

County Council approves 1.9 percent increase for 2018

By Jasen Obermeyer

Dufferin County Council has approved its 2018 budget which involves a 1.9 percent increase in the county's portion of property tax bills.

For the average Dufferin property assessed at \$400,000, the increase equates to about \$1,556 on the county portion of tax bills next year, an increase of about \$29 compared to this year.

At last Thursday's Council meeting (Nov. 9), the main topic was the discussion and presentation of the proposed 2018 County budget by Dufferin Treasurer Alan Selby.

In his presentation to council, Mr. Selby discussed their revenue and cost of operating stream, proposing a \$1.5 million increase in spending for next year, equating to a 3.61 per cent tax levy compared to last year.

Numbers from Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) show that the County experienced a 1.7 per cent growth in assessment, bringing the tax levy hike down to 2.21 per cent.

To keep figures in line with the rate on inflation, members agreed to withdraw \$106,000 from the county's Rate Stabilization Reserve and add it to the budget, bringing the tax increase further down to 1.9 per cent.

The tax increase remains largely unchanged from the treasurer's original prediction of a two per cent growth, when the budget proposal was presented to council's October meeting.

The \$37 million budget proposes an operating budget of \$29.5 million, an increase of \$622,122, about 2.15 per cent, compared to 2017.

Showing the numbers of the past budgets to council, Mr. Selby said, "Over the course of the four years, we've pretty much passed budgets that work out to more or less bang-on the rate of inflation."

From 2015 to 2018, county council has approved respective tax increases of 0.65 per cent, 3.14 per cent, 1.7 per cent and 1.9 per cent, an average of about 1.85 per cent.

He added that, "What we've accomplished is we've made major strides in capital," which "Council deserves a lot of credit."

The treasurer also showed numbers comparing Dufferin's infrastructure needs with other counties, with Dufferin originally being very low on the list, but having made significant improvements in the infrastructure gap.

"We are not trailing the pack anymore, we are in the pack," Mr. Selby added.

Councillor Jane Aultman, Deputy Mayor of Amaranth, congratulated staff for coming with the budget, and said she is pleased with the numbers.

Warden Darren White told the Free Press the numbers are reasonable, and attributes it to having a "very forward-thinking council."

He added that, since Council projects years into the future and plans for important projects, they don't "want to put our children and our children's children to pay for our mistakes." "Everybody seems to be on the same page."

The budget will be passed as a bylaw at council's December meeting.