

Town's reserve fund tapped to hold line on taxes

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Staff Reporter

In order to bring the residents a zero per cent budget for 1994, Whitchurch-Stouffville officials are "tapping" deep into the town's healthiest savings account, said the town's administration head this week.

Chief administrative officer Merlin Dewing said politicians are spending "big money" in many different areas this year and are using the town's biggest reserve account to fund the projects.

"(Council) is committed to zero, but at the same time they're taking a substantial amount from the park trust fund to do it. They could be over-utilizing it and using that account to balance the budget," Dewing said.

Dewing said the town's park trust reserve account, which had a balance of about \$1.1 million before budget talks began, is dwindling fast as officials scramble to meet zero while making improvements and additions staff says it can't do without.

But Dewing says he wants councillors to be aware that while using money from park trust might be the answer in the short-term; it could put them behind the financial eight-ball in the future.

He says park trust funds are supposed to be used for recreational purposes, but the definition of what is recreational use becomes "wider and wider" to justify using the money.

By the time the budget is finalized in April, council may have taken more than \$600,000 from the account, Dewing said.

"It may not be fiscally appropriate to tap the park trust account to offset current operations. The dollars are there to enable the town to provide recreational facilities on a larger scale," he said.

Dewing said he predicts council will break a sweat when they see what they've already allocated for capital when they view the operational costs side by side.

"They'll come to the realization that something has got to go," he said.

Roads being ignored to hold a zero budget

Whitchurch-Stouffville politicians are allowing the town's biggest investment to go to pot and things are only going to get worse, says the town's top staffer.

In an interview last week, Merlin Dewing said roads are a municipality's most important asset and are being ignored at the Stouffville budget table, he said.

While he admits there are barely enough funds to go

around especially since federal and provincial grants are dwindling, Dewing said roads seem to be the last area of improvement or priority.

"Roads are our biggest singular investment and they need more attention," he told *The Tribune* during a discussion on budget priorities and expenditures.

Dewing said the town has set aside about \$350,000 for road repairs for 1994 "to maintain the status quo," but admitted local roadways are falling apart at a rapid pace.

"There is maybe \$12 million worth of deficiencies out there, multi-million dollars worth. What we're doing now is band-aid repairs to our roads" to suit the budget, he said.

"We're corkscrewing down to the middle and putting off the inevitable," Dewing said.

And since council is determined to meet a zero per cent budget increase for 1994, the situation will likely get worse,

he added.

"To maintain zero, we don't have a whole lot of ability to do anything big," Dewing said.



Photo: LORI EMMERSON

Putting the pressure on Bhaduria

About 1,000 residents from the Markham Whitchurch-Stouffville riding turned out for a rally Sunday afternoon at the Markham Civic Centre to organize a petition to oust MP Jag Bhaduria. Among those at the event was the riding former MP, Conservative Bill Attewell, back row centre.

Fire department has wish list

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replace all 20 of the requested units, so will recommend next year's council set aside money in 1995 to complete the set.

Stouffville's fire department will also get 36 new fire helmets at a cost of \$5,500, a fire hose tester worth \$2,800, signal light changing equipment during emergency use worth \$17,000 and a new TV and VCR worth \$1,800 for training purposes.

And that's just the capital portion of the budget. Officials are set to discuss the operation side of the administration dur-

ing an April budget meeting.

"Things could still change when officials look at operating. That's when they see the overall picture," Dewing said.

Officials have allocated "big money" in a lot of different areas so far and will have to do some cutting when they see the way the budget is shaping up, Dewing predicts.

"When they look at everything, council will come to the realization that something has got to go," he said.

Another major expenditure this year will go to build a brand new baseball diamond at the Ballantrae Park including bleachers and lights.

The town has also set aside

\$20,000 to upgrade the town pool, including fencing and a solar blanket.

Officials agreed to inject \$350,000 into roads, but Dewing says that is barely the tip of the iceberg, citing "multi-million dollar deficiencies" to local roads, which he says don't receive enough attention.

The town will also buy a \$100,000 front-end loader and a \$62,000 recycling truck which Miller Waste operates on the town's behalf under its \$2 million waste contract.

He says the town has to own its own recycling vehicle in order to receive funding from government agencies under improved 3R's initiatives.

Petition campaign begins

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receiving a standing ovation.

Richard Van Seters of the Coalition for Fair Representation in Parliament urged residents to recruit neighbors, friends and colleagues to sign petitions. The citizens coalition hopes to collect at least 40,000 names, more than the number of votes cast for Bhaduria, before the next public meeting Feb. 20.

Coalition spokesperson Kathleen Freeman said Bhaduria no longer has the respect of his constituents. "As taxpayers we strongly object to paying the

salary of an ineffective, independent member of parliament who no longer has our support or our trust."

Residents asked how to ensure a politician with a closet full of skeletons isn't elected in this riding or elsewhere in Canada. Many believed members of Bhaduria's party knew of his letter-writing penchant before the election.

The meeting launched a door-to-door petition campaign endorsed by the local Liberal, Progressive Conservative and Reform riding associations.



Photo: LORI EMMERSON

Totems opens

Artist Marilyn Campbell, left, discusses her works with Rick Brooker, centre, and Don Jensen during the opening of her show Totems at the Latham Gallery. The show features carving and acrylic paintings.



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