

# Next year's Town budget has plenty of challenges

*Difficult decisions ahead as budget process begins*

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Council must consider the completion of stimulus-funded projects, a significant hike in the cost of street lighting and the possibility of a hospital reserve fund when deciding on Milton's 2011 budget.

These were just some of the issues mentioned as Town staff presented the budget call report — a study that provides guidelines and direction for preparing next year's budget — to council last week.

The report suggests a 6.91 per cent tax hike may be needed to maintain Milton's existing level of services. However, Linda Leeds, director of corporate services and treasurer, says the report is "more of a worst case scenario."

"Typically, what we've done when preparing budgets for consideration is prepared a budget to that upper limit. Then we would provide the budget committee with a range of options on how it can be reduced.

"(The report) gives some information about the issues that are going to need addressing in the 2011 budget," she continued.

Among those issues were growth-related

expenditures — including the salaries and benefits for new staff, the cost of maintaining more roads and parkland in town and the costs related to the Milton Sports Centre expansion and the openings of the Milton Public Library's main branch and Milton Centre for the Arts, all of which are set to open in April.

The report states the Town will not receive enough revenue from growth (for example, development charges) to cover the costs of growth.

"With new roadways we go in and maintain them and plow them. With parks being constructed, we cut the grass and light the fields," said Leeds, noting Town staff always tries to match growth expenditures with growth revenues. "We've done that every year in the operating budget, but right now, with the forecast we've done for 2011, this matching with revenue and expenses is not happening...it's something we'll be working on more."

The report shows an increase in Town staff salaries of 2.16 per cent and a 7.64 per cent increase in the cost of benefits. Salaries and benefits make up more than 50 per cent of the Town's expenses.

"In 2011, I think we need to look at a zero per cent increase to all salaried employees across the board," said Ward 4 Councillor Paul Scherer. "We're adding almost \$2 mil-

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