

Budget deliberations begin this week following presentation to Council

Deliberations over the 2025 municipal budget began in earnest this week following a formal presentation to Council on November 5.

Mayor Tom Mrakas officially tabled Aurora's 2025 Budget at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting, a presentation which is under the Mayor's purview following the granting of Strong Mayor powers from the Provincial Government last year.

In his remarks, he said all Council members will have the opportunity to propose amendments to the Budget which, he added, "is a critical part of the process."

"I look forward to the feedback and I am committed to working collaboratively with Council to ensure this budget works in the best interests of all Aurorans and we can continue to get things done," he said.

As The Auroran reported in October, Aurora residents are poised to see a 3.5 per cent tax increase on the municipal portion of the tax bill in the year ahead, and 2.9 per cent in 2026.

This tax increase, said Mayor Mrakas, will "maintain all service levels and strategic investments in key areas that will sustain the very high quality of life Aurora has become known for."

"The reality, and I know many of my colleagues know this as well, is that many people in our community continue to feel financially strained and it is extremely important to keep this tax increase as low as possible," he said. "That is why I am very pleased we kept the inflationary part of the tax levy lower than the Consumer Price Index and we will continue to strive to keep the Levy in line or below the level of inflation."

"Importantly, it enables us to continue supporting Central York Fire Services and other important community partners, including the Aurora Public Library, the Aurora Cultural Centre, Sport Aurora and the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame " organizations that all significantly improve the lives of our community members."

The Budget for the year ahead will see a number of items in the Aurora's 10-Year Capital Plan move forward, which the Mayor said will "significantly strengthen our community as we continue to grow" and will serve as "projects that truly help build a complete community where everyone can thrive."

These items include projects to modernize municipal facilities, redeveloping playgrounds, improving tennis and pickleball courts in parks, technology upgrades to make online tax and water billing possible, and new traffic calming and pedestrian crossing studies.

"We will make immediate improvements to local infrastructure, including numerous roads, stormwater ponds, sewers and pumping stations, projects that keep Aurorans healthy and moving and that also ensures we're climate resilient," said Mayor Mrakas. "At a time when we really do need to play our part in addressing the housing crisis, we will continue working on initiatives that help get more housing built in our community by developing tools like the Community Planning Permit that streamlines zoning and approval processes to accommodate our projected growth while still allowing us to maintain our built and natural heritage. This budget is a result of tremendous amount of teamwork with staff, elected officials, residents and businesses all providing input on priorities during our pre-budget consultations."

Unpacking more of the Budget at the Committee level, Town Treasurer Rachel Wainwright-van Kessel said the Town's gross expenditure for the year ahead is \$125.9 million, and \$130.1 million 2026.

Aurora's share of every one dollar on the tax bill, she said, is 38 cents, with the lion's share going to the Region of York and 18 cents to education. The quarterly water bill, she noted, is expected to rise by \$19.62 per household.

"Inflation is starting to temper a bit and it's beginning to balance out a little bit," said Wainwright-van Kessel. "Part of the challenge is we're still seeing some significant inflationary impacts on some of our multi-year operating contracts and the reason for that is we have had contracts that have been in place for five years. These were set at 2019 pricing. Prior to that rapid inflation we have seen? we are still seeing some of the impacts of that happening, particularly in the Operational Services department and some of the roads and streetlight services."

Additional challenges, she added, come from uncertainty over the amount of development charges (DCs) the Town will be able to bring in "that is, money paid by incoming developers to the Town to account for future growth needs.

"The latest development charge study, recognizing that some of these projects have a significant benefit to the existing community so they can not all be paid for through growth means. That means we need either another source of funding, whether it be tax levy source reserves or possible grants," she said, citing, among other projects, pedestrian underpasses at Cousins Drive, on Yonge Street north of St. John's, and parking projects in the Aurora Promenade area.

"We are going to be seeking opportunities for grants to pay for the Town's portion of this "the non-growth" to support the development of many of these projects."

By Brock Weir