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A bite out of winter

Paige Cox, 7, playfully pretends to bite snow while waiting her turn for a carriage ride with Santa downtown Saturday. See more photos from the event on page B8.

Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Municipal taxes are going up 3%

Urban homeowners will see \$18 hike and rural residents will pay extra \$15

By MELANIE HENNESSEY

The Champion

After lengthy deliberations, Milton council hammered next year's tax increase down to about \$18 for the average urban homeowner and \$15 for those in the rural area Monday night.

Following almost four hours of discussion and debate as a budget committee, council approved an operating budget with a three per cent tax increase for 2006 — down from the 3.35 per cent increase staff recommended which would've meant an approximate \$20 jump in urban residents' taxes and \$17 for rural taxpayers.

Council also eliminated a proposed 1.5 per cent separate capital levy that would've resulted in an extra \$9.21 on next year's tax bill for the average homeowner.

The levy was suggested by staff to reduce the Town's reliance on debentures and assist with funding for initiatives to address traffic congestion concerns in the community.

Instead, Wards 2 and 4 Councillor Ron Furik put forward a motion, which council approved, to incorporate the levy into the three per cent tax increase, meaning the traffic initiatives will still be covered in the budget.

The motion also called for reducing the amount of money that was going to be transferred to reserves by \$66,401, cutting a \$48,651 project for an emergency operations centre out of the budget and funding any difference from reserves.

Before voting on the changes to bring the increase down to three per cent, a few councillors voiced their mixed thoughts on

the matter.

"I'm concerned that our reserves are going down," Ward 3 Councillor Cindy Lunau noted.

Ward 4 Councillor Wendy Schau said she thinks council should stick with the total staff-proposed tax increase of 4.85 per cent.

"It's my concern that this emphasis on low taxes is limiting the Town's ability to provide the services that our growing community needs," Ms Schau told The Champion as to why she supports the original recommended hike.

"I'm particularly concerned about providing necessary infrastructure such as underpasses, expanding our transit system, providing recreational opportunities for youth and building the new library and arts and entertainment centre."

But Mr. Furik stood by his suggested budget changes. "I rather think we're doing a very wise thing here. It's all about keeping our taxes down."

Mayor Gord Krantz also voiced his sup-

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