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Draft Budget cuts lower tax rate

Chair of Finance for the Town of Shelburne, Councillor Randy Chambers led Council in Draft budget discussions at a special meeting November 16th. Town staff including Treasurer Carol Sweeney and Deputy Treasurer Carey Holmes presented the draft to Councillors who worked through the dinner hour passing motions that would tighten expenditures and lower the tax rate from a projected increase of 3 per cent to 2 per cent for 2016.

As the Chair of Finance, Councillor Chambers says he has three roles: to provide advice and guidance to staff as they prepare a draft budget for Council's consideration; to ensure that Council has a good understanding of the draft budget and comprehend the implications; and to help adjudicate the deliberation of the draft budget with Council. Chambers said that at the special budget meeting, ?this meant ensuring that each member of Council had a fair and equitable opportunity to bring forth and debate any changes that they would like to see made to the draft budget.?

Although Councillors added an additional $25,000 in expenditures, as a result of the working meeting Monday night, they found $112,039 in reductions, for a savings difference of $87,039 from when the night began. Most of the $25,000 in increased expenses, $20,000, was designated for improvements to Town sidewalks which are making accessibility increasingly difficult and even dangerous for those travelling in wheelchairs and with other mobility challenges.

Mayor Ken Bennington, in his bid for additional funds for sidewalk improvements, reminded Councillors of the wheelchair challenge he participated in earlier in the year, ?I hope we can attack some of the issues,? said the Mayor. Councillor Walter Benotto supported the Mayor saying, ?We've been putting this issue off for too long and not keeping up with maintenance.? The motion to increase funds for repairs passed unanimously. The additional $5000 in expenditures is earmarked for parks and recreation requirements and improvements.

As a result of the $87,000 in budget adjustments November 16th, Council passed a resolution to decrease the tax rate increase from 3 per cent to 2 per cent and to place an additional $30,000 into reserves.

Councillor Chambers told the Free Press, ?In regards to budget adjustments that were made, I was frankly hoping to achieve additional savings that could be placed into our diminishing reserves, but overall I believe that it was a very productive night of deliberation by Council.?

There will be a Public Meeting to present the draft budget on November 23rd at 7 p.m. in the Town Hall. This meeting will provide time for public debate and discussion with Council and staff before the budget is passed. Randy Chambers encouraged ?residents to attend, ask questions and to voice their opinions.? He said, ?Council has always acted in the best interest of its residents, but without public input or feedback the decision making process is missing a key component.?

By Marni Walsh