

Town budget a key concern of council candidate Robert Duthie



By Mike Pickford

Orangeville council candidate Robert Duthie wants to conduct a complete, non-biased assessment of the Town's annual budget should he be elected in October's municipal election.

A relatively new arrival to Orangeville, having relocated from Toronto in 2015, Mr. Duthie was astounded when he first learned of the municipality's lofty tax rates. It encouraged him to do some research and take more notice of Orangeville's bi-weekly council sessions. Three years on and it's safe to say he hasn't been impressed by what he's seen.

"It was certainly an eye-opener when we first moved to the community. The taxes were an issue, so I started paying attention to Council, and wow. To say there have been some issues would be an understatement," Mr. Duthie said. "Our taxes have gone up significantly over the three years since we moved here. I get the feeling that we, as taxpayers, are not getting value for our money." Mr. Duthie is recently retired, having spent 36 years with the Toronto Police Service. As a result, he now has the necessary time on his hands to dedicate himself fully to being an effective councillor. He believes his "cool demeanour" would ensure he'd get along with any of the 16 other candidates running for political office, while his "strong" problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills would come in useful during council deliberations.

Not surprising considering his earlier comments, Robert lists taxes and spending together as his number one issue heading into the election.

"Spending has to be addressed before we can look at taxes," Mr. Duthie said. "Best case scenario is saying we may be able to come up with a way to freeze taxes. I'm not going to sit here and promise that I will drop taxes in Orangeville, that's not a reasonable promise. There are obligations we have to fulfill and infrastructure we have to maintain. With that said, I'm sure there are items in that budget that do not belong. There are efficiencies in each area of the budget that we can focus on that shouldn't see too big an effect on services in town."

Mr. Duthie was highly critical of the Town's five-year plan, which calls for a 20 percent increase in its operating budget by 2022, taking overall spending up from approximately \$34 million to \$41 million. He called for Orangeville's next council to, at most, hold the line at the rate of inflation "generally regarded to be around two percent."

"I don't want to see any new developments, no new infrastructure, no new anything until we have gotten our spending habits under control," Mr. Duthie said. "A 20 percent increase in five years cannot happen. It just can't. We need to be more reasonable." He likens the Town's position to that of Greece, the troubled European nation that has been embroiled in financial turmoil for much of the past decade. He says the municipality needs to tighten its belt so as to ease the pain today, rather than hold off and run into more significant issues in the future.

While some candidates have decreed the OPP to be Orangeville's saviour when it comes to saving money, Mr. Duthie believes the numbers put forth last year during the controversial review of police services in Orangeville were a little too good to be true.

"There is no way those savings are accurate," Mr. Duthie said. "I just can't see how we would be provided with the same level of police service for half the cost. You will have to sacrifice something for that level of price drop."

With that said, Robert wouldn't be opposed to considering another costing, provided the OPP present 'real information' this time around.

Another contentious issue in town is the municipality's railway line. Robert was quick to write that off as a failure, stating the Town needed to cut its losses on a liability he says is costing taxpayers approximately \$500,000 a year.

'There's a lot more we can be doing with that money,' Mr. Duthie said, noting he would like to see the line decommissioned.

Having taken the opportunity to meet with every other individual running for a seat on Orangeville's next council, Mr. Duthie is confident the community is in good hands no matter who the masses choose to elect. Come end of day Oct. 22, he hopes to make up a significant part of that new team.

'I believe I can make the hard decisions that need to be made. The decisions that need to be made over the next four years are going to be significant and highly impactful,' Mr. Duthie said. 'I don't necessarily have the electorate experience behind me, but I have the drive, commitment and know how to be an effective component on council. I will strive to get things done, and done properly.'