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Treasurer presents budget highlights to council

A public review of the budget, held in Council Chambers on Monday, February 9th was poorly attended by ratepayers. Town Treasurer, Carol Sweeny presented 2015 budget highlights to Shelburne Council.

Diverse highlights in the Treasurer's presentation included a 0% increase to property taxes; the tax rate will remain the same as it was in 2014, any increase in property tax would be assessment related. The Municipal Assessment Corporation (MPAC) re-evaluates the value of all properties in the province every four years. ?If the value of a given property increases during that re-assessment year,? said Sweeny, ?the increased value is phased in by 25% each year over the four year assessment cycle. Due to this phased in assessment increase, a home in Shelburne with an average assessment of $267,000 will experience an assessment related increase of 1.5 % or $29.26 on the municipal portion of their bill in 2015.?

Sweeney reports ?the cost to manage new development projects and to co-ordinate and evaluate a crucial Water Inflow and Infiltration Project are the two drivers in the increased Planning Department costs. The overall operating costs for the Town will increase by 8%.

Ontario Municipal Partnership Funding for the Town will go down $145,000 from 2014; this is money ?the town has always allocated the money to the general operating budget to offset the pressures on the tax rate,? says Sweeney. The Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund (OMPF) is the Province's main transfer payment to municipalities.

4.2 million dollars is allocated for Ann, Muriel and Susan Streets. $1.2million is coming in a provincial grant. The Treasurer says the balance of the project will be funded by reserves, a small portion from Development Charges, and a loan. ?The project encompasses a complete reconstruction of those streets both above and below grade,? says Sweeny, ?including the re-placement of water and sewer lines, road re-reconstruction and bringing the streets up to current urban standard with the inclusion of storm sewers and sidewalks.?

The report detailed that the design work for the Hyland Park ball diamond upgrades was completed in 2014 and the cost to implement the design work in 2015 will be $340,000. 100,000 dollars is budgeted for the crosswalk signalization of Main and William Streets to be completed in 2015. 1.2 million dollars in Town reserves is ?earmarked for cash flow purposes, some for emergencies, but most are earmarked to fund future capital projects that would otherwise have to be funded from the tax base,? says Sweeny.

Capital expenditures in 2015 include $3.7 million that is budgeted for new well #7. Sweeny reports, ?1.1 million will be funded by a grant with the balance being funded by a long term loan.?

Residents will see a 5% water and sewer rate increase this year as per the five year plan. Currently the combined water/sewer cost to an average family is $52.50 per month; in 2015 that cost will increase to $57.50.

2.2 million dollars will be left in water and sewer reserves after the 2015 capital draws have been removed. Carol Sweeny says, ?These are savings, not only for emergencies, but to help fund future water and sewer capital projects such as a $1 million dollar additional water storage unit and $1 million dollar sewage filter replacement project that will be required over the next few years.?

Beyond the budget discussions, Council had a heavy agenda Monday night. Of particular interest for fiddle fans was a report from the Fiddlefest Entertainment Gardens Sub-Committee on their first meeting. The previous week, the Sub-Committee examined the pros and cons of refocusing their resources in a new direction to best support Fiddlefest and decided that there would be no Town supported Entertainment Gardens in 2015. Mayor Bennington says, ?Much more discussion is required to determine our path forward.?

By Marni Walsh