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COUNCIL

TOWN BUDGET COMMITTEE ENDORSES 4.5 PER CENT TAX INCREASE

COUNCIL TO MAKE FINAL DECISION NEXT WEEK

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Local residents can expect to pay about \$100 more on the town portion of their tax bill next year.

After much deliberation over the course of two days, the Halton Hills budget committee (comprised of all council members) endorsed a 4.57 per cent tax increase for 2022. This figure includes a new 0.67 per cent dedicated levy to assist with rising insurance costs and a 0.6 per cent special levy increase to address the infrastructure gap.

The hike translates into an additional \$103.80 on the town portion of a typical homeowner's tax bill, based on the average assessed value of \$623,500 for a single family home in Halton Hills.

The budget will now go to council for final consideration Dec. 13.

Not everyone around the committee table was in favour of the figures presented, with Councillor Bryan Lewis voting against the budget.

"This might have been

the time to say we have to show a little bit more restraint (in spending)," he said, questioning whether everything in the budget is a necessity, such as hiring more than a dozen new staff.

"We're forcing people to leave our community and go elsewhere because they can no longer afford to live here."

According to Town staff, one of the key pressures on the 2022 budget is the steep rise in liability insurance premiums and WSIB (Workplace Safety and Insurance Board) self-insurance costs, which have a combined impact of \$843,000.

Council combed over the budget for savings and proposed several changes, such as:

- Postponing activities/contracts related to the town's equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) efforts, along with truth and reconciliation (TRC) — a suggestion from Councillor Ann Lawlor, who ultimately made no formal motion to do so.

"Those are not core ser-

vices that we have traditionally provided," she said, noting the library is already doing work in both areas.

"That's not to say they're not important, because they are."

- A motion from Councillor Clark Somerville to fund \$45,000 in EDI and TRC implementation from the tax rate stabilization reserve, versus tax dollars, which was endorsed by the committee. This lowered the tax increase from 4.65 per cent to 4.57.

- Elimination of \$15,000 earmarked to keep library branches open on Sundays in the summer to serve as cooling stations. After hearing opposition to the cut from fellow committee members, Somerville withdrew his motion.

- Removal of a \$50,000 bike share feasibility study (funded from capital reserves, not tax dollars), with the matter instead being referred to the active transportation committee for feedback — a motion from Councillor and cycling advocate Jane Fogal that was approved.

legal matters | COVID and the Courts

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Have the courts become a bad option to solve matrimonial disputes?

A

Early in COVID days I thought great we have Zoom meetings with the courts and avoid travel and sitting around the courts waiting for our turn to speak with the Judge. Pre-covid Judges would have 15-20 cases on motion day and they would deal with all normally over 3 to 4 hours. You would book your date, with a minimum of 4 days' notice, and appear.

COVID has interfered with this as now each motion gets their own time. The problem is the courts can't schedule 15 or 20 motions any one of which could take an hour, so, they schedule 4 or 5 leaving 10 to 15 files for another date. It has not taken long for courts to back up and simple motions to have the first date available 2 or 3 months later rather than next week. Brampton is even worse than Milton. Our office last week sought a date to speak with a judge for an hour Settlement Conference. The first date available was September, 2022. A Settlement Conference is one of many steps as your matter progresses through the court system. If you want the courts to solve your matrimonial issues expect to take years. Mediation may be your only alternative but only if both parties agree.

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