

Aurora's 2026 tax increase expected to stay at 2.2 per cent following Mayoral vetoes

Aurora's 2026 municipal budget will likely hold at a 2.2 per cent tax increase after Mayor Tom Mrakas formally vetoed budget amendments passed by Council on November 17.

Council met last Monday for a Special Council meeting for local lawmakers to propose amendments to the municipal budget which, following changes in municipalities granted Strong Mayor powers from the Provincial Government, is a financial blueprint now introduced by the Mayor.

A total of ten amendments were brought forward by Council.

While an amendment from Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese to provide additional funding to the Aurora Farmers' Market through the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve, a fund that doesn't impact the tax levy, and a further motion from Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland to 'pause' the addition of sail shade structures at Aurora Town Square pending further analysis, were approved by Council 'the lion's share' were voted down.

Two significant exceptions, however, were a motion from Councillor Weese to pause funding for the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame until audited financial statements for 2025 were 'received and approved by Council' and a motion from Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo directing staff to come back with a budget reflecting a 0% tax increase while maintaining current service levels were approved 'and ultimately vetoed'.

The motion related to the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame generated a great deal of discussion around the table. It was also the subject of a delegation from Aurora Sports Hall of Fame President Javed Khan who stated no other organization that receives their amount of funding from the municipality are required to provide such an audit.

'Over the past several days, I have taken the time to thoroughly consider each amendment, review the impacts on our financial plan, and speak directly with many staff and residents about these proposed changes,' said Mayor Tom Mrakas, in his formal statement on the vetoes. 'After careful consideration, I believe these two amendments could have a significant negative impact on the municipality'an outcome I feel strongly should be avoided.

'As your Mayor, my responsibility is to protect the long-term financial health of our Town, uphold fairness and transparency, and prevent decisions that put Aurora at risk. In my view, these two amendments do exactly that.'

Municipal policies, he said, only require audits for organizations that generate general revenues over \$250,000. The Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, he continued, receives 'nowhere near that amount' and has complied with all financial asks from the Town.

'The Aurora Sports Hall of Fame is a volunteer-driven, nationally recognized institution that celebrates, preserves, and educates residents about our Town's sports heritage,' said Mayor Mrakas. 'They strengthen our identity as the Town of Champions 'and they deserve fairness, not moving goalposts.'

Moving forward with Councillor Gallo's motion to bring in a 0 per cent tax increase, he continued, would 'gut' capital funding and 'raid' reserves.

'It's trading for today and it's financially reckless. This approach is basically asking the Town to take out a payday loan 'Borrow from reserves today; pretend everything is fine; and then pay it back 'with interest 'next year; leaving residents with the risk of a massive tax increase in 2027.

'Aurora has built a reputation 'over many years 'for strong financial stewardship. Under my leadership, this Town has never seen

a tax increase anywhere near 5%? and it never will. To better preserve and protect the integrity of our established capital plan, infrastructure and service delivery and the long-term financial stability of our municipality, I will be issuing a veto of Amendment #10.

?Aurora's financial health has been built on years of responsible, steady, transparent budgeting ? Not gimmicks. Not short-term thinking. And definitely not through decisions that mortgage our future for short-term talking points. Aurora deserves responsible decision-making, honest budgeting, and leadership that protects residents both today and tomorrow.?

Additional amendments considered last week included:

A motion from Ward 2 Councillor Harold Kim, which would have given inflationary increases to the municipal funds allocated to the Aurora Public Library, Aurora Cultural Centre, Aurora Historical Society, and Aurora Sports Hall of Fame. This did not receive a seconder and was not discussed;

A motion from Councillor Weese to increase funding to Aurora's nine registered Ratepayers Associations to pay for meeting expenses up to \$500 per Association. This was defeated;

A motion from Councillor Gilliland to pause funding for a new LED Screen for use at special events. This motion was defeated on a vote of 4 ? 2, with only Councillors Gilliland and Wendy Gaertner voting in favour of it. Councillor Thompson was not present for the meeting;

A motion from Councillor Gilliland to add a new capital project in the budget ? an off-leash dog park in west Aurora. This was defeated 5 ? 1.

A motion from Councillor Gilliland to remove a new student position with a salary of \$47,000, funded by the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve, which was defeated on a tie vote;

?My amendments came from a place of wanting to enhance what's already been proposed, in a spirit of collaboration and shared commitment to our Town's future,? said Councillor Gilliland in a social media post following last week's meeting. ?This isn't about criticizing anyone's work, but about fine-tuning our priorities so that we can best serve our community together. Each of these amendments were really about ensuring that our spending aligns with our shared goals of community well-being, local economic vitality, and principles. Process and information were not always clear, coupled with mixed messaging.

?We all want the same thing: a budget that reflects the 'needs' of our residents, supports our local businesses, and promotes a vibrant, balanced community.?

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