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Shelburne Council kicks off line-by-line review of 2020 budget

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Monday night's special budget meeting saw Council go through the draft budget department by department, but saw no substantial changes to the original document. In fact, additions were made as opposed to subtractions, and although they did not raise the tax levy from its current 5.5 percent increase, as established in the draft, it did raise a few other things.

Dog owners will pay more for their tags in 2020, as will anyone caught illegally parking on Town roads and streets. Dog tags will go up by the cost of living, rounded up to the nearest dollar amount, which is a 2 percent increase for 2020, while parking fines have been quadrupled, from $10 to $40 per offence. The parking increase was long overdue, as rates had not been increased for years and Shelburne was known as the cheapest parking centre in the County.

Planning & Development

Council began budget deliberations with the Planning and Development Department and before going into the 2020 budget, placed the 2019 surplus, of $221,900 into the Development Reserve, to be used in 2020 to complete projects not finished in 2019. They also allotted $30,000 from reserves, to be used to develop the Fiddle Park Master Plan. As Fiddle Park is being discussed for multiple uses and events, it was deemed essential to develop a master plan to guide the park's development.

Coun. Lynda Buffet asked when the last time was, that development charges were reviewed, and was told by Town Planner Steve Wever they were re-evaluated annually. Coun. Walter Benotto then asked if the Town really needs a Senior Planner, such as Mr. Wever, to be doing all the leg work for the Town's planning.

He also noted that Clerk Jennifer Willoughby needed to be removed from working on planning issues, so as to devote her time to being the Clerk. CAO Denyse Morrissey noted that Mr. Wever actually did not do many of the things noted by Coun. Benotto, and that staff was in discussions with Mr. Wever's firm to facilitate the Town having a planning co-ordinator, on staff, to facilitate many of the things currently handled by the clerk and to lessen Mr. Wever's load as well. Mr. Wever also mentioned that a junior staffer had been hired by his firm to handle much of the day to day issues involved.

The CAO explained that any person hired would be paid from a part of the Planning Budget, now designated for Mr. Wever's firm, GSP and would therefore not impact the overall budget figures negatively. Deputy Mayor Steve Anderson clarified that the individual would be paid partly from the GSP budget item and partly from the portion currently being done by the Clerk. In essence, a realignment of funds as opposed to an increase in expenses.

Economic Development

Next up, was the Economic Development Committee budget lines. Treasurer Carey Holmes noted that the money for the proposed Gateway and Wayfareing signage shown in the 2020 budget, was already set aside and CAO Morrissey explained that no Gateway signs were planned until after the developments on the eastern and western ends of town were completed.

The new Wayfaring signage will replace all the existing signs. EDC Co-ordinator Carol Maitland explained that the new signs will be more informative and will point out where various sites or facilities are located.

She also noted that the Trails and Cycling Master Plan is underway, but that no timeline has ben established, pending financing from federal and provincial grant applications etc. Deputy Mayor Anderson asked if bar codes will be placed on the signage in order for people to scan them and receive further information. Carol said the technology does exist and could be incorporated.

Treasurer Carey Holmes said write offs for 2020 were left at 2019 levels, however, if certain appeals go through they could

substantially increase. She requested that $50,000 from the 2019 surplus be added to reserves to offset this potential eventuality. She also informed Council that as of 2 p.m. on Monday afternoon, the Town had been notified that their annual insurance premium would be increased by an incredible 41 percent This dramatic increase was precipitated by the volume of and size of claims recorded in 2019. The largest of these, being a $3 million lawsuit brought against the Town, by an insurance company, over the most recent fire at the wood processing plant in the west end of town. CAO Denyse Morrissey said that Staff were looking at ways to reduce this increase, by perhaps increasing their deductible amount from the current $15,000 and looking at changing the insurance coverage in town.

She explained that one of the Town's issues was that all of the various boards of management, such as Fire and the Library Boards, are currently covered under the Town policy. However, the Town has no control over the actions of these various Boards and cannot therefore control their risk factors. It was suggested that it may be possible, to have each Board secure their own insurance coverage, thus mitigating the risks to the Town overall.

Deputy Mayor Anderson mused that perhaps these higher risk Boards should be dropped from the coverage and requested to know who they were. The CAO stated that the largest, but by no means only driving force for the increase, currently, was the ongoing $3 million claim over the Fire Department.

Upon investigation, it has been discovered that this lawsuit, is entirely the efforts of another insurance company to mitigate it's losses from the fire in question and that the actual property owner is not involved and is in fact still working with the Fire Service to ensure his company is totally compliant with regulations and able to safely carry on business. At this time, it has not been possible to reach the assigned insurance adjuster for further clarity in the matter, but efforts to do so are ongoing.

The Deputy Mayor asked if Staff were looking into reviewing the insurance coverage and provider and was informed that yes they would be, but not this year. The CAO also explained that because of the make up of our Fire Board and the fact that the Fire Hall is wholly owned by the Town, it may be difficult for the Board to secure it's own insurance coverage. The Treasurer added that General Liability this year is up by 71 percent.

Mayor Wade Mills noted that contrary to how things had been done in previous years, the general costs for maintenance, upkeep, heating and cooling of the Town Hall would now be split 50/50 with the Shelburne Police Service. In the past, all these costs were attributed to the Town. The Mayor went on to say that this was simply a realignment of costs and would not affect the overall bottom line of the budget.

Councillor Benotto requested that the Town purchase two more of the flashing speed signs that are seen about the town. The $9,200 cost plus the annual data storage fee of $400 each, tomb taken from the Public Works Safety Devices Budget. He explained that these appeared to reduce speeding when in place , but that upon their being moved, speeding increased. His rational was to have the ability to leave some of the signs permanently in place on streets that were prone to speeders. The Deputy Mayor suggested that this be held off pending definitive proof that they were reducing speeds, at which juncture the Treasurer and CAO stated that they were accessing the data collected and that on Main Street, in October, 194,000 vehicles used the street and fully 54% were speeding!

Following review of the Public Works budget, the issue of Cemetery fees was brought up. It was noted that it was less expensive to be buried in Shelburne, than Orangeville and that ninth GTA, fees were substantially higher. CAO Morrissey said that the fees charged for burial space, had to be inline with the community, but that Staff could certainly look into them.

Mayor Mills next suggested that $20,000 be set aside from the Parks and Recreation Reserves, to begin the process of redesigning Jack Downing Park as suggested ninth Town Community Improvement Plan. As the gateway into downtown, the park was the first thing visitors see and Council was unanimous in agreeing that it needed to be redeveloped and made into a statement piece for Shelburne. The idea would be to make a go to venue for both visitors and townsfolk, with a new pavilion and seating as well as gardens and walkways.

Further with to regards Parks and Recreation, the Deputy Mayor requested that Staff investigate the cost of a tennis court in KTH

Park, stating that he could not see how it could possibly cost $100,000 to build a tennis court. The CAO explained that many factors affect the price of a court, from the type of surface to ground preparation and drainage, but that Staff would investigate. Councillor Wegener, who previously had moved the increase in dog tag revenues, then suggested that a further $20,000 be set aside for the development of a dog park, in town. This would come from the new Parks and Recreation levy and from reserves. She mentioned that this was a feature often requested by dog owners in Shelburne and CAO Morrissey stated that Staff has already done a study as to suitable locations and the costs of construction. She stated that the main expense was the right type of fencing, that was both durable and strong enough to withstand the playfulness of the dogs, especially the larger ones.

At the end of the evening, the Mayor noted that he was happy to see that the overall levy increase of 7.54% has remained the same and that some additional expenses and revenues had been achieved.