

Council approves 2021 budget with zero increase in Township portion

By **Mark Pavilons** Editor Local Journalism Initiative

King councillors stayed true to their word and wasted no time in giving King taxpayers a break on their municipal taxes. Council passed the 2021 budgets Monday that crossed all the boxes, offering a zero net increase while still maintaining efficient services and putting money into reserves. During a pandemic, that was quite a feat, one that didn't go unnoticed by council and every staffer at the municipality. Council approved a zero per cent increase in net levy requirements – the portion of the tax bill that goes to the Township. The other two components of the tax bill are payments to the Ministry of Education and York Region. Those two components still have to be finalized by York Region and the Ministry of Education. The past year has been extraordinarily difficult on all of our residents, said King Township Mayor Steve Pellegrini. Many of them have seen their work hours cut during the COVID-19 pandemic, while others have been laid off. We could not ask them to pay more on the Township's portion of their tax bill. Mayor Pellegrini said that despite the additional costs of introducing new technology to maintain service levels during the pandemic, staff have looked for efficiencies in other areas in order to keep the Township's portion of the tax bill flat. I'm extremely proud of the work council and staff have done to continue offering not only our essential services like Fire and Emergency Services, waste collection and road and sidewalk maintenance, but we've been able to offer new services. This includes virtual recreation programs, a brand new website with many new online services and curbside pickup of blue and green bins, said Mayor Pellegrini. King CAO Dan Kostopoulos said major changes and staff efficiencies have actually added value to King taxpayers. The mayor and council asked for a zero tax increase and staff delivered, he said. The CAO also pointed out King has one of the leanest administrations in the N6. The net zero comes without compromising King's future sustainability. Capital projects are still on track. Division head after division head provided a break-down of department efficiencies and changes. Staff all echoed that modernization and online services have been ramped up to meet taxpayer demand. Staff rose to the challenges and no stone was left unturned in finding new ways to do things. In fact, King achieved more than 80 innovations. Some last-minute tweaking by Mayor Pellegrini delayed a tax-funded project and programs. It was all that was needed to arrive at the net zero rate. Some of the highlights from the capital budget include: Improvements to various community parks (\$2 million) – Blue Heron, Kettle Lake; Tomlinson Gardens, Nobleton Lions Community Park, Tasca Community Park, St. Andrews, OSIN Park. Schomberg Community Hall renovation and accessibility upgrade (\$1 million). Road-related infrastructure repairs and conversion of gravel roads (\$2.5 million). Nobleton Sewers Phase 3 (\$14.6 million). In addition to infrastructure investment, property tax dollars pay for a wide range of programs and services including snow removal from roads and sidewalks, road and bridge repairs and maintenance, fire and emergency services, parks, arenas and four library branches. The total approved 2021 operating budget is \$46 million, while the total approved capital budget is \$22 million. In order to obtain as much input from the public as possible, King Township offered residents several engagement opportunities. These included a virtual Public Information Centre and an online budget priority survey on King's digital engagement platform at www.speaking.king.ca. King has also put together a budget quick reference guide which can be accessed at <https://www.king.ca/your-local-government/budget-and-finances/budgets> along with a complete set of documents related to the 2021 budget.