

York approves its 2014 budget with a 1.54 per cent tax increase

By Mark Pavilons

York Region now has bragging rights for record-low tax increases over the past term.

And that translates to a softer impact on homeowners.

York Regional Council approved its \$3 billion 2014 Business Plan and Budget, which includes \$1.2 billion in funding for capital projects and \$1.8 billion to maintain services to residents and businesses.

The 2014 budget includes a 1.54 per cent tax increase, representing an additional \$32 for an average residential property in York Region.

In King, York takes the lion's share of property at 45%, with the Township keeping 33%. The school boards absorb the remaining 22%.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini said the average tax hikes over the past four years have been less than the rate of inflation.

King Township presented its draft budget and is proposing a 2.59% tax hike, but it has yet to be approved.

Pellegrini said the local budget is "secure," with no surprises and he pegs the blended tax increase (as it currently stands) at roughly 1.5%

King will receive what the mayor calls "small dollar capital" improvements. Capital road works are allotted, and expected to take place in the next year or two. They include improvements to intersections at Highway 27 and King and Weston and King.

The mayor is pleased there's a regional commitment to maintain the bus routes (61, 22) that serve King.

Pellegrini is impressed that the region has plans for 30 more civilians for York Regional Police, which means more officers will hit the streets. There are plans for 18 new paramedics to service the need.

And all of this is achieved at a lower cost.

The York budget makes major infrastructure investments that deliver on its mandate of sustainable growth, while ensuring the high quality programs and services needs of our residents and businesses are met in areas such as transit infrastructure, community and health services, policing, water and wastewater and roads.

The 1.54 per cent tax increase maintains York's record of low tax increases. Coupled with their sound fiscal strategy, there will be a "significant increase in its reserve levels and a significant reduction to debt levels."

Budget Highlights

The \$3 billion York Region 2014 budget is the fourth-largest municipal budget in the province of Ontario.

The 2014 operating budget includes the following new additions:

? 16 additional police officers and 30 civilian staff, resulting in deployment of 11 further officers to front-line patrol.

? 18 additional paramedics to service high-call volume areas.

? Investment in Community and Health Services Multi-Year Plan initiatives.

? Investment in housing programs, including increased contribution to non-profit housing capital repair reserve.

The 2014 Operating Budget includes:

? \$506 million for environmental services.

? \$427 million for Community and Health Services.

? \$305 million for York Regional Police.

? \$295 million for transportation services.

The 2014 Capital Budget includes:

? \$303 million for wastewater.

? \$287 million for York Region Rapid Transit Corporation.

? \$128 million for water.

? \$117 million for Regional roads.