

York capital budget tops \$1B

Taxpayers could face 2% to 4% tax increase in 2009

BY DAVID FLEISCHER
Staff Writer

The region's biggest ever capital budget was approved by the finance committee last week and goes for council approval Dec. 18. "It went over \$1 billion, that's huge," said Richmond Hill Mayor Dave Barrow, the region's finance committee vice chairperson. You may be wondering how this will impact your tax bill, but that picture will be clearer with the tabling of the draft operating budget, to be reviewed next week as well. That budget is finalized in March. While the region targeted 4 per cent as a high-end possible tax increase, Mr. Barrow estimated it is likely to fall between the mid-tens and high-threes.

This year's capital budget includes \$369.5 million in debt

The capital budget derives less than 6 per cent of its funds from the tax levy with the rest primarily coming from development charges and grants. In the meantime, this year's capital budget includes \$369.5 million in debt, to be paid from future tax levies, wastewater rates and, in particular, development charges. If development slows, levies collected from developers could dry up and that could mean the region needs to look, again, at how it takes on debt loans. The overall total is a marked increase from last year's \$678 million capital plan but is due to several large, long-term projects going

WHERE THE MONEY IS BEING SPENT

- ▶ **RAPID TRANSIT** - \$218.4 million
Extending the Spadina subway and Viva lines along Davis Drive and Highway 7;
- ▶ **YORK REGION TRANSIT** - \$63 million
Purchasing more than 50 buses and construction of a new garage;
- ▶ **ROADS** - \$110.9 million;
Including 84 active major capital projects and road rehabilitation;
- ▶ **WATER** - \$109.8 million including upgrades and a water system for Georgina.

forward. Wastewater projects account for the largest share, followed by rapid transit, which is largely funded by other levels of government. The region also aims to spend just more than \$100 million on road projects, including 84 capital improvements. York Regional Police have requested funds for 12 new cars and 103 replacement vehicles but their biggest project is a new \$80-million building in Aurora. It would house 430 employees from all the investigative units including homicide, emergency response and a forensics lab. "This is the time we make sure all of our expenditures are absolutely necessary," Mr. Barrow said.

Making best of green bin

York Region is looking at how it can help you make the best of your green bin. When the program launched, residents were encouraged to place organic waste in a kitchen container lined by a plastic bag, which could then be transferred to the outside receptacle. Among other things, it provides a re-use for otherwise troublesome shopping bags. However, 15 per cent of the 86,000 tonnes collected from green bins last year were residuals such as plastic film, according to this week's report of the solid waste com-

mittee. The bags have other side effects, including inhibiting the breakdown of some materials. While diapers can go in the bins, they become a processing problem if wrapped into too tight of a ball. Similarly, pet waste goes in the green bin but does not get digested by the system if doubled bagged. Eliminating these objects would save the region money. A recommended scenario of voluntary biodegradable bag use will maintain the existing program but reduce the residual rate by 3 per cent. The region aims to roll out an education program next year.



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