

Essex Ward 1 sees 2 per cent tax increase

Town budget to be unveiled at public meeting

BY ANDY COMBER

All that remains is a public meeting to adopt the 2007 budget for the Town of Essex following approval of the final draft by town council March 19.

For 2007, the owner of a home in Ward 1 assessed at

\$200,000 will pay \$1,581 in municipal taxes, up \$32 or two per cent from last year.

Based on the same assessment, municipal taxes in Ward 4 (Harrow) will be \$1,463, up \$37 or 2.5 per cent, and \$1,415 in Wards 2 and 3 (Colchester

North and South), up \$42 or about three per cent.

Town Treasurer Donna Hunter said that the major influences in the budget increases for the base mill rate included higher policing costs and increases to wages and salaries for town employees.

Hunter said that more than half of the increase in taxes, about \$23, was due to a 13 per cent increase in garbage and organic tipping fees that are not controlled by the town. Increased work on roadside ditching accounted for an increase of the rural mill

rate by \$5, she said.

At the regular meeting that followed budget talks, Ward 3 Coun. Paul Innes said that increasing costs associated with having a municipal police force were causing significant budget woes.

The Essex Police budget

for 2007 increased by \$300,000, bringing the total to about \$4.25 million. This cost is high compared to Kingsville, which has a contract with the Ontario Provincial Police at a cost of \$2.73 million, a difference of over \$1.5 million.

"When you do the math, there's something wrong, I mean very wrong," said Innes, who complained that Essex was paying much higher costs for policing than neighbouring municipalities - making deep cuts necessary in other areas of the budget.

"We've ripped the heart out of every budget item, removing funds needed to maintain infrastructure," said Innes, who made notes of the significant cuts to the public works department and capital projects.

"That is why we have a crumbling road situation, insufficient bridges, areas that require emergency repairs just to keep them safe," said Innes. "We have these problems because we have sacrificed all for policing."

Major cuts affecting the town's infrastructure included the \$345,346 reconstruction and repaving of Alice Street in Ward 1 and the \$68,576 repave of sections of the 3rd Concession in Ward 3, both originally approved for 2007 as part of the town's 10-year capital road plan.

In addition, the public work's sidewalk fund was slashed \$10,000 to \$70,000, and funds for bridge and culvert work were reduced by \$100,000.

The town will be releasing details of a public meeting to adopt the 2007 budget, which is tentatively scheduled for Monday, April 16.

For a \$200,000 home in Ward 1, the county tax increase is 1.8 per cent, up \$13.85 to \$788.40. Education taxes remain unchanged at \$528. The total municipal tax bill will be just over \$2,897.

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