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NEWS

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A & E

## WYC set to rock Hardball

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A Metroland Media Group publication • Vol. 149 No. 80

Friday, December 12, 2008

56 Pages • \$1.00 (incl. G.S.T.)



GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

**PAWS AND CLAUS:** Animal lovers brought their pets to Ruffin's Pet Centre Saturday for its fourth annual Santa and Pet Photo Day with proceeds going to benefit local animal shelters. Here, Noel, a one-year-old hamster, gets his photo taken with Santa. Noel was a Christmas present for sisters Mady and Tory Sousa last year.

# Municipal tax hike of 4.5% proposed

By Tim Foran

CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Ten councillors, eight hours of debate and a bunch of staff added up to one thing for Miltonians — a 4.5 per cent tax hike on the Town's portion of their property tax bills.

The Town's budget committee spent two straight late nights this week poring over the staff-recommended budget and ultimately cut about a dollar from the taxes for a typical household with a \$300,000 home, reducing the increase to about \$35 for urbanites and \$29 for rural dwellers. Councillors whittled down the hike from 4.63 per cent with some minor cuts to the operating budget.

The original budget proposal coming into this week had foreseen a tax impact of 5.6 per cent. However, a last-minute announcement of an unexpected assessment of new residents to the Town — and the tax dollars they bring with them — gave staff the leeway to make some late changes to the budget resulting in the 1 per cent drop.

Councillors received another happy bit of late-breaking news when they found out Milton Hydro, of whom the Town is the sole shareholder, is increasing its 2009 dividend by \$1.25 million to Milton. However, that money wasn't directed to a tax break but instead to temporarily shore up falling reserves.

"This is a valuable asset and it's really starting to pay off now," Milton Mayor Gord Krantz said of Milton Hydro. "It really is the gift that will keep on giving."

Milton resident Marshall Horner, who presented a delegation to the budget committee Monday night, was pleased with the tax hike.

"They're (councillors) are start-

ing to realize some of the costs...to run the city," Horner explained.

Horner said the zero-tax-hike years earlier this decade were imprudent and the Town is now facing increased costs to maintain service levels for a Town that has doubled in population over the past five years.

Despite tax hikes over the past couple of years, Milton's residential property tax rate continues to be one of the lowest in the Greater Toronto Area. About a quarter of the property tax bill pays for Town services, with half going towards Regional and police services and the last quarter for education.

The \$100 million Town budget is split into two sections, an operating budget and a capital budget. Property taxes pay for about 40 per cent of the \$65 million operating budget, with user fees covering

• see BUDGET on page A4

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