

WHERE ALL THE MONEY GOES...

A Guide to the Municipal Budget Process in Whitchurch-Stouffville

It's that time of year again. The time when dollars are weighed against 'sense.'

It's an often fateful time for many homeowners who fear yet another hike on their municipal tax bill.

It's the time when local politicians decide how much money it will take to run the town effectively, and still offer a level of service residents expect.

The time of year when projects are scrutinized; costs are analyzed; and the day-to-day services provided to ratepayers are examined through a financial microscope.

\$125 per year for firefighting

It costs \$700 every time the trucks leave the Main St. station



Mrs. White shuts the patio doors behind her and heads to the side of the house. She unwinds the garden hose, turns on the water and begins to nourish her backyard vegetable garden. She doesn't take much notice when the shrilling fire alarm sounds in the distance, nor does she pay much heed to the amount of water it takes to fight an average fire.

Mrs. White continues to water her carrots.

Taxpayers pay out an alarming \$700 each time the Whitchurch-Stouffville Volunteer Fire Department leaves the station. Last year, it cost homeowners \$689,000 to effectively run the fire department from manpower, house-cleaning to equipment repair costs.

Add another \$125 onto Mrs. White's yearly tax bill - whether she requires the service or not.

Her water bill is yet another story.

What should be cut? Which projects could be shelved for a more economically viable year? Which services are in greatest demand?

Priorities are pitted against tax dollars, and services are pitted against services.

Local officials spend months in private session just before the budget is announced, making financial decisions that will affect each and every Whitchurch-Stouffville taxpayer for the next 12 months - sometimes for the next five years.

The first steps in the budget process begin to show signs of life in the late summer or early fall when council approves a five-year capital forecast in principle, said town assistant treasurer, Holly Kirby.

Kirby, a certified management accountant has been with the town for more than three years and works alongside finance director Ed Blackburn.

Kirby called the five-year forecast a "planning document" which maps out the town's main priorities and expenditures, and acts as an economic guideline for the next five years. The budget is comprised of two portions: capital and operations. Capital items are the town's fixed assets such as infrastructure, (water, sewers, etc.) big ticket items, such as a fire truck, major construction and large repairs.

The operational portion consists of



Mr. Jones hears the familiar brakes of the Miller Waste garbage truck as they grind to a halt in front of his house - it's a stop that costs him about \$122 a year on his municipal tax bill.

The Jones family throws two, sometimes three green bags each week to the curb for pickup. It doesn't seem like much, but when you consider the average Stouffville family of four contributes more than 150 bags each year to landfill, it's easy to see how municipal costs can mount. Whitchurch-Stouffville, with a population of just under 18,000 - with nearly 5,600 households, contributed nearly 6,000 tonnes of trash to the Vaughan-area Keele Valley landfill site last year.

In fact, Stouffvillites send more than 17,000 bags of trash to landfill each year. In 1992, ratepayers spent \$519,000 for a curbside collection service and paid another \$895,000 to dump its trash in the landfill - a \$1.4 million gross expenditure. The town received a \$730,000 tipping fee rebate from Metro Toronto, leaving local taxpayers with a \$684,000 trash tab.

the 'upkeep,' maintenance and "things we have to spend" to protect town assets, such as snow plowing, grass cutting, repairs and salaries.

The treasury staff works with the other department heads to create a first draft forecast.

"We have to weigh the capital costs with the operation costs - the two go hand in hand," Kirby said.

Kirby said treasury department "plays the advocate," challenging the viability of each item or project presented by department heads.

"We have to be sure that what (staff) is putting forward is reasonable - and we let them know what the bottom line will be," Kirby said.

She said department heads are well aware of the "economic restrictions" before they submit their budget needs and must justify any service level change they want to initiate.

The town's 1992 capital budget was set at \$2.3 million, with the "lion's share"

coming from roads (\$345,000,) and recreation (\$480,000), Kirby said.

"This \$2.3 million gross budget is not all raised from taxation. We receive revenue from grants, park trust, lot fees, and from putting money away to provide for the fact that things need replacing," Kirby maintains.

She said the town's fire truck proposal is one of the big ticket items that has "made its way through the process."

"It's worked its way closer and closer,

through the forecasts, and is now recognized as a current need," she said.

Kirby said municipal taxes are raised when there is no other alternative or way to initiate revenue.

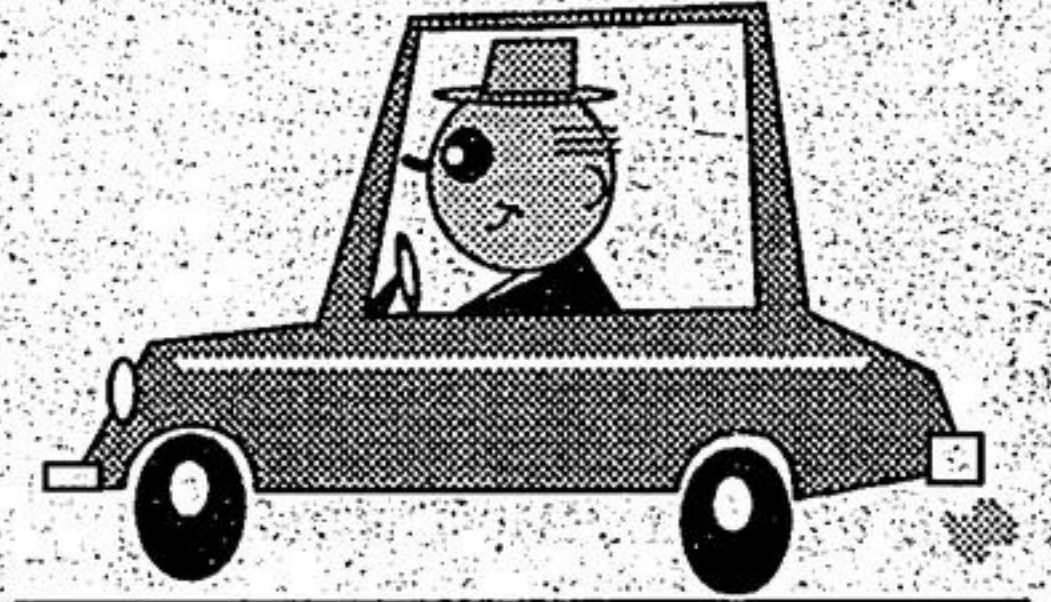
"If the number of dollars needed is more than the mill rate dollars generated, we either have to increase the mill rate or reduce the number of dollars spent," Kirby said.

The town issued 6,164 residential, commercial and business tax bills this month. She said \$45,000 is generated for each percentage the town increases taxes. Department heads submitted their first draft budgets Monday and will rework the figures if necessary and come back with revisions, she said.

"Everything we do is scrutinized and objectively examined. Treasury and the other departments play a very important role in the budget process, but council makes the final choice," Kirby said.

Mr. Brown leaves work and begins his familiar drive home. He takes the usual route, but in his haste fails to notice improved culverts installation - initiated by the Stouffville works department. Mr. Brown may not realize it, but local road repairs alone will mean another \$300 added to his tax bill for repairs, maintenance and construction. In fact, Whitchurch-Stouffville taxpayers spent \$1.6 million last year on roads, including winter maintenance, grading, culvert installation, ditching, snowplowing and garbage clean-up.

Stouffville taxes are spent to maintain and repair about 160 kilometres of local roadways each year.



\$300 per year for roads
Stouffville taxes are used to maintain 160 km of local roads

Story by Tracy Kibble. Illustrations by Andrew Mair

York Region will need \$75 million for service swap

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less than what other regions

and municipalities pay their civil servants.

He added the region's operating costs have been kept in

check at one-tenth of one per cent. York's school board has not announced its finalized budget, but the board is talking of a 12 per cent hike.

Municipal budgets are expected to be as close to zero as possible, but will not be finalized until next month.

Forhan said if plans to swap welfare with roads service next

year with the province gets approved, ratepayers will see a 1994 tax hike of up to 20 per cent to offset an expected \$16 million annual loss.

York politicians say they would need another \$75 million a year to keep the added roads service up to par if Queen's Park approves the services swap.

Obituary

Reta Assinck fondly remembered by many

A well-known Jack Lake resident has passed away.

Reta Ann Assinck (nee Wagg) passed away peacefully at her home on Jack Lake Jan. 27. Mrs. Assinck had just had her 64th birthday Sept. 2 when she took a heart attack on Sept. 5. She was in intensive care for eight days in Civic Hospital in Peterborough for five to six weeks before returning home. She went steadily downhill after that owing to a problem with sugar diabetes and heart trouble which resulted in gangrene. In May of 1989, the Assincks moved to Jack Lake from Peter St. in Markham to the dream home they had built. Never to really enjoy the home, Mrs. Assinck soon developed heart problems.

Reta Wagg married Tony Assinck 41 years ago on Nov. 22, 1951. The couple had four children; Frank, Walter, Andy and Pauline. There are eight grandchildren; four boys and four girls.

She leaves two sisters Margaret Hill, and Dorothy Wagg, two stepsisters Eunice Caulfield and husband Harry, and Betty Morgan and husband Mike. One step brother Fred Woodland and wife Eleanor, and five nieces and two nephews. She rested at O'Neill's Funeral Home and the funeral was held at Bloomington Associ-

ated Gospel Church.

There will be spring burial in the Bloomington Cemetery across the road from the church. The family thanks those who helped Reta Assinck for the last two years while she was in a wheelchair and walker and to those who visited at the funeral services.

Cliff has watched town grow

(From Page 1)

said. "The best move I ever made in my life was to get the hell out of Toronto." Aiken always enjoyed his customers, and prided himself in being able to look after even the most demanding individuals. "I always used to love my customers. Anyone can sell to any easy customer, but I used to love to sell to difficult customers."

Aiken would insist that his customers call him at home after hours in the event of an emergency prescription and remembers some middle-of-the-night calls. Aiken has witnessed much change in his 33 years in Stouffville, but feels the town has progressed for the better.

"There were only 2,900 people here when we came. I think they've done an excellent job in developing the town."

The Aikens, who will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary next year, have remained in Stouffville since selling the business. The couple has four children and six grandchildren.

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