

County's draft budget calls for 7 percent tax levy increase

Written By JASEN OBERMEYER

The Dufferin County draft budget for 2019 was presented to council last Thursday by Treasurer Alan Selby, with a projected increase in the tax levy of seven per cent.

Given that the majority of the 14 councillors are new to the county level, or have no prior experience in budget-setting, Mr. Selby explained in detail the process of the budget, and reasons behind the numbers.

"We expect that this budget as it stands is probably not going to go through," he told council.

For the average Dufferin property assessed at \$500,000, it would mean an increase of \$93.16 for property taxes if the budget went through. Last year's budget saw a 1.9 percent tax levy increase.

"We're in shock," quipped Amaranth Mayor Bob Currie.

Mr. Selby explained that the county needs to make up for \$2.5 million in operating costs in the next year, because of a loss of income from provincial transfers "down over \$700,000 from 2018" and several infrastructure and environment projects budgeted for the year.

He added that the county is "heavily reliant and vulnerable" on provincial transfers, while at the federal level, the carbon tax will "consistently add costs to our fuel budgets, our natural gas budgets each year."

He went on to discuss three options for council to reduce the tax increase. One option would be to take money out of reserves to pay for the operating budget increases, which he described as a "Band-aid fix." The second option would be to set a reduction target. The final one would be to cut specific projects and services, describing this one as "painstaking" due to trimming off several items.

This is only the first stage for the 2019 budget. Discussions will be held throughout the month during the county's committee meetings, with a decision on a final budget expected in Council's February meeting.