

# Halton taxes may go up 3.7%

By Melanie Hennessey  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

A tax increase that could be quite similar to this year's is on the horizon for Halton residents in 2007.

Region staff is forecasting a possible 3.7 per cent hike for next year, or an extra \$45 for the average homeowner based on a \$300,000 assessment — up slightly from the 3.6 per cent increase approved for 2006.

The numbers went before regional council Wednesday and July 10 to the Region's budget review committee, where Director of Financial Planning and Budgets Mark Scinocca explained the details.

He highlighted the items that are driving taxes up, including an additional \$3.7 million needed for staff compensation, \$6.4 million for the Best Start child-care program, \$1.5 million for GTA pooling and \$1 million for waste management operations.

The committee also learned that funding the Region recently received from the Province, which lowered the ultimate 2006 tax hike from 3.6 per cent to 3.1 per cent, helped keep next year's projected tax increase down to 3.7 per cent.

Scinocca went on to list the top 10 most expensive projects to be covered in the 2007 tax capital budget. Topping the list

is the widening of Trafalgar Road from two lanes to four from Britannia Road to south of Hwy. 401 for \$8.2 million, followed by Derry Road's widening between James Snow Parkway and Ninth Line for \$5.3 million.

### Water rates up as well

Average homeowners could also see a 6.5 per cent increase, or about \$42, in water and wastewater rates next year. This is down from the 2006 rate increase of 7.2 per cent.

Scinocca explained the hike could be attributed to the extra \$11.7 million needed for financing capital projects, \$1.7 million for infrastructure upgrades, \$1.2 million for hydro and nearly \$1 million for plant maintenance, amongst other things.

Regional Chairman Joyce Savoline pointed out the rate-supported budget includes a "promise made, promise kept" by politicians in that it discontinues a surcharge implemented 10 years ago to pay for cast iron water mains — something she said she wants Halton residents to be made aware of. "I think that's a testament and credit to the way we do our work here at Halton Region."

But Burlington Councillor Jack Dennison told her the Region "shouldn't go waving flags and banners" about it since, in the meantime, water

rates have gone up.

Savoline countered that, "We have been realistic about what it takes to provide good, safe water," going on to argue that the Region has some of the best water in Ontario if not in Canada.

While Dennison said he didn't disagree entirely with her, he insisted the Region's water and wastewater increases have been "very high."

CAO Brent Marshall then jumped in and said the Region should be waving a banner for the fact it improved the community's safety with the cast iron watermain program. He noted that water and wastewater costs would be significantly higher if the Region didn't have a good system to operate.

The projected 3.7 per cent tax hike is composed of a 2.5 per cent increase for regional services, or \$22, and a 6.2 per cent jump, or \$23, to cover the police budget.

Halton council ultimately approved having the Region portion of the budget prepared with a maximum tax increase of 2.5 per cent and water and wastewater increase of 6.5 per cent. The budget will come back before this fall's incoming council in the new year.

Melanie Hennessey can be reached at [mhennessey@milton-canadianchampion.com](mailto:mhennessey@milton-canadianchampion.com).

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