

Aurora tax bills set to rise 3.1 per cent in 2019

By Brock Weir

The budget numbers are in, and the average Aurora homeowner can expect to see their tax bills increase by \$202.28.

Council approved the Town's Operating, Capital and Water budgets last Tuesday night.

On the municipal portion of your tax bill, residents can expect to see a rise of 3.3 per cent, which breaks down to an increase pegged at 2.3 per cent inflation, plus a further one per cent for fiscal strategies (infusion to reserves) to address infrastructure and other issues.

This 3.3 per cent increase translates to an increase of \$79.71 on the municipal portion of the tax bill for the average home assessed at \$800,000.

The Town's portion of the total tax bill includes funding for the Town, the Aurora Public Library and the Central York Fire Services, as well as contributions to infrastructure rehabilitation and replacement.

But, the Town's portion of your tax bill is only one component impacting your bottom line.

When tax increases at the Regional level, as well as a static contribution to education are included, residents will face an overall tax increase of 3.1 per cent, representing a \$202.28 increase to the average \$800,000 property.

"I am proud that staff and Council were able to work collaboratively to produce a budget that maintains the excellent level of service the Town provides to our residents while remaining fiscally responsible," said Mayor Tom Mrakas following last week's Council meeting. "This budget also represents the first year of our phase-in for operating costs related to the new Library Square and I am thrilled we've been able to accommodate that exciting project with minimal impact to taxpayers."

Indeed, the 2019 Operating Budget includes the first of a three-year phase-in of operating costs related to Library Square, along with contributions to infrastructure, the final phase-in of increased costs for waste management related to the Town's contract with Green for Life (GFL), and the continued reduction of the Town's reliance on development-driven revenues.

But it was costs related to the new Library Square redevelopment which garnered the most chatter at last week's Council meeting.

"I am going to be voting against the majority of this

just as a kind of bookmark in terms of expressing my desire, as I have expressed before, for more information to satisfy myself and my comfort level moving forward," said Councillor John Gallo, echoing his opposition expressed at the previous week's Special Council Meeting on Library Square towards the financial plan approved by Council.

Councillor Gallo said at the time he wanted further information on the money the Town can expect to receive from government partners on the Federal and Provincial Level before approving the full Library Square price tag, but this information will not be available until Spring at the earliest.

Nevertheless, Councillor Gallo said he was looking forward to beginning work on the Town's Finance Advisory Committee (FAC) in the months ahead, alongside Mayor Mrakas and Councillor Michael Thompson, which will help steer the budget process going forward.

"I am looking forward to working with yourself and Councillor Thompson at the FAC," replied Mayor Mrakas. "I think we're going to make some great strides in improving our policies and procedures and I am quite excited about it" as much as people can be excited about a budget."

Similar sentiments were offered by Councillor Thompson.

"I would like to show my appreciation to staff and all members of Council for the time and effort put in to both the development of the budget as well as the discussions to get us to this point this evening," he said. I think a lot of work has gone into it. I know there were some concerns expressed going through the process about ways to improve and I look forward to having that conversation at FAC on an ongoing basis, but I do want to recognize the work and efforts that went into the budget."

The full operating budget was approved at a cost of \$67.5 million.

Elsewhere, the 2019 Capital Budget includes a number of big ticket items which will take a step forward this year.

Among the projects are the Town's new Strategic Asset Management Policy, the 10-Year Capital Investment Plan, all going towards the full capital budget of \$60,563,760. This number includes \$10.5 million for the repair and replacement of existing infrastructure, \$49 million for growth and new capital, and \$980,000 for studies and other projects.

Individually, a further \$410,000 has been earmarked for a new pumper truck for the Central York Fire Services, \$9.4 million for a new gymnasium at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex, \$1 million for the reconstruction of Vandorf Sideroad (Monkman Crescent & Carisbrooke Circle), \$600,000 for the water meter replacement program, \$250,000 to resurface the parking lot at Sheppard's Bush Conservation Area and \$50,000 for backup

generators for emergency evacuation centres.