

## Township begins work on 2025 budget

By Mark PavilonsEditor

King councillors want to keep next year's budget affordable. While very early in the 2025 budget process, staff had asked for an increase of between 4 and 5%, but councillors rejected that. Council conveyed a clear message to staff that the projected increase of 4.8 per cent was too much to ask from residents, who are experiencing tax fatigue. Instead, council approved the new format and budget timelines but rejected the recommendation for a rate increase between 4 and 5 per cent. Throughout the summer, the staff work on the budget, and council provided advanced notice to ensure every effort is made to lower the projected ask and avoid increasing full-time staff size. Staff hope to present the new budget to council in late November. Staff noted budget pressures are sparked by inflation, fuel prices, insurance and other factors. For 2025, staff will be developing a service-based approach to the budget instead of the traditional version organized by departments. This is anticipated to better outline the services provided to and accessed by King citizens. A public open house is tentatively planned for Nov. 13. The estimates within the 2025 budget direction incorporate the Strategic Plan from 2023-2026. The Corporate Strategic Plan will help guide the Township's business planning and budget processes and reflect the most important needs of the community and its residents. Fueling the budget are mandatory expenses mandated under provincial legislation. Increases in staff pay, as negotiated in union contracts, also play a role. Inflation is increasing the average prices of services or commodities that may impact budgeted expenses. For example, if the cost of construction material has significantly increased, so the budget will need to account for additional expense costs. Staff are always on the lookout for efficiencies and they will continue to capture cost savings or improvements. As well, the Township is receiving some new revenue from increased user fees. The 2025 'service-based budget' will concentrate on planning, services, road maintenance, greening and governance. Staff said organizing the budget in these categories will illustrate more publicly-relatable concepts under a service-based approach as opposed to the traditional departmental structure. These themes will provide the public with a better understanding of service offerings, which are subject to change over time. Based on a preliminary analysis, staff identified several budget pressures for 2025. Inflation is estimated between 2.7% to 3% for 2024. Fuel price increases continuing on from 2024. Insurance rates are up 10% with the addition of the new TWRC coming into service in the fall of 2024. There's a potential increase for staffing in 2025. The Township will see an increased service level for winter maintenance in urban areas for the 2025/2026 season. As growth continues in King City East and Nobleton, additional services will have to be added. The Township had a 4.98% hike in 2024 and is looking at 4.8% in 2025. In 2026, that drops to an anticipated 4.1%. The priorities of utmost importance, staff said, are to the community and the obligations and commitments of the Township of King to its citizens.