

Town budget challenges ahead with grant reductions

BY FRANCES NIBLOCK
The Acton Tanner

Can Town Council hold the line on taxes for a fifth year in a row, or will dwindling provincial dollars mean a tax hike, service cuts or a combination of both for Halton Hills residents?

What promises to be a tough process begins on

Monday (Nov. 18) when the Town's budget committee sits down with staff for a public strategy session on next year's operating budget.

Faced with what Treasurer Andy Koopmans called a "fairly significant" reduction in provincial funding - between \$600,000 and \$700,000 - councillors face

a major challenge if they don't want to raise taxes, but also not make service and program cuts, less than one year away from the municipal election.

"I'd like to say to you that it's going to be zero tax increase this year as far as I'm concerned, but I'm not prepared to say that yet," budget

committee chair, Ward 3 Councillor Moya Johnson, explained on Thursday.

"To look at zero per cent (tax increase) is one option and staff will show us what zero looks like and what other increases would look like," Johnson said, stressing she's going into the meeting with an open mind.

As in past years staff will come to the strategy session with options for Council based on a zero per cent tax increase budget and various incremental increases.

Last year the Town received more than 30 per cent, or \$900,000, less in provincial grants than the year before and this year the various departments were asked to put together budgets as close to last year's as possible.

"That's our starting point so we can assess just where we stand and whose needs take priority," Koopmans explained Friday, noting that

some councillors believe there shouldn't be a tax increase while others haven't ruled one out.

Several times in recent months Town Administrator Ray King has cautioned Council about how tough this budget process will be.

"It's getting increasingly difficult because of the major reductions each year in funding from the province, while at the same time the expectation is that there will be a zero per cent (tax) increase when in fact there are hundreds of thousand of dollars less to deal with."

Maria St. gets fenced

Realstar Management, owners of Acton Apartments Limited - the two rental buildings at 40 Maria Street and 128 Church Street - will pay the Town \$150 to be allowed to install a fence on the Town's right-of-way to stop cars from parking on the grass adjacent to the property.

Realstar has attempted to stop vehicles from parking on the western boulevard of Maria Street and damaging the boulevard and lawn grass.

The Town rejected Realstar's initial requests for a parking ban or a curb and sidewalk, so Realstar asked for permission to install a wrought iron fence where a temporary snow fence has been since 1995.



CRAFTY! The Acton Seniors Centre holds its annual Christmas bazaar today (Wednesday) until 3 pm at the Centre, located inside the arena. Making some of the crafts for the bazaar last week were Reshida Ali and Grace Lamberink. (Jennifer Flesch photo)

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