

Remarks on passing this year's County of Renfrew budget

The County of Renfrew budget was both a message about the local economy and our services to the community. The Council went into the budget deliberations with the target of 2.5% increase during these inflationary times – it was very hard work to achieve that target. In the past 4 years of my experience at County budget deliberations, this is the first time we met for a second day (February 23rd and 24th 2023) to realize our target.

The COR spends approximately \$54 million a year on salary and approximately \$43 million on capital. As an example, the Algonquin Trail build-out continues, part of an aggressive multi-year build, partially subsidized by grant programs and partnerships. It is an essential part of building on experiences for residents and visitors to our community.

In terms of services the members of County Council decided:

- After a review of increased service levels in Paramedic Service, to add a 24/7 ambulance later this year
- Service levels have been maintained – for example: Community Services (Ongoing support for 1,020 rent-geared-to-income housing units / Continued support for subsidized Child Care and Ontario Works)
- Introduction of new service delivery models in public works (in-house engineering and operations staff enhancements), trails (shifting reporting divisions), planning (GIS enhancements), all fostering smoother workflow and some savings
- Staff were requested to and did suggest several recommendations that revised previously Council mandated budget requirements to keep levy change to a minimum and made concessions where possible.
- Allocation of new assessment growth to the long-term capital asset management plan, and to offset levy increase
- The residential property tax impact of \$9.88 increase per \$100,000 of assessed value. The median residential property value in Renfrew County currently sits around \$203,000, meaning that a typical homeowner would see an impact of \$20.06 for 2023 on the County portion of the tax bill.
- The approval of additional capital public works; a partnership with the Town of Arnprior on a significant and problematic intersection.
- Investment in long term care, with a capital commitment to continue with the Butterfly Model of Care which was delayed in implementation because of COVID.
- There will be a 2% COLA increase for non-union staff.
- COR entered the 1st year of a four-year phase-in of remuneration for County Council increases.

We recognized the Long-Term Financial Plan and Asset Management Plan is affected by the Council's reduction to the TCA (Tangible Capital Asset) reserves. Mindful of the information from the Treasurer, we will discuss this during the Fall when the plans and report card are to be reviewed. The decreased allocation occurred when Council chose to reduce -\$1.5 million in funding that was to go into the TCA reserve. That allocation is destined to pay for future capital projects as outlined in the long-term financial plan. Council made the decision to decrease the allocation to offset increases in the levy that exceeded the 2.5% budget target (Council was considering a 5.49% increase to the levy after a series of recommendations made by the CAO to mitigate service level decreases).

County councillors were very concerned about the impact of inflation in many households and in addition, the affordability of an increase for some municipalities and authorized the reduction. Throughout all the budget discussions, the County councillors were trying to minimize the impact of increased spending to our community as many of our citizens struggle to meet their bills.

Notes from:

Warden Peter Emon

Mayor Debbi Grills