

## MUNICIPAL BUDGET 2006

# TOWN SPENDING HITS RECORD HIGH

### Hiring, road projects prompt \$20M tally

BY HANNELORE VOLPE  
Staff Writer

Whitchurch-Stouffville councillors recommended the largest budget in town history — more than \$20 million — at talks held Monday and Tuesday.

But residents won't know how much tax they'll pay to the municipality until February.

Both the recommended capital and operating budgets, which are about \$3 million higher than last year, would pave the way for hiring 10 new town staff, including five more firefighters, and moving ahead with major roads projects.

*The bone of contention among some councillors was how to pay for additional expenses next year.*

Concerns about additional hiring on an unprecedented level and other expenses led to an unsuccessful call by Councillor Phil Bannon to delay setting the tax rate until year-end figures for 2005 are in.

But that would mean waiting until March or April, making it difficult to hire new staff needed for upcoming projects, town's treasurer and administrator Nick Kristoffy said.

The budget was moved up for hiring purposes and so town staff could go to tender for construction projects and get better quotes.

Hiring plans must be made now, since hiring a junior employee can take up to two months. That increases to six months for senior staff.

The bone of contention among some councillors was how to pay for additional expenses next year.

The 2005 budget surplus should come in at more than \$900,000, Mr. Kristoffy said, and around \$200,000 would be used to offset taxes for residents and businesses.

Some expenses are also being covered by development charges, which are coming in at an unprecedented rate because of burgeoning growth in residential development.

Councillor Rob Hargrave told the Sun-Tribune he favours delaying tax increases and setting up a staffing and departmental review.

He was concerned if the surplus is used to defray taxes, when income from development charges dries up, "you have spent



SUSANNE HILTON: New hirings highlight of next year's budget, councillor says.

your future today."

It will be expensive to maintain facilities that will be funded through development charges, especially when construction starts slow down. As well as less income from this source, the town will also be on the hook for the operating costs and upkeep of the new facilities, he said.

Last year, the municipal tax hike was set at 4.9 percent, but more income than anticipated meant the increase was actually 4.3 per cent, but residents weren't informed of that, Mr. Bannon said.

Mayor Sue Sherban remem-

bered the high municipal tax increase during her first year of office, after the previous council had come in with several zero increase budgets, and the cost-cutting that had to take place.

"Two years ago, we were worried about people being put out of their homes (through high taxes)," Mrs. Sherban said.

The budget will be re-examined in February, she noted, to see how increases will be dealt with and which budget increases are actually necessary for 2006.

Giving the stamp of approval for the new hirings was a high point of the budget, Councillor Susanne Hilton noted.

The extra firefighters give the town 12-hour-a-day coverage by full-timers seven days a week.

Fire service could also be improved in Vandorf and Preston Lake and Hwy. 404 north of Bloomington, when an agreement with York Central Fire Services, operated by Newmarket and Aurora, is completed to cover those areas.

Resident Cliff Dunkeld suggested the administration centre planned for the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum in 2010 be pushed ahead to 2008, a suggestion that found favour with council. The estimated cost would be around \$600,000.

### KEY NUMBERS

- Five more firefighters will be hired, giving the town 12-hour coverage, seven days a week.
- An extra \$100,000 was put into reserves for the Stouffville Arena.
- McCowan Road will be reconstructed starting in the spring from Bloomington Road as far north as possible to Vivian Sideroad at a cost of \$490,000.
- Another \$150,000 has been set aside for downtown revitalization projects which council will decide on later.
- The budget also contains \$150,000 to cover the cost of the town's newly-expanded municipal offices.
- Parks for Musselman's Lake could be in the cards after Councillor Bannon pushed to have \$20,000 put in the budget for a study and \$100,000 earmarked for 2006 and 2007 for acquiring parkland in the area.
- A Ballantrae branch of the library is projected for 2009, with \$951,000 earmarked in that year's budget and another \$10,000 in furnishings.
- A new project in town, Communities in Bloom, received \$7,000 for 2006.
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- Council voted to give the Silver Jubilee Seniors' Club \$15,000 for renovations this year instead of the \$1,000 originally marked in the budget.

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