

Cash not extinct from CH budget

By STEPHANIE THIESSEN

The Champion

Conservation Halton's board of directors recently passed a nearly \$16 million budget for 2004, marking a 16.8 per cent increase over last year in the amount of funding coming from municipalities — largely, Halton Region.

Continuing the stance taken when the 2004 preliminary budget was presented to the board last June, Mayor Gord Krantz — along with Halton Hills councillor Clark Somerville — voted against the recommendation that \$3,387,946 of 2004's \$15,824,264 budget come from municipal levies and funding.

"I'm not in favour of 16 and 17 per cent increases," Mr. Krantz said at Conservation Halton's (CH) board of directors meeting February 26.

Last year, only \$2,900,000 of the budget came from municipal levies and funding.

Halton Region is by far CH's major municipal supporter, accounting for about 90 per cent of its municipal funding.

"It doesn't matter what board or agency it is, it just goes against my grain to have double digit increases," Mr. Krantz said in an interview with The Champion. "The single biggest complaint I hear is there's too much darn tax. I'm always conscious of that."

Last year's budget totalled \$11,349,605, making this year's budget 39 per cent higher.

Mr. Krantz, who has been on CH's board of directors for about 30 years, said it's not CH's expenditures he's opposed to, but where the funding comes from.

He said he thinks the funding should come largely from the province, where it used to come from, rather than municipali-

ties.

Besides Halton Region, CH receives minimal financial support from Mississauga, Puslinch and Hamilton.

Theresa Maguire-Garber, CH's CAO/secretary-treasurer, said the 2004 budget demonstrates CH's ability to be self-sustaining, rather than relying on taxes.

Almost 79 per cent of the budget is non-tax supported, with user fees accounting for 60 per cent of its funding.

User fees include admission fees for CH's parks, map fees, permit fees and programs at the parks. As CH offers new and expanded programs, that figure increases, Ms Maguire-Garber said.

The 2004 budget stuck to CH's figures determined in a 10-year forecast put together last year, she said.

Ms Maguire-Garber said one reason for the 39 per cent budget increase is a capital projects initiative has been built into the budget.

"There are a number of capital projects that need to be done," Ms Maguire-Garber said.

But, if they were all built into this budget, the result would be a huge increase. So, it's being built slowly but surely into each year's budget, she said.

Ten years from now, CH will be "in a more financially sustainable mode to meet our capital needs," Ms Maguire-Garber said.

There has also been a \$2 million increase in Glen Eden operating and capital programs, which includes the new tube park and the pedestrian bridge that was recently lifted into place.

As well, there's the re-introduction of Ontario Municipal Employee Retirement

Savings (OMERS) that has contributed to the larger budget.

CH's initiatives include flood control, natural areas protection, environmental planning and the provision of conservation areas for educational and recreational use.

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Exciting times ahead

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on voter support."

Her enthusiasm was evident. "I'm just plain excited about what's coming our way."

Appointees on the board are selected by their municipal council.

Stephanie Thiessen can be reached at sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

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