

Increased demands see budget shortfall

By Mark PavilonsEditor

King's 2023 budget is poised for a tax increase, as costs for the municipality continue to rise. Aside from annual increases in things like fuel, maintenance, inflation and electricity, other pressures include meeting mandates set by the Province. Accommodating growth has also hit the Township for roughly \$500,000 and all of these added pressures have led to some shortfalls this year. King's department heads, led by Treasurer Peggy Tollett, presented their budget details, before the document's final approval slated for the Feb. 6 council meeting. A \$1.5-million shortfall, if not addressed, will result in a 4.95% tax hike for King, before York Region and local school boards set their budgets. The total 2023 budget is \$33.65 million, and there is a budget shortfall is \$2,109,900. Once you factor in assessment growth income and a delay in hiring staff, the shortfall drops to \$1.58 million. This, if passed, will see an average increase of roughly \$139 for King homeowners. This will be combined and factored in when York Region and the local school boards pass their budgets. To lessen the impact to residents, staff have found efficiencies and reductions. At this point, several departments are looking at hiring extra staff. Fees for the public are slated to increase 2-3%, or a little over \$300,000 to offset expenses. While staff are needed throughout the departments, some positions are being delayed. King did enjoy very good returns on its investments and some of these funds will be directed to the budget, while others will be put in reserve funds. Each department presented its achievements in 2022, and the priorities for this year. Community Services, according to Chris Fasciano, is caught up and has completed many of its projects. The Township Wide Recreation Centre is on time and on budget. An updated master plan is in the works this year and it will help set the direction for the next few years. Stephen Naylor, head of Growth Management Services, said his department is implementing new system efficiencies. Studies and a new economic development strategy are also in the works this year. He's hoping to get at least one additional staffer to accommodate the increase in requests and planning pressures. Public works, according to director Samantha Fraser, is also looking to hire one project manager. The department is in its third year of the 10-year paving plan. King Township Public Library is hoping to increase its services to meet the post-pandemic demand. A few residents appeared before council, mostly from Kingscross, asking for King to put aside funds to mitigate future flooding problems. Mary Muter, of Kingscross Ratepayers' Association, admitted budget pressures are tough, and she's concerned about the impacts of the Province's Bill 23 and loss of development charges and permit fees. These are in addition to the physical changes and added costs that future development in the area will bring. The numerous changes in the Bill and impacts to local wetlands, will not only see an ecological tragedy, but KRA anticipates flooding when new projects come to fruition. Another Kingscross resident said water levels in the areas are dropping, which he attributes to new development. Kingscross resident Ian Hilley is also concerned about mitigating flooding in the area. KRA appreciates that the Township staff have included about \$300,000 in the budget for work to mitigate flooding from tributaries of the East Humber river around homes at the intersection of Kingscross Drive and Manitou Drive. The year-round flooding experienced at one property consistently gets very close to that home's wellhead. The situation has been very stressful for the homeowners. They and KRA are grateful that the process to address this concern aggravated by the significant buildup of silt, he said. The flooding also impacts use and enjoyment of the King City Trails. The trails cross a wetland which is getting wetter for longer periods throughout the year. High boots are advisable. As a solution KRA has initiated a request for a boardwalk to be built across the wetlands at the Township of King/York Region wellhead on the east side of Manitou Drive to enable access the King City Trails without walkers having to get wet and to reduce the need for grass cutting apart from trimming. The operating budget includes annual expenditures for personnel costs, materials and supplies, contracted services, minor capital, debt charges, reserve transfers and program fees. The capital budget includes expenditures and financing sources to acquire, construct, maintain and facilitate Township capital assets such as roads, bridges/structures, water distribution and wastewater collection systems, recreational facilities and administrative facilities. You can read the entire 2023 Budget and Business Plan on www.king.ca