

Average residential county tax bill to rise \$25 in 2014

Not everyone on county council was totally pleased with changes made to reduce ?scary? hikes to something more palatable for taxpayers in 2014, but the end result of what now amounts to an average \$25 increase in the levy might mean that all municipalities will pay less for waste disposal than they did before the county took over that responsibility.

Those with landfill sites would, however, continue to be burdened with the need to budget for eventual closure of the sites or, as an alternative, to offer the sites for sale.

Not much was said about waste disposal at the meetings at committee and at the council on budget discussions last Thursday except for noting, as previously reported, that waste management costs have reduced as a result of recyclable sales, in part because of the nature of the contract with Green for Life and in part because of the success of the recycling program.

As well, Community Development Chairman Allen Taylor gave a lot of credit to Alyssa Broadfoot for her co-ordination of public information and creation of a 3-award-winning program.

Outside the meetings, however, Treasurer Alan Selby agreed off-handedly with a suggestion that the average household levy of \$25 should mean that the county's levy has not risen on anyone beyond what waste disposal had previously been costing.

?If their taxes are rising, it won't be because of waste management but because of other (costs),? he said.

Related to waste management, Mr. Taylor insisted that ?DEEP is not dead,? although the hoped-for Alter NRG gasification facility has died for lack of investor interest and York Region has been dragging its heels on the planned-for composter.

?Another possibility is that the next council might look at all of York's organics,? he said in defending a reserve for the necessary highway access improvements when Dufferin Eco Energy Park is eventually developed.

However, the consensus of councillors was that \$900,000 should be taken from that reserve for other capital purposes. That fund was money saved from gas tax for the purpose. The county's gas tax share is about \$1.75-million annually, according to Mr. Selby, who said in an interview that there will be no remaining gas tax reserve, so everything starts afresh.

Should the understanding on compost with York become a solid agreement, the road work would become an emergent funding need.

The deletion of work on County Road 12, a \$600,000 item, proved to be controversial.

?It's always roads that get the boot here. I resent that,? said Grand Valley Mayor John Oosterhof. ?We have to do more than (15 km) every year. Take out Stanton. Spend the \$10,000 and take it somewhere until enough money has been raised (to pay for a permanent placement.?

Shelburne Mayor Ed Crewson pondered, ?how often have we called on road reserves (to pay for other things).?

Mono Deputy Mayor Ken McGhee noted that ?there is nothing in the report that looks at new programs. We've already committed the public to a lot of debt (by initiating several projects) all at once.?

On that note, Amaranth Mayor Don MacIver said that ?the hospital is an item that could be left (for a future budget). It's not a critical issue for (Headwaters to receive the money immediately). What is critical is the burden on taxpayers.?

His suggestion didn't gain much traction as others felt the hospital issue should be a priority. Said Amaranth Deputy Mayor Walter Kolodziechuk: ?The donation for Headwaters should be a line issue (within the budget).?

An early budget item for the Stanton Hotel raised eyebrows around the table, but it might have been worse as Museum Curator Wayne Townsend interjected that he would feel comfortable if it were \$500,000 ? his earlier estimate of the ultimate restoration costs in total.

But CASSH, the Community Association to Save Stanton Hotel, has said from the get-go that Mr. Townsend's estimate is exaggerated. CASSH is committed to continuous fundraising. Its plan entailed moving the hotel away from Airport Road and 5 Sideroad to the museum property at minimal cost until more funding, including a possible Trillium grant, became available.

So how did the cost of a simple move become \$250,000, the Committee wondered.

CAO Sonya Pritchard explained, ?the reason it's so high is council wants it on its final location. A significant amount of work needs to be done at that site. It could be moved to a different site at the museum.? She said Victor Snow had suggested a different site.

Mr. Snow is a Dufferin resident and specialist in historic restorations. It was he who had discovered the historic value of the structure.

Mayor Oosterhof, who chairs the museum board, wasn't pleased that the building might be placed, however temporarily, in some corner of the property.

But the Committee opted for a temporary move to reduce the Stanton budget by \$200,000.

By Wes Keller