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Export date: Sat Oct 31 18:49:30 2026 / +0000 GMT

County approves $52.7 million budget with nearly 4 per cent levy increase

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Dufferin County officials believe this year's budget will stay the course toward its objectives even as it puts fiscal responsibility at the fore. The county inked its 2026 operating and capital budget during a special meeting on Feb. 11. The spending plan has residents of the county's eight municipalities pay an additional $16.20 for every $100,000 of assessed property value. That levy is in addition to individual municipal and education taxes.

The initial draft budget, which would have kept services and programs on par with the previous year, had an almost seven per cent increase after accounting for 1.17 per cent growth.

The total tax levy to support service delivery in the approved budget is $52,705,255. It results in a net taxpayer impact of 3.88 per cent after growth on the county's portion of the tax bill.

Aimee Raves, the county's finance manager and treasurer, said Dufferin County aims to advance its Corporate Strategic Plan, but not all goals are achievable within current financial constraints.

?As a result, some initiatives have been deferred or scaled back, and sustaining existing programs and services remains challenging,? she said.

The levy includes a $7,910,244 capital investment toward the purchase or replacement of assets, strengthening the county's financial position, and preparing for future contingencies, as well as operating, capital, and special initiatives.

?The 2026 budget maintains essential county services and programs, supports priority initiatives under the county's strategic plan, and introduces some items that will allow the county to invest in the community's future,? according to a press release.

?The county will continue to work to achieve important plan objectives while keeping fiscal responsibility top of mind and mitigating the financial impact on Dufferin taxpayers.?

Money has been earmarked to support the Health and Human Services Hub and to design and construct a new operations centre. The county will work toward implementing its housing strategy and the Road Safety Master Plan.

Lisa Post, the county's warden and Orangeville's mayor, said Dufferin County finds itself in the same financial straits as other communities in Ontario and throughout Canada. That is, all levels of government are challenged to balance strategic objectives with fiscal responsibility.

The 2026 budget will help the upper tier address housing and homelessness, health, and community safety while keeping financial sustainability top of mind.

Sonya Pritchard, the county's CAO, said the spending plan outlines some of the challenges faced at the upper tier.

?With a strong focus on mitigating the financial impact for our taxpayers, we will continue to invest in Dufferin's future and provide the services and programs that our community members rely on,? Pritchard said.