) in 2014, despite its \$1.2 million in costs incurred due to the ice storm, said Town CAO David Smith.

Halton Hills Hydro CEO and President Art Skidmore will attend the Monday, Jan. 27 council meeting.

Town Treasurer Ed DeSousa said in his budget briefing, "The 2015 budget year is the year to start addressing (the costs) based on actual costs, and any financial assistance received." He pointed out that the four additional Public Works staff, which budget committee approved in the 2014 budget, would assist with the clean up.

An attempt by Councillor Clark Somerville to add \$75,000 to the operating budget for tree replacement, failed to gain any support. Somerville said he felt it was important that money be earmarked this year for trees (which are not covered under the emergency assistance).

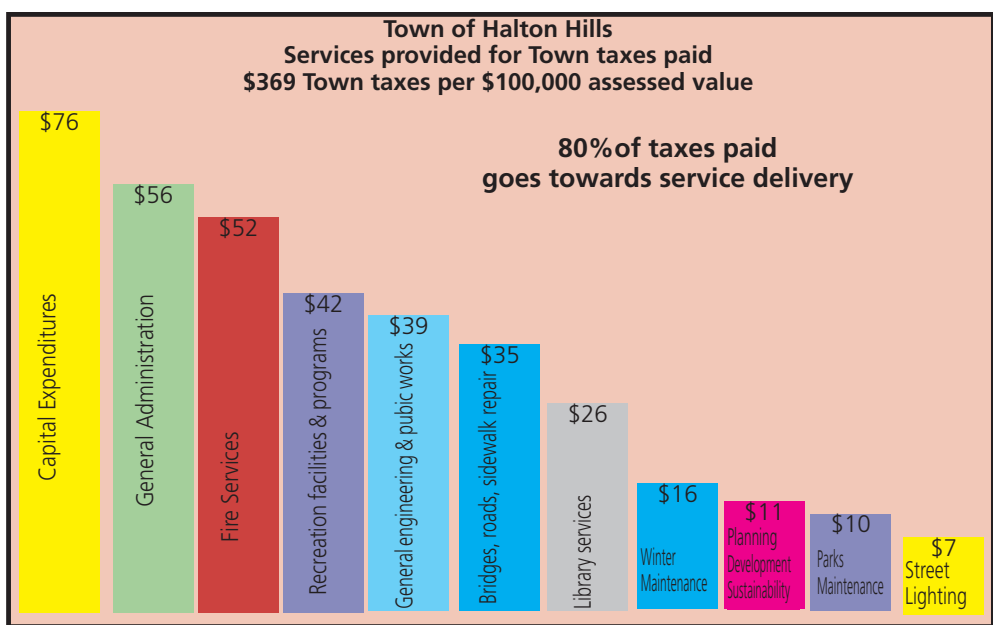
DeSousa said money is available this year in the reserves, including the Severe Weather Reserve, and possibly even the 2013 surplus if additional spending is required for clean up work and tree replacement in 2014.

Smith added staff prefers to wait until a comprehensive recovery plan with costs is developed before setting aside funding.

"A lot of our immediate costs were in 2013 and so they are covered. ...When we know what the full costs are, we will develop a plan, likely in the fall, and at that time it will be timely to include it in the 2015 budget."

Councillor Jane Fogal said the Town should look at doubling its contribution to the Severe Weather Reserve, noting there were three severe weather events in Halton Hills in 2013. Halton Hills is one of the few GTA municipalities to have this reserve.

With files from Torstar News Service



## Premium Outlets help Town loosen purse strings Town taxes to go up 4.9%

By CYNTHIA GAMBLE  
Staff Writer

The Toronto Premium Outlets opened more than new stores in Halton Hills' Premier Gateway Business Park, the tax assessment it generated has opened up the Town's purse strings.

Assessment growth in Halton Hills grew by 3.62 per cent— primarily due to the opening of the Outlets mall in August as well as a Great Gulf development also in the Business Park. That increase translates into \$1.5 million for the Town's coffers.

At Halton Hills budget committee meeting Monday night, Town staff recommended part of the money be put into reserves and another \$535,200 into new programs and hires such as developing a tourism strategy, hiring Operations staff, extending park washroom hours, collecting litter and hiring summer student labour.

None of the decision packages would have an effect on tax bills, said Town Treasurer and Director of Corporate Services Ed DeSousa.

He said the increased assessment is money the Town can count on in future budgets. More importantly, it has dropped the residential/industrial tax ratio from

90:10 to 88:12. That may not seem big, but DeSousa said each percentage point is a big change in the right direction.

The budget committee (all members of Halton Hills council) agreed with the staff recommendations— with the exception of one program— and added \$517,200. The lone exception was a \$22,700 request by Light Up The Hills (LUTH) volunteer group to have Town staff set up and take down the Christmas lighting display at Dominion Gardens Park.

LUTH's chair Gerry Kentner said the volunteer-based group is aging and it's becoming more difficult to set up the elaborate displays. But budget committee rejected the plea, fearing it would set a precedent for other volunteer groups to request staff time. However, committee did agree to spend \$4,700 to ensure park pathways were clear of snow during the month of December and to have the park washroom open on Ignition Night.

Committee also agreed to add \$3,200 into the budget to assist Willow Park Ecology Centre purchase event insurance and continue with its programs after its Trillium funding ended in 2013.

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