

Shelburne residents facing 4 percent tax levy increase as Council admits defeat in 2018 Budget

By Peter Richardson

Shelburne Council gathered for a special budget meeting this past Monday to once again discuss the municipality's 2018 financials. Unfortunately, it's not exactly great news for local residents.

The meeting was organized so that Council could take a second look at the proposed 2018 Budget and attempt to offset the impending levy increase discussed in last weeks report. While Council tried to bring the proposed increase of 4 percent down, they were ultimately unsuccessful, passing the multi-million dollar budget with a 4 percent tax levy increase.

As stated previously, the increase is being driven primarily by the increase in Provincial assessment values, as property values continue to rise across the province. Shelburne is currently experiencing a period of very rapid growth, as indicated by, not only the latest census assessment, but more easily by the rapid increase in housing developments in and around town.

Even our newest Councillor, Steve Anderson, is a recent new arrival, drawn to Shelburne by its small town charm and modest housing prices and cost of living. However, with rapid growth comes a rapid expansion of necessary community services and infrastructure demands, which cannot generally be delayed or postponed and can bring with them a healthy price tag.

While careful long range planning can assure that there is a gradual and timely introduction of cost increases at times, other times the necessary expenditure demands are immediate and not subject to delay. Such are some of the budget items facing the Council, in this years budget deliberations.

The 2018 Budget, as proposed, is a lean one, with very little room for Council to pare it down and despite the aforementioned urgent demands, it is still a tax neutral budget that does not increase the tax rate for 2018, in and of itself.

Staff was diligent in their efforts to achieve this and should be applauded for their efforts. That said, Councillors tried their best on Monday night to attempt to cut whatever they could from it, in an attempt to offset the assessment driven levy increase of 4 percent. One bright light for Council was the announcement by Treasurer Carey Holmes that Reserves were no longer in a negative growth position for 2018. Several tentative figures from the preliminary draft had now been confirmed and this had improved the revenue bottom line for the Town, thus allowing an increase in the transfers to Capital reserves.

Also, the 2018 actual numbers for the OMPF Grant were still unknown, at this time. On the costs side, the actual 2018 CPP changes had still not been confirmed by the CRA, but the WSIB rate has been set for 2018 and is an increase of 4.9 percent over last year. In all, the Reserves were increased by \$259,675.13, placing them back in black for 2018.

At the end of the night, Council was only able to decrease budget expenditures by some \$8,400, but two more opportunities exist for revisions prior to the 2018 document becoming finalized. The first of those will be the presentation to the public next Monday night, during the regular Council meeting.

Looking at expenditures for 2018, that have been driven by the rapid growth of the town, several big ticket items are prominent and also not frequently required. One is the purchase, this coming year, of a new Pumper Truck for the Shelburne Fire Department.

A Pumper will normally last approximately 20 years in service and the current truck is definitely due to be replaced. The Chief had previously brought this matter to Council's attention and the department has been researching the purchase for some time.

Preliminary figures for the new truck were in the range of \$450,000, however the current replacement cost will be approximately half a million dollars. Likewise, the Police Department are faced with several necessary, but infrequent expenditures for the coming year.

One of these, directly related to growth, is the need for a new officer. The Chief expects to hire a cadet, rather than an existing officer from another force and this will require that the individual attend the Ontario Police College and be assigned a training officer after graduation for the first few months of their duties.

The Police Department will also be replacing their handguns in 2018 and moving to the more popular 9mm from their current .40 cal handgun. The chief explained that this was not only because the force's guns are currently reaching the end of their useful life, but also that since the force trains with the OPP, who currently use the 9mm round, it makes sense for our force to carry the same weapon. This will prevent the potential for confusion from having two different rounds on the training range, but also makes the force's ammunition interchangeable with that of the OPP should a situation arise where the two forces are acting jointly in policing a situation.

A final major expense for Shelburne Police Services, will be the purchase of a new cruiser to replace the aging Ford Excursion presently in use. Nevertheless, even here, Chief Moore was able to save the town substantially, by being able to purchase a demonstration cruiser from one of the department's equipment suppliers. This vehicle, equipped with all the latest gear, was used by

the company to showcase their products and is sold at the end of each year to a police department from their client list. Chief Moore requested the current vehicle and since it is technically, a 'used' vehicle, will save the Town a substantial amount over purchasing a new car and then having it outfitted as a police cruiser.

Although Mayor Bennington had hoped that the Budget could yield some substantial cuts, to help offset the assessment driven tax increase of approximately 4 percent, in the end he was resigned to the fact that there was little that could be cut and that due to the rapid growth of the Town, some big ticket items were not going to be negotiable.

Rapid growth brings with it pressing demands on things such as, policing, fire prevention, infrastructure and community programs and these, by nature, increase the cost associated with them.

Mayor Bennington was resigned to this fact, but buoyed by the knowledge that many were also one time expenses, or long term ones, that would not be something that Council would have to deal with repeatedly in the coming years. As he pointed out, Council and staff had done their part by holding the tax rate to the same level as that in 2017, so, the level increase expected, was solely due to the increase in property values and not to Town Council and staff. Basically, it was a case of the resident's investment in a home costing them, in taxes, as they saw it rise in value over the previous year.