

Overtime mounting, fire service at 'bare bones', chief tells council

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was at the all-day meeting, took to Facebook to voice her displeasure.

"Unbelievable needing to increase tax +1.5 per cent to save for reserves because the councils have overspent. You will never get that 1.5 per cent off your taxes. Stouffville needs to stop spending and start living within our means. Spend more time and energy bringing business that will help pay for our services and give us some quality jobs. Young people can't afford to live here as it is. Our families are moving to Uxbridge and Mount Albert," she wrote.

The morning was spent dissecting the leisure services budget, which includes the Lebovic Centre for Arts and Entertainment – Nineteen on the Park, museum, operations centre, arenas, pool, parks and special events.

Among the big expenditures for 2016 are the library/leisure centre expansion (\$12.825 million) and phase three of Musselman's Lake Coultrice Park (\$1,987,500).

Memorial Park's fifth phase design budget was approved (\$250,000), as was the aquatic facility (\$100,000) design budget. The second pool will go beside Weldon Road's Stouffville Clippers Sports Complex. Both projects are slated for construction in 2017.

Memorial Park, when completed, will become the municipality's first main accessible park, according to Rob Raycroft, director of leisure services for Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Ward 5 Councillor Iain Lovatt pushed to ensure the timeline for the second pool stay on course, stating, "deferring it a couple of years will only exacerbate the issue. ... It's important to keep it on the front burner."

Raycroft could not provide exact numbers regarding the cost of cleaning up pool foulings, when asked by a councillor, but he did note for a minor fouling it takes four hours to clean and for a major one, it's 12 hours.

"The simple solution is we can't use the pool as a washroom," he said.

"If children are ill, please don't take children to the pool," Raycroft added.

A noted disappointment for the department was SoccerCity. It had expenses of \$526,100 but revenue of \$425,750.

The municipality has an exclusive lease agreement with the facility owner.

"We're not as impressed with the levels of uptake," Raycroft said. "Numbers discussed are not being seen at this time."

Town staff may look at going outside of Whitchurch-Stouffville for renters, he said.

The Strawberry Festival's grant of \$42,130 was approved, but in the future, all organizations requesting grant or donation money of more than \$5,000 will have to provide financial statements for review by the treasurer. Grant approval/denial will still be done by council.

"It's just about accountability, as far as I'm concerned," Lovatt said.

"There has to be clarity on how this money is being dispensed," concurred Ward 1 Councillor Ken Ferdinands, who added it's important to know how much is being spent on salaries.

Latham Gallery requested an additional \$30,000 in funding. There was already \$85,260 earmarked in the budget for the gallery. The gallery ended up with another 10 per cent.

The Mantle site sign and two signs commemorating Capt. Roy Brown were put on the priority list for this year. Brown, who is credited with shooting down the Red Baron, retired to Whitchurch-Stouffville.

The Vandorf ball diamond had its \$60,000 overhaul approved.

As baseball and softball become more popular, the diamond will go into heavy rotation until Bethesda 3 is built, according to Raycroft.

Vandorf Park will get its parking lot paved. Among the fire department's request was the approval for a second fire prevention officer.

The old rule of thumb, according to chief Rob McKenzie is to have one fire prevention officer per 10,000 people. Whitchurch-Stouffville has more than 40,000 residents.

As of November 2015, the fire department

responded to 1,136 calls, with roughly 60 to 65 per cent of them being medical, according to McKenzie. Another 20 to 30 per cent were motor vehicle accidents and 5 to 10 per cent were fire calls.

In 2010, the composite department moved from Level B to A for medical calls. Ward 2 Councillor Maurice Smith questioned being a Level A responder and is expected to ask town staff, during the Feb. 2 council meeting, for a report on it.

McKenzie also noted the fire department is operating with minimal staff.

"We're at the bare bones," he said, noting there are overtime costs because of lieu time, sick days and vacations.

One or two firefighters would make a difference, but not eliminate overtime, he said.

In 2015, Whitchurch-Stouffville firefighters accumulated 4,372 hours of overtime, which cost \$291,000, according to Pourvahidi.

"I'm kind of wondering if we're shooting ourselves in the foot, operating at minimum staff," stated Ward 3 Councillor Hugo Kroon.

The public works budget had \$150,000 approved for removal and replacement of 150 ash trees.

The town's advisory committees had their overall budget increased from \$8,000 to \$15,300. The heritage committee requested \$9,300, primarily for a Capt. Roy Brown commemoration event this summer.

The municipality has a debt of \$35,031,607, with an annual repayment of \$3,731,475.

The debt is funded by development charges (72 per cent) and taxes (28 per cent). This comes to \$2,825 per household.

The province has an annual payment to own source revenue ratio cap of 25 per cent. Last year, council put the municipality's cap at 12.5 per cent.

Grants and donations will be dealt with at the Feb. 16 meeting. It begins at 3 p.m. and is open to the public.



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SATURDAY FEBRUARY 6th

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