

Average home looking at \$18.94 tax increase

BY MAGGIE PETRUSHEVSKY
The New Tanner

Guelph/Eramosa council has approved a 2.99 per cent increase in taxes for its 2004 budget.

For a home assessed at the municipal average of \$256,988, that translates into a tax hike of \$18.94, said assistant treasurer Linda Cheney.

She stressed that while the municipality's mill rate actually dropped, current value assessment in the municipality has seen property values increase by 10 per cent on

average and that means many people will see their taxes rise.

She also pointed out that only 22 cents of every municipal tax dollar remains with the township. The rest goes to the school board and Wellington County.

Cheney said more than 64 per cent of the budget, or \$2,112,906 is dedicated to transportation which includes roads and bridges, winter road control and street lighting.

The other two major items in the budget were protection to persons and property at 15.75 per cent and property and leisure services at 12.2 per cent.

The municipality's budget totals \$3.271 million.

Cheney said the municipality faces significant increases in the cost of insurance, mandatory testing of water for small water systems, a higher Grand River Conservation authority levy and new operating costs for implementing the provincially mandated Emergency Measures program.

The budget also includes funds for the completion of the new fire hall landscaping and paving, reconstruction of the rest of Jones Baseline, completion of the reconstruction of Fall Street, completion of the

roadwork needed for replacing the Sixth Line bridge, engineering and approvals for replacement of the Eden Mills bridge, completion of the Ministry of Environment water upgrades, upgrades to municipally owned buildings such as a new roof on the Old Town Hall, new carpeting at Rockwood Library and maintenance at Rockmosa, adding a fourth tennis court at Rockmosa, installing a parking lot at the Eden Mills soccer fields, completing a basketball court and expanding Valentino Park, and completing the new well at the Eden Mills Community Centre.

Former councillor questions arithmetic of new council

After accusing the previous council of "not being able to do arithmetic" the new Guelph/Eramosa council has produced a heftier tax hike in one year than the old council did over three, and put less into municipal reserves, a Rockwood resident said Monday.

Former councillor Doug Breen said between 2001 and 2003 his council raised taxes a total of 35 cents on the average and were denounced for ignoring residents' (in)ability to pay that much. Yet the new council has upped the cost \$18.94 in one year. Despite that increase, this budget puts \$53,000 less into municipal reserves than the previous budget.

Breen also questioned the calling of a special public meeting on April 26 to hear residents' concerns about the proposed budget when there was no public notices about the meeting.

"There was absolutely no public consultation until

seven days before the budget was passed," Breen said. "The meeting was announced nowhere, posted nowhere. It was called Thursday (April 18)."

Despite the shortcomings Breen applauded the budget as doing what the municipality needs to get done.

Mayor Clint Martin admitted he telephoned the Guelph Eramosa Taxpayers Association to invite them to the meeting. He questioned whose responsibility it is to notify the press of special meetings and how the Daily Mercury knew about the meeting when neither the Wellington Advertiser nor The New Tanner was told about it. He also questioned whether the press represents the public.

Martin made a point of praising GETA past chair Wally Mays and Eddie Thompson for their remarks at the public budget meeting and credited them with prompting whatever tightening did occur in the budget.

Gibson-Smye only one opposed to '04 budget

The budget process didn't leave sufficient time to do enough cutting, one Guelph/Eramosa councillor says.

Rockwood councillor Teresa Gibson-Smye opposed passage of the municipality's 2004 budget Monday.

The lone opponent, Gibson-Smye said she wasn't critical of staff's efforts. Her concern was with the process because council just accepted it as presented instead of looking for places to cut it.

"Part of it was timing," she said. "It was late in the year. We should have been looking internally for more savings in things like administration. Small things like photocopying costs, livestock payments (to cover farmers' loss from dog kills)."

She termed the budget

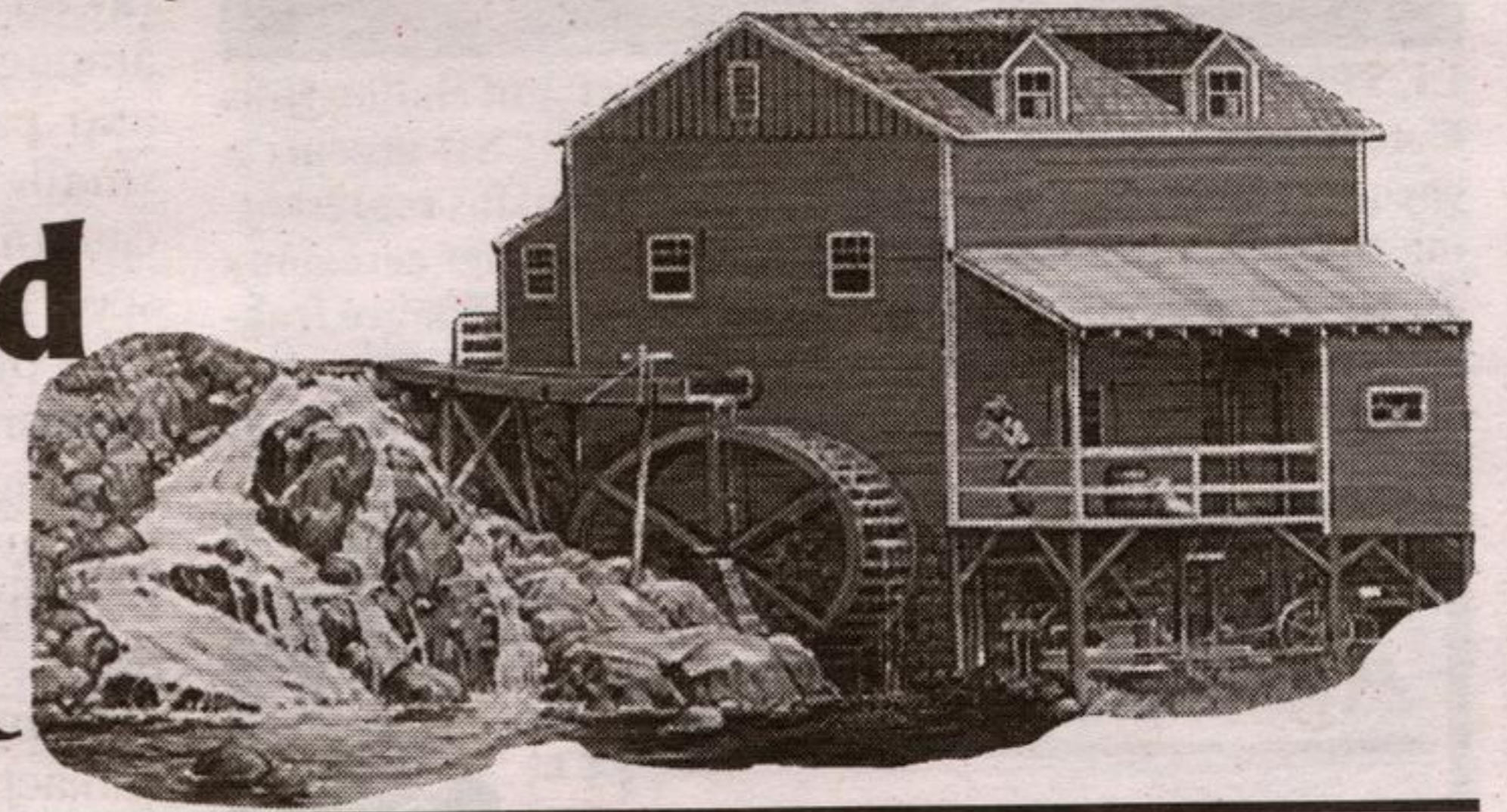
"good in many respects" but condemned the fact budget preparatory meetings were held during the day because that precluded public participation.

She gave council a notice of motion for next meeting to cover some of her concerns.

In that motion she will seek a report on the current arrangement for the building inspector's services and how the position is tendered, where the reserves and development charges come from and how they are used, and the facts surrounding the Rockwood Hydro account and why it can only be used for Rockwood purposes.

She also wants the 2005 budget to be set earlier so the public can review it and those planning meetings scheduled to allow for public involvement.

The Rockwood MILLER



TREES FOR WELLINGTON: Eramosa Public School pupils got heavily involved in the Green Legacy Program celebrating Wellington County's 150th anniversary. Helping sort the white pine, white cedar, silver maple, walnut and tamarac seedlings the county provided for free were from the left Sanij Vernon, (kneeling), Andy Marttala, Travis Laitor, Kalyi Leslie, Gr.4,5 teacher Miss Rumley, Emily Neeb, Sarah Redikopp and Tiana Reis (kneeling). Although the school only serves 78 families, they planted 5,500 trees on area farms and rural residences. - Maggie Petrushevsky photo

Rockwood Spring Fair June 24-25-26

Rockwood's third annual Spring Fair will be held the last weekend of June.

It will not conflict with Pioneer Days which is traditionally held on Father's Day weekend said Jim Weatherby, who organizes the fair for the Rockwood Lions' Club.

He told council this will be the make or break year for the event. In 2002 the club lost \$3,800 on the fair. Last year the loss was just \$1,100.

This year, costs are rising and the Lions want \$1,000 from the municipality as well as free use of Rockmosa Hall and a free building permit for their beer tent.

The club began the project to raise community awareness and to help local non-profit organizations make money.

While the Lions haven't done so well financially, other participating groups have made out fairly well, Weatherby said.

The Lions want to raise

funds to improve the play structures at the Lions Park, to create a skateboard park and to install lights at ball fields, he said.

He promised to provide council with a copy of the budget for the fair.

The fair will be held June 24 and 26.

Mid-June before work starts on Main Street

It will probably be mid-June before work begins on upgrading sewers and water lines along the main street of Rockwood.

In a report to council Monday, Public Works manager Larry Van Wyck said once the work begins, there will be no through traffic on the street. The job will probably take six to eight weeks to complete and will include upgrading a section of sewer on Carroll Street and on the manse easement and installing a water main for the new Rockwood well on the Bernardi lands.

The work can't begin until the Ministry of Transportation gets traffic lights installed at the intersection of the Fourth Line and Highway 7 since that will be the bypass for the project. He could offer no timing for that work.

The tender for the sewer and water work went to Drexler Construction with a bid of \$951,000 which was more than \$300,000 less than the only other bidder.

Van Wyck promised residents will be notified once the timing for the work is known.