

## Transportation costs big factor in County's \$34.2M draft budget

Dufferin County Council will have a hard task in front of them if they want to avoid a large budget increase and upset county taxpayers.

According to the draft budget proposal for 2015 that will go to County Council today (Thursday), councillors could be looking at starting the new term with a 10.7 percent increase over the 2014 budget, equalling \$2.8 million more in spending. This would mean a total budget of \$34,215,829 for county-wide services.

And if Council is determined to reduce the proposed increase, the question remains as to where those services would be cut.

The staff-written draft noted that it was "not unusual for the budget discussions to commence at around the 10% mark," adding that as in most other years the proposed increase could be attributable to "enhancements in capital funding to deal with the ever-growing infrastructure deficit."

The 97-page document includes a proposed \$7.9 million worth of projects to be completed in 2015 for transportation needs alone.

Once revenues are applied to that number "mainly from gasoline tax rebates" the required property tax increase will still be \$5 million, which is more than the full amount of tax support for capital work done in 2014 from all departments combined.

Some of the transportation projects include Public Works plans to rehabilitate two bridges and three culverts in 2015, as well as the resurfacing of 13.5 kilometres of Airport Road (County 18), resurfacing of County 19, and both resurfacing and widening portions of County Road 11, which already saw some work completed on it in the later part of 2014.

According to the notes in the proposal, the capital budget 10-year plan for transportation has already been reviewed and amended several times by staff in efforts to keep the property tax impact to a gradual increase over the period, but with the high cost of transportation projects, that impact will likely reach \$9 million by 2024.

The proposed budget also highlighted two positive changes "one, that the county will see a reduction in Salaries and Benefits for council as a result of having only 13 instead of 14 councillors, and that they will be able to provide an increase to the grant program for the new Wardens Scholarship Program.

About 1.6 percent of the proposed budget increase comes from a proposed \$500,000 donation to the Headwaters Health Care Centre. The donation has been included as a separate item for County Council's consideration, and if rejected, would lower the overall increase.

Waste Collection will also be a topic of interest as part of this year's proposed budget, with the County hoping to see an increase of both their blue box capture rate (from 95 percent to 96 percent), and their green bin capture rate (from 79 to 85 percent) through the County's waste collection programs. The increase in recycling and compost should help decrease the level of garbage, even by a small percentage.

According to budget forecasts, however, this year will be the hardest one over the next few years, taking the brunt of the issues, as the proposed increase should fall to only a 4.6% increase in 2016, and 3.3% in 2018.

The proposed budget will be presented to County Council at their regularly scheduled meeting this evening (Thursday) in the County Council Chambers starting at 7 p.m. Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting, and a regular public question period will be held prior to the presentation.

The draft budget can be downloaded from the home page of [www.dufferincounty.ca](http://www.dufferincounty.ca)

**By Tabitha Wells**