

Town council to tackle 12% tax hike next week

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 At the March budget meeting, councillors had reservations about the 12-

per-cent increase, the largest in eight years, and urged staff to submit another budget in the 5 to 7-per-cent range.

Councillor Clyde Smith said he didn't see why there should be a 12-per-cent tax increase after all town departments except development services received a 10.9-per-cent increase last year.

"If our goal is to maintain services, we should be able to have less than a 12-per-cent tax increase," he said.

Several councillors said they had received calls from constituents worried about the proposed tax hike. Mrs. Sherban said she has received only one call.

With councillors trying to keep taxes down, the mayor and staff are considering a number of scenarios.

She is strongly in favour of maintaining the town's

level of services and said "we are working on what kinds of changes and reductions we can make" in preparation for the operating budget meeting April 13. It is in the council chambers, 37 Sandiford Dr. in Stouffville.

A 9.5-per-cent increase would be possible if only four full-time firefighters were added, she said. That level of increase would also involve delaying some road maintenance and repairs until 2005 and 2006.

"We need about \$1.4 million in road repairs and maintenance," she said.

The tax increase could further be lowered to 7.95 per cent if the fire department was presented as a "separate issue on the table," she said.

If councillors could find other savings in other areas and be willing to put off certain projects, I support that", she said. Staff is also looking at cutting waste and increasing efficiencies.

'If our goal is to maintain services, we should be able to have less than a 12-per-cent tax increase.'

Former Ward 4 councillor Cliff Dunkeld wants to see services maintained for all age groups, especially seniors and young people. That said, he added, "If

they can put (the tax hike) down to a single digit, that will be fine with me."

Increases in the residential tax base are slowing down, Mrs. Sherban said, since no additional sewage capacity will be available until after the arrival of the York Durham trunk sewer line (the big pipe), anticipated toward the end of the year. She estimated only about half as many new homes were built in 2003, compared to the previous year.

Residential properties account for 87.6 per cent of municipal taxes collected, while the commercial and industrial sectors add up to 12.4 per cent.

Those sectors grew slightly from 10.8 per cent in 2002.

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