

## Average household to see \$168 tax hike

**By Brock Weir**

Aurora residents can expect their tax bill to increase by 2.4 per cent or approximately \$168.29 for the average local home assessed at \$770,000 in the year ahead.

Councillors are set to approve a final budget for 2017 this week, which will see the municipal portion of tax bills increase by 3.1 per cent. Combined and weighted with the tax rates from the Region, as well as the educational level, this comes out to a combined hike of 2.4 per cent overall.

Local lawmakers signed off on Aurora's 2017 Operating Budget earlier this month after lengthy back to back sessions to whittle down the final number.

They went into the meeting with a proposed municipal tax increase of 2.9 per cent, 1.9 per cent, plus an additional 1 per cent to increase the cash flowing into reserve accounts but further adjustments, including last-minute asks from community organizations, saw this number increase by .2 per cent.

At its July 2016 meeting, guided by [budget principles set out by Aurora's Finance Advisory Committee], Council approved a specific budget preparation directions for staff, says Dan Elliott, Treasurer for the Town of Aurora, in his final report to Council this week. The base budget was to result in a tax increase of not more than inflation, with a further 1 per cent increase to assist in funding the Town's long-term financial strategies related to unsustainable revenues and needed funding for infrastructure sustainability.

Despite inflation reported at 2.1 per cent for 12 months to June 2016, staff presented Council with a base operating budget proposal with a resulting tax increase of 1.9 per cent, plus the 1 per cent for fiscal strategies. In addition to this draft budget, Council was presented with several options for consideration for increases in service levels in various areas. The base budget accommodated service extension to accommodate all growth, while also making significant budget adjustments to several specific budget lines which had become substantially out of line with historical expense or revenue realities.

The Budget Committee made several adjustments, both budget reductions as well as budget increases. Several options presented by staff for consideration were added to the budget, including some service level enhancements.

Tweaks made by Council along the way include the creation of an Economic Development Officer, funded by capital, at a cost of \$76,895, a \$50,500 sustainability grant to the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, an additional full-time position for the Aurora Museum & Archives at \$58,635, a \$45,000 boost in animal control services to support the growing community, \$15,000 towards commemorating the 150th anniversary of Town Park, \$24,000 for a multicultural event in 2017, a sponsorship infusion to the Aurora Chamber of Commerce to support their revived Business Excellence Awards and an inaugural Women in Business Conference, and a nearly \$8,000 boost to Council's Administration Conference Budget.

The 2017 Operating Budget sets out planned expenditures totalling \$60,814,800, funded with non-tax revenues of \$18,993,100, such as investment income, user fees, Federal Gas Tax grants, and fines and penalties, says Mr. Elliott. The remaining \$41,821,700 requirement is to be raised through property taxes.

The final approved budget results in an average increase to the Aurora share of the residential tax bill of 3.1 per cent. When combined with the Region of York's estimated tax increase of 2.87 per cent and the expected 0 per cent increase on the provincial education share of the tax bill, the combined effect on the overall tax bill is expected to be approximately 2.4 on average. For each \$100,000 of assessment, these increases will add \$10.46 to the Aurora share and \$21.86 total overall.

For an average home assessed at \$770,000, the impacts are \$82.52 for the Aurora share, and a \$168.29 total overall on average.