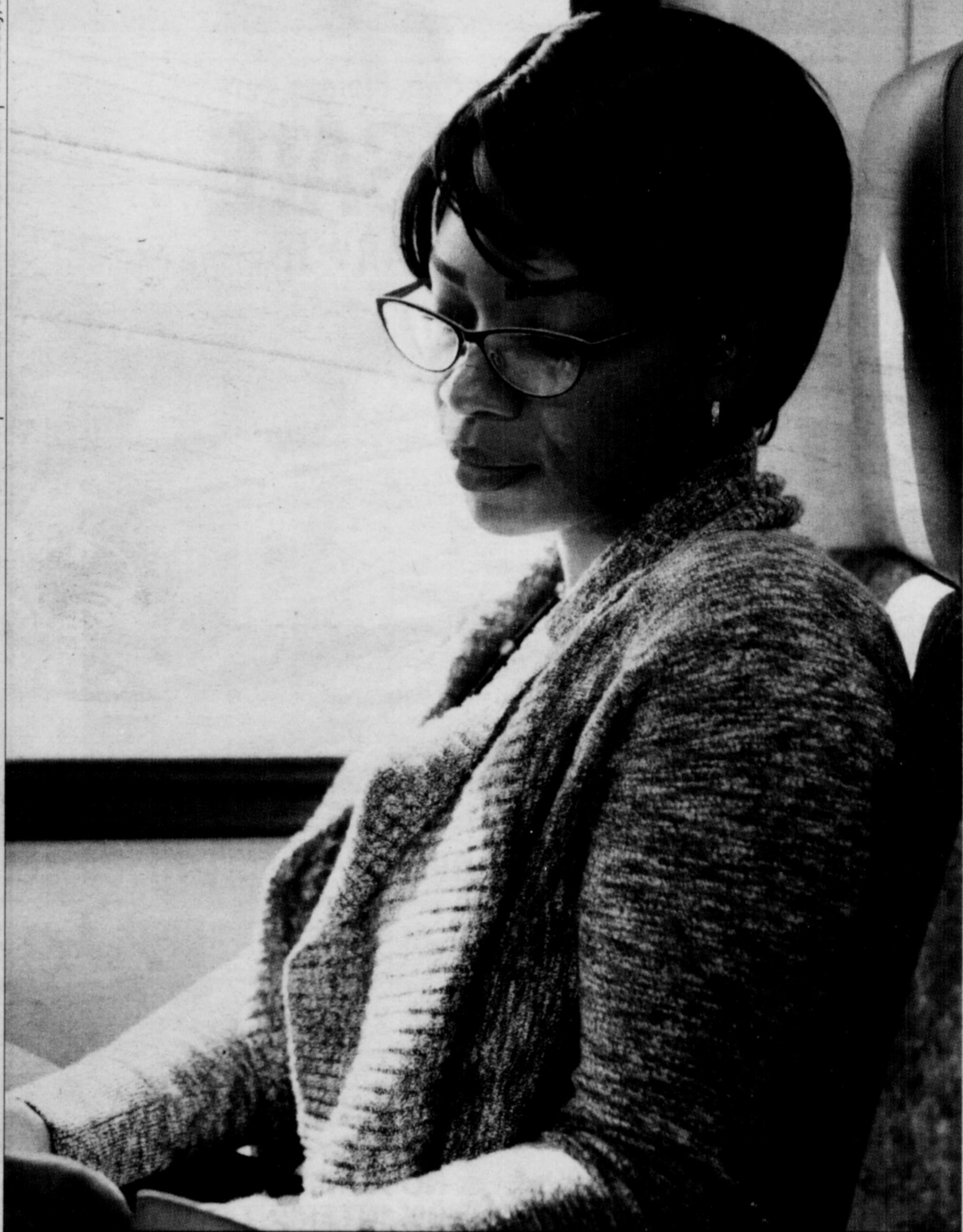


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Di Lorenzo concerned about Town's stabilization reserves

2.5.5 per cent. This includes the library and hospital's portion of the tax bill. With the Region's proposed 1.8 per cent increase, the total impact on the tax bill would be 1.7 per cent for rural residents and 1.35 per cent for urban.

The combined impact on the tax bill then, per \$100,000 of assessment is \$13.46 for urban residents and \$12.69 for rural.

Linda Leeds, director of corporate services and treasurer, put it in perspective during her presentation, saying that if Mississauga passes a two per cent tax increase, Milton would need to pass a 21 per cent increase to have the same financial impact.

And according to Councillor Rick DiLorenzo, herein lies the problem with how the Town budgets.

"We are patting ourselves on the back for having the lowest tax rate in the GTA (Greater Toronto Area), but how are we doing that? It's not been sustainable....we are not heading in the right direction," he said.

DiLorenzo evidenced his claim using a graph showing the decline of Milton's stabilization reserves. These act as "savings" accounts that the Town puts money into for future use or contingencies, for instance, the ice storm of 2013. The graph showed a decline in total reserves of close to \$6 million from 2011 to 2015.

The Ward 7 councillor recommended that every time council found a way to reduce money in the budget, 50 per cent would go to address the reserve imbalance and the other 50 per cent would go to keep taxes low. His motion was opposed.

"And the downward trend continues," DiLorenzo added in an email to The Champion.

Another controversial item on the agenda was Saturday transit service. Councillor Rick Malboeuf put forth a motion to have it removed from the budget, citing figures from Milton Transit that showed a per-hour ridership of just 6.9 people, costing \$300,000 annually.

"I don't think it's successful and it's costly to taxpayers," he said.

Councillor Zeeshan Hamid comically responded, "let's recognize the horses and stop beating them...we have councillors stuck in old suburban sprawl mentality refusing to acknowledge reality."

He argued that Milton's population growth, which is estimated to hit 158,800 by 2024, would inevitably result in increased ridership.

The motion was struck down.

Frustrations continued to mount as more motions came forward, some carried, some lost, only for the budget to be voted down. Twice.

"I'm absolutely startled. This has become nothing but political," said Councillor Cindy Lunau, arguing that councillors were using the budget process to enhance their political image instead of making the Town financially viable.

Local and Regional Councillor Mike Cluett responded with this: "we are politicians. This is a political process. I am doing the

job I was elected to do."

Cluett then slashed \$172,000 out of the infrastructure budget, more specifically, an expanded asphalt program, which would increase the life cycle of roadways. The allocated costs for roadways in the proposed budget are \$13.4 million.

"We're going to have to make tough decisions. Is it going to suck at the end? Probably, but let's move forward because we still don't know what's going to happen at the Region," he said.

Funding of \$125,000 was also cut from the Winter Control Reserve, leaving it with \$125,000. A program to eliminate weeds in parks and boulevard areas was also slashed by \$175,000.

In hopes that the third time would be the last, councillors voted to accept the proposed budget by a vote of 8 to 3. DiLorenzo, Malboeuf and Arnold Huffman opposed it.

After the final cuts were made, the gross operating budget for the Town was \$103,511,312 and the capital budget, \$32,028,472. It is expected to be ratified in two weeks.

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Rick Di Lorenzo



Cindy Lunau