

Average Aurora tax bills to rise a combined rate of 2.5% in 2020

Average Aurora

homeowners can expect to see a tax increase of \$158 to their tax bills in the year ahead, following Council's approval of the 2020 Operating Budget last week.

On Tuesday night,

Council approved a 3.4 per cent increase on the municipal portion of your tax bill. Factoring an anticipated tax increase on the Regional portion of the tax bill, along with no change to the education component of the bill, residents can anticipate a combined tax increase of 2.5 per cent in the new year.

Council's approval of

the 2020 Operating Budget went hand-in-hand with the approval of a multiyear budget, which has tentatively pegged municipal tax increases at a further 3.4 per cent in 2021 and 2.9 per cent in 2022.

Local lawmakers began

budget talks this fall looking at a target budget increase of 1.9 per cent on the municipal portion of the tax bill, plus a further 1 per cent for 'fiscal strategies to reduce the town's reliance on unsustainable revenues' by adding to reserves.

An additional 0.5 per

cent tax rate increase was considered for 2020 and 2021 to support debt incurred in the anticipated redevelopment of Library Square.

'I am proud that staff

and Council were able to work collaboratively to produce a budget that maintains the excellent level of service that the Town provides to our residents while remaining fiscally responsible,' said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement following last week's meeting. 'The Town of Aurora joins a select group of Ontario municipalities who have approved a multi-year operating budget. Through our approval of future year budgets, we're able to more effectively manage the Town's operating budget impacts.'

Broken down further,

the Town's portion of the residential tax bill includes funding for not only Town operations, but also the Aurora Public Library and Central York Fire Services, the fire department serving both Aurora and Newmarket.

'Council approved

retail water rates of \$2.41, \$2.45 and \$2.48 per cubic metre, wastewater rates of \$3.11, \$3.11, and \$3.15 per cubic metre and a flat rate stormwater charge of \$7.09, \$8.01, and \$9.32 per unit per month for residential and condominium properties and \$90.07, \$101.73, and \$118.31 per unit per month for metered non-residential commercial/industrial and multi-residential properties for 2020, 2021 and 2022,' noted the Town. 'Each new rate will become

effective on all billings issued by the Town after April 30 of each year and will be retroactive for the entire billing period.?

Within the budget, the total required investment to make Library Square a reality is estimated to be \$47.9 million with the use of debt being a source of funding, according to Jason Gaertner, Manager, Financial Management for the Town of Aurora.

In addition to Library Square, the Aurora Cultural Centre has accounted for increased operating pressures in each of the next three years, totalling \$67,000, \$19,000 and \$21,400 respectively.

While these budget increases have been covered out of the operating budget of Library Square, there is uncertainty ahead as the Aurora Cultural Centre ? as well as the Aurora Museum & Archives ? will have to vacate their home at 22 Church Street during Library Square construction.

Challenges currently faced by the Cultural Centre include staff salaries and accounting for cost-of-living increases, as well as a downturn in revenues previously realized through facility rentals, a change which Executive Director chalked up to a ?shift? in markets at the last Budget Committee meeting prior to last week's approval.

?The market pressures?we actually had a loss in the revenue side of things, so the rental program helps to underwrite our costs so we can deliver our programs and when you lose revenue on that program, there isn't another place necessarily to find that funding,? Ms. Haines told Council. ?The grant we get from the Town doesn't fully cover our staff salaries, so we have a lot of pressure around the salary piece and we include that COLA increase in the increase to 2020.?

By Brock Weir