

# Milton taxes could rise by a little more than 2%

By **Melanie Hennessey**  
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

After two nights of deliberations, the Town's budget committee managed to hammer next year's anticipated tax increase down to 2.23 per cent — less than half of staff's recommended hike.

The figure means that, subject to council approval next week, urban residents will be paying an extra \$25.35 in 2007 and rural homeowners, an additional \$12.54 based on a \$300,000 assessment.

During Monday and Tuesday's budget meetings, the tax increase proposals yo-yoed from staff's recommended 4.6 per cent, down to 3.18 per cent, then 1.23 per cent and back up to the 2.23 per cent supported by the committee.

But prior to that, staff first outlined the details of next year's operating budget of more than \$40 million — of which about \$18 million comes from taxes — and the \$55.5-million capital budget.

"This (operating) budget provides a balance of maintaining services and meeting the demands of growth with available financial options," said Director of Corporate Services and Treasurer Linda Leeds.

She detailed the pressures on the operating budget, like the \$1.6 million extra needed next year for staff wage adjustments, \$817,000 for additional human resources to maintain existing service levels due to growth and \$231,000 to provide service to new roads and parks.

On the capital side, Leeds said 98 new projects are on the horizon for 2007. Of those, she said the Thompson Road widening from Main Street to Derry Road, including the rail crossing, will be the most expensive at \$17.5 million.

Other initiatives topping the list include the Town Hall expansion at \$5.6 million, Lower Base Line road work from Regional Road 25 to Sixth Line for \$3.8 million, the purchase of four buses for the Town transit system for \$1.4 million and the new library branch building for \$1.1 million.

About half of the capital budget is funded by development charges, while the remainder comes from various sources, including Town revenues, reserves and proceeds from Slots at Mohawk.

The councillors also heard from local residents Gary Ellis and Mike Grimwood, who both felt that there are ways council could achieve a 0 per cent tax increase next year.

During deliberations, Ward 3 Councillor Jan Mowbray, Ward 4 Councillor Wendy Schau and Wards 1 and 3 Councillor Barry Lee expressed concern with the reduction in Town service levels and cutbacks to staff hours that will have to be made to keep the tax rate down for 2007.

"We should keep in mind the needs of the community, not just the needs of the taxpayers," said Schau.

Mayor Gord Krantz once again voiced his support for keeping taxes "in and around the rate of inflation," which is

approximately 2.5 per cent.

Wards 2 and 4 Councillor Colin Best said he'd like to keep the hike under the inflation rate as well.

Ward 2 Councillor Mike Boughton then put forward a motion to reduce the tax increase from 4.6 per cent to 3.18 per cent.

He explained he wouldn't want to go below that figure because it would mean a reduction in part-time hours for firefighters.

Lee then put forward an amendment to that motion to use reserve funds to get the increase down to 1.23 per cent, which the committee endorsed.

Following that, Lunau took issue with staff's proposal to make a one-time transfer of \$400,000 from the slots reserve fund to the legal reserve fund. She made a motion to stop the transfer from happening and instead get money for the legal

reserve fund through a one per cent tax increase, bringing the total committee-recommended hike up to 2.23 per cent.

Other items the committee supported include:

- Removing \$31,000 slated for pesticide bylaw public consultation consultant fees. If supported by council, this means the amount of consultation will be greatly reduced.

- Advancing the timeline for the Brookville Park project with \$432,000 from the development charges reserve fund and \$48,000 from the slots reserves

- Purchasing new library branch computer equipment with \$24,037 from slots reserves.

All of the committee's recommendations will go before town council Monday.

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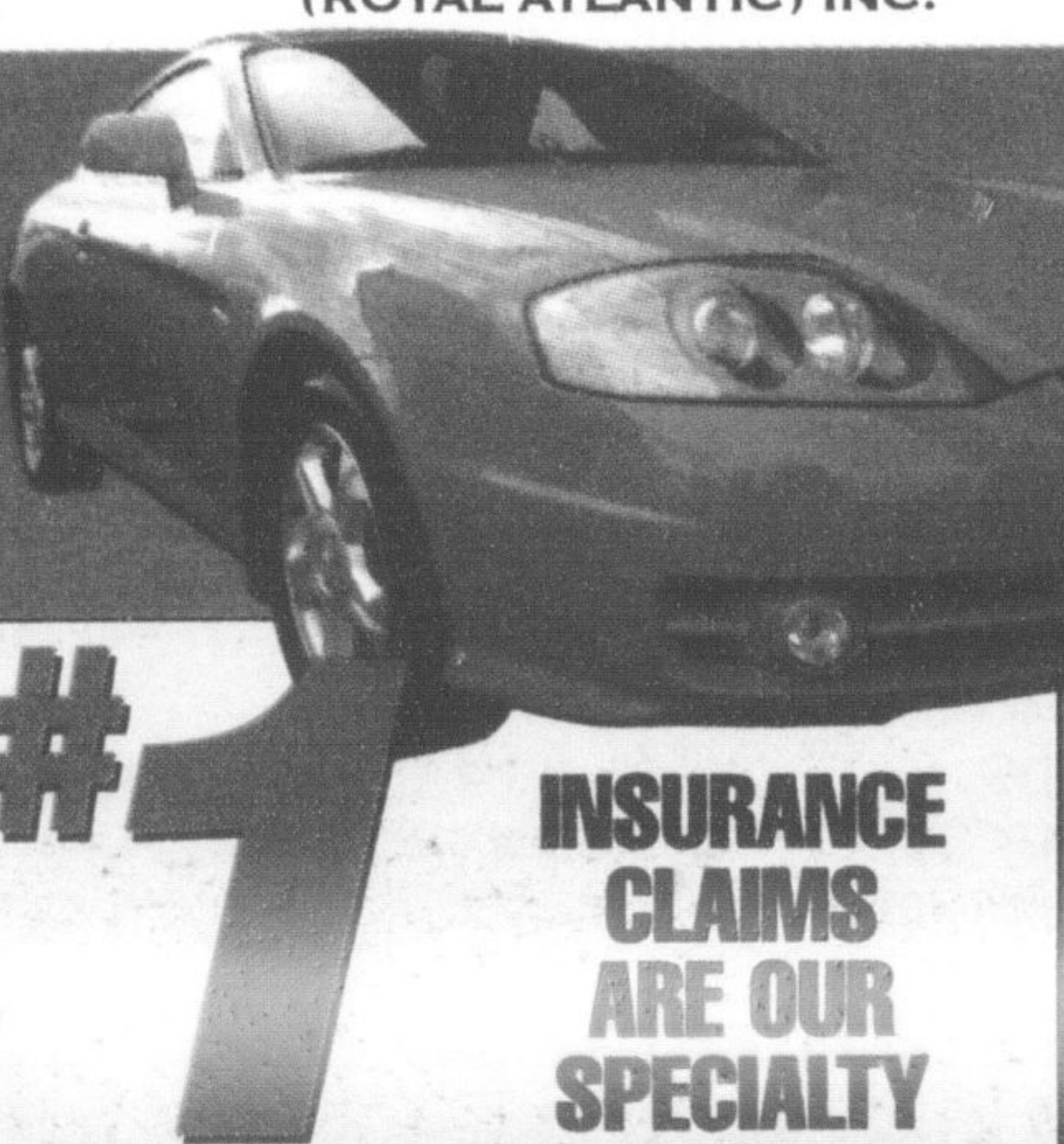
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