

# Budget committee approves increase in residential taxes for 1999

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"There's one taxpayer. Someone gives them a break in income tax and we're right there to grab it up," said Chatten.

He stressed once costs for increased staff are added they're there forever.

Councillor Bob Inglis echoed Chatten's sentiments and said the new employees amounted to approximately the town's tax increase.

Councillor Kevin Kuiack questioned the need for a director of Recreation and Parks.

"We have not had a Recreation and Parks director

for three years and we've managed to build an arena," said Kuiack.

Town administrator Steve Andrews said it was "critical" to proceed with the hiring of the director and the town was close to hiring someone for the job.

Andrews said it's not unusual for town staff to work until 11 p.m. three-to four days a week.

"This is not sustainable. We are going to lose good people."

In the end, committee only deleted one of the recommended new hires, a municipal law enforcement officer.

Before the budget was passed

Chatten made an attempt to send it back to staff to be reduced by 1 per cent, about \$110,000, in areas that don't affect the public.

Councillor Norm Elliott said he couldn't support Chatten's recommendation and stressed the region can more afford to make cuts to its budget than the town because its base is so much larger.

Elliott commended staff for doing an "absolutely brilliant job" with the capital budget.

"Sticking with a zero per cent increase has put us behind the eight-ball," said Elliott. He said

council now has to play catch up and the rate of inflation is at least one per cent.

Councillor Rick Bonnette wanted an assurance the cuts wouldn't be coming out of road maintenance items like sand and gravel.

Andrews said finding a one per cent cut would be "a pretty difficult exercise" and it actually amounts to about a five per cent cut from areas that aren't directly related to the public. He stressed before the budget went to committee staff made \$800,000 in cuts.

He said zero increases are

"more like minus three per cent every year because inflation doesn't stop."

Councillor Jane Fogal called a zero increase deficit financing and Councillor John Day said the town is in a growth mode and council needs to "send a signal that we're prepared to invest in our community."

When the vote was taken on Chatten's motion only he, Inglis, Kuiack and Councillor Clark Somerville supported it.

Mayor Marilyn Serjeantson said setting the budget "is a real balancing act."

—By Lisa Tallyn, staff writer

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