

# COUNCIL APPROVES BUDGET WITH 4.5 PER CENT TAX INCREASE

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They may not all have been happy about it, but the majority of Halton Hills councillors voted in favour of the 2022 town budget this week.

In a 9-2 vote Dec. 13, next year's financial plan and resulting 4.57 per cent tax increase were approved by council, with councillors Clark Somerville and Bryan Lewis opposed.

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 equates to an additional \$103.80 on the town portion of a typical homeowners' tax bill, based on the average assessed value of \$623,500 for

a single family home in Halton Hills.

Local residents also pay taxes to Halton Region — with regional council considering a 2.2 per cent rise in taxes on Dec. 15 — and the local school boards, which are both anticipating no tax increases in 2022.

With the town, region and school boards combined, the overall blended tax rate increase for Halton Hills residents is 2.86 per cent, or a little more than \$140 per year.

While Halton Hills budget deliberations carried on for two days last week, in the end local councillors only voted in favour of a couple minor changes to the document.

"We took out two items of nickels and dimes in overall value," said Lewis, who once again expressed his concern about hiring new staff when local resi-

dents and businesses are trying to recover from financial blows dealt by the pandemic. "What better time to hold the costs and not hire as many as 15 people?"

Somerville shared similar sentiments. But the commentary from those opposed to the budget didn't sit well with Coun. Jane Fogal.

"When people don't agree with the budget, they should be offering things to take out of the budget during the budget discussion," she said. "If you don't want as many staff, then start picking things you don't want. You can't just leave it out there and say 'no, I don't approve.'"

Somerville contended that council "doesn't have the will to make budget cuts," explaining that he proposed a \$15,000 cut to the library budget last



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According to Halton Hills staff, insurance costs are driving up next year's budget.

week — a notion that was quickly shot down by other councillors — to illustrate his point.

Others around the council table voiced their support for the overall budget, including Coun. Moya

Johnson, who noted the tax increase works out to about \$2 a week extra for the average household.

"I don't think \$2 a week is a lot to ask of people," she said.

Mayor Rick Bonnette

said he feels staff brought forward a budget that's "reasonable and realistic."

He added that while the insurance levy will likely "not be popular," it's a required revenue source.

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

"I remind the community that we have supported the advocacy efforts of the Association of Municipalities (of Ontario) in calling on the province to take action against rising insurance premiums," noted Bonnette.



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