

ANNOUNCEMENT



Markham Mazda is proud to announce that Irene Muir has joined the Markham Mazda Sales Team and brings with her three years of experience selling Mazda. Irene makes her home in Stouffville and welcomes her new friends and neighbours to drop by the dealership for a test drive and learn why now is the best time to own a Mazda.

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8% town tax hike forecast for 2010

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increase is due to the inclusion of a one-time \$9.2-million stimulus package grant the municipality hopes to receive from the federal government.

"If we don't get it, we won't do the projects," said Whitchurch-Stouffville Chief Administrative Officer Dave Cash.

Projects in potential jeopardy if the funding falls through are the reconstruction of McCowan Road from Vandorf to Aurora roads; Rupert Avenue between the Ninth Line and West Lawn Crescent; Maytree Avenue's reconstruction between Tindal to Hawthorn roads and Victoria Street between Main Street and Sunset Boulevard. The latter two projects are also scheduled for water main and sewer reconstruction work.

Phase one, of Memorial Park may also be on the chopping block.

One project not eligible for stimulus package funding is the operations centre for parks, roads and facilities maintenance on Bethesda Road.

However, Whitchurch-Stouffville staff was able to

slash \$2 million from its original budget, which is what helped bring the municipal tax levy down from January's proposed hike of 5.9 per cent, to the final 4.9 per cent.

CAPITAL COSTS

Growth apparently doesn't pay for itself as the 2009 capital budget is \$44.7 million, with \$33 million of it related to growth. The remaining \$11.6 million is for non-growth related projects.

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Projects in the capital budget include the twin-pad arena and new fire hall on Weldon Road, Main Street's widening and the Lebovic Centre for Arts

and Entertainment - Nineteen on the Park, all of which were started in 2008.

"We're right in the middle of our growth spurt, so we have to finish some of the projects we started," Mr. Cash said.

"These things are wonderful to get, but they need to be maintained," Mr. Hargrave said, adding he has repeatedly asked staff to provide a five-year projection of their operating costs, to no avail, he said.

Added Mr. Bannon: "Let's look after our capital cost pay-out now, so operating costs are under control in the future."

While Mr. Emmerson, Mr. Hargrave and Mr. Bannon fail to see eye-to-eye on the 2009 budget, they do all agree that come this time next year, the budget increase will be significantly higher.

Mr. Bannon and Mr. Hargrave anticipate it to be in the eight-per-cent range.

Property taxes not only include the municipal portion, but also Region of York taxes and the Education Tax Rate. The region is currently contemplating a 2.9-per-cent increase, while the province has indicated the education budget will remain status quo.

How your tax rate stacked up to neighbours'

How Whitchurch-Stouffville's tax rate stacked up against other municipalities last year.

2008 municipal tax rates and amounts for a property assessed at \$360,000:

- Georgina - \$2,216.25
- Newmarket - \$1,408.46
- Aurora - \$1,357.73
- East Gwillimbury - \$1,311.30*
- King Township - \$1,182.94
- Whitchurch-Stouffville - \$1,033.29
- Richmond Hill - \$995.81
- Markham - \$973.49**
- Vaughan - \$954.93

*East Gwillimbury recently passed a 1.4-per-cent tax hike for 2009.

**Markham approved a zero-per-cent increase this week.

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Libraries popular spots during bad times

From page 1.

affected by the \$37,680 shortfall include professional activity day and summer reading programs.

"The library now has to revise its budget accordingly," said Whitchurch-Stouffville's director of finance and treasurer Marc Pourvahidi.

The revised amount was based upon a funding formula agreed upon by the municipality and library board last fall, according to Mr. Pourvahidi.

"(It was to) ensure there was consistency with the funding in the future," he said. "At the time, it appeared the (library) board was happy with the formula."

While the board may have been happy, apparently council no longer is as the formula will not be used to calculate future funding for the library.

"Next year we have to come up with a new discussion," Mr. Pourvahidi said. "There was no funding formula approved by council."

The library board will meet on March 5 to discuss its options.

INCREASING MEMBERSHIP

Within the first nine months of 2008, more than 1,300 new people became library card holders, which brought the number of active users to more than 16,000 according to Ms Nordheimer James. That translates into 54 per cent of the town who uses the library.

Circulation materials rose by 17 per cent during the same nine-month period in 2008 from 2007.

The library is anticipating an increase of 1,000 people in 2009, Ms Nordheimer James said.

However, the library is already seeing an increase in the number of materials being checked out. Last month, 14,000 items were borrowed, an increase of eight per cent over January of last year. A 33-per-cent increase in checked-out material also occurred from December to January.

"Libraries become an economic sanctuary in an economic downturn," Ms Nordheimer James noted. "We expected an increase because the population increased, but we didn't expect it to be that much."

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