

Council approves 2.9% tax increase for 2022

Aurora property owners will see the municipal portion of their tax bills rise by 2.9 per cent next year, following Council's approval of the 2022 Budget last week.

Council signed off on the plan at their December 13 meeting.

1.9 per cent of the Budget is attributed to inflation with a further 1 per cent allocated to reserves.

"I am very pleased that we have approved a budget that maintains the services that residents have come to rely on every day, while keeping in mind fiscal sustainability," said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement following the approval. "Not only does our operating budget continue to provide quality of life for Aurorans, but we have a solid capital budget in place for 2022 that will support the renewal of our infrastructure for the future."

The Budget, as approved, maintains current service levels, but it also accounts for the continued funding of the Aurora Town Square (formerly Library Square) redevelopment in Aurora's historic Downtown Core.

"Key projects for 2022 include completing the Cultural Master Plan update, the Public Art Master Plan, implementing recommendations from the Town's Diversity & Inclusion plan, and infrastructure works such as road repairs and reconstruction, and work on water and storm sewer systems."

This is the last Budget to be approved by the current Council ahead of the 2022 Municipal Election.

The 2.9 per cent tax increase is in keeping with the multi-year budgeting strategy implemented earlier in the term.

At last week's Council meeting, lawmakers praised municipal staff for meeting this target in the face of pandemic uncertainty.

"It is particularly challenging, not just with COVID, but the fact that assessment growth came in less than anticipated and staff had to revisit a number of different things to ensure that we continue to meet our fiscal strategy of inflation, which we have identified at two per cent, plus one for our fiscal strategy and our future growth," said Councillor Michael Thompson at the table.

Mayor Mrakas added that "Council has done a tremendous job" in meeting the goal.

"We have approved the Budget that maintains services that residents have come to expect and deserve, but we have been fiscally responsible at the same time and I think that is key right there," he said. "I think this is going to continually improve the quality of life for all Aurorans as we continue through 2022. I know that some would like to say there is uncertainty, but I think we've allowed to bring forward some certainty to the Town that we're moving forward in a positive direction and we're going to continue to push forward to make sure we're one of the best communities in all of Ontario."

While Councillor Wendy Gaertner too said Rachel Wainwright-van Kessell, Aurora's Director of Finance and Treasurer, did an "excellent job" in this budget cycle, she did note some degree of uncertainty over the 2022 plan, particularly the allocation of 1.9 per cent to account for inflation.

"I continue to be concerned about us pegging the rate of inflation at 1.9," said Councillor Gaertner. "Last I checked, and I don't know if it was for the Region or the Province, but it was 4.71."

The Treasurer said that inflation is "trending over 4.3 per cent" right now but "if we look back into a year ago, inflation at that time was close to zero or below zero."

?When it balances out over a couple of years ? the Federal Government is calling for higher inflation next year [and] they are expecting it to return to a more normal state after that,? said the Treasurer. ?We will monitor things as we go into next year, but I am confident the [with] the budget we have we can make it work with the inflation that we see.?

With the recent approval of the Region of York's budget, the estimated blended combined tax rate ? Town of Aurora, York Region and School Board taxes ? amounts to 1.92 per cent, according to Jason Gaertner, Financial Manager for the Town of Aurora.

?This represents a combined tax increase to a typical Aurora home assessed at \$800,000 of \$116.77 for 2022. Aurora's proportion of this combined amount is \$71.51,? he said.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter