

12th session fails to produce consensus on Town budget

Orangeville Council's 12th budget committee meeting of 2015 bore as little fruit as the rest have, as the councillors managed to knock no more than \$25,000 off, bringing the new proposed tax increase down to 3.14 per cent.

The meeting, which went on much like a scratched disc, repeating the same parts over and over again, lasted four hours, with tempers flaring and discussions that once again resulted in laughter and commentary from the gallery.

'How many more meetings are we looking at this year?' asked resident Melissa Cauley. 'It's tough as taxpayers waiting and sitting here. We definitely need to know where we stand. I think we understand that you hear us, but I think the problem is that you're not listening. We can all hear, but it doesn't mean that we're taking it in. How long are we looking at before you guys can work together, and put your heads together, and figure this out?'

But it wasn't just the public's dissatisfaction with the process that saw some tempers flare at Tuesday night's meeting, as within the last hour, several members of Council, including Mayor Jeremy Williams, loudly expressed displeasure at the attitudes, actions and inactions of fellow councillors, and even staff.

On two different occasions, staff were criticized by council members, first by Councillor Scott Wilson for having ever suggested less than the \$1.2 million contribution to reserves, an action he deemed as inappropriate. The second criticism came from Councillor Don Kidd, who was upset by the number of staff not present at the meeting.

'I was just going to mention how disappointed I am tonight with the number of staff that are missing,' said Councillor Kidd. 'We are coming down to the wire on the budget. No one from the police department is here. I don't see any technical support here. The treasurer is not here. And here we are in the 11th hour.'

Acting Town CAO Ed Brennan defended the staff absences, explaining that those missing had his authority not to be present.

'We are very far along into the year and people had plans and vacations booked that took them outside of the province and I didn't feel it was warranted to cancel them,' he explained.

Towards the end of the meeting, Mayor Williams expressed concern that some members of council might be deliberately extending the budget process, accusing them of doing so in order to make a zero percent budget implausible.

'We were almost at zero and then Boom we just tacked [the reserves] on,' he said. 'And forgive me for saying this but I almost feel like that was added on specifically so that you could say we're not going to have zero and make me eat my words. Is there an intent, is there a plan to draw this on as long as humanly possible? We keep talking about the same things over and over again, passing things and going back to them. If there is a decision to prolong this, why?'

His questions were not addressed by any members of council.

Several items that were brought up for consideration to be removed from the budget included \$20,000 in event reserves from the cancellation of First Night, the removal of funds for all but the fireworks on Canada Day, the removal of the GIS tech from the budget, and removing the funding for a Fire Prevention Officer, all of which failed, several with only the mover voting in favour.

The Canada Day motion sparked a fairly lengthy discussion, in which Councillor Sylvia Bradley felt that it was one of the items that was more of a luxury for Orangeville residents, and was not successful enough at this point to consider keeping in when hard decisions need to be made.

'People keep talking about wanting us to make the hard decision and cut costs, and that's what I'm trying to do,' she said. 'Maybe we should find a service club to take things back again, at which point, I would be happy to see the town donate funds to help them

put on an event, but at this point we are not finding any savings in the budget.?

Later, Deputy Mayor Warren Maycock moved for the removal of the Fire Prevention Officer, at a saving of \$22,000. However, the motion failed yet again, with the explanation from Fire Chief Andy Macintosh that the position is one the station needs to get caught up with government regulations, and remain that way.

?People don't mind paying taxes when there is value, but if we keep stripping out everything that has value to the people of Orangeville, and keep putting money to the reserves, you keep squeezing the taxpayers for money and taking all their value away from them,? said Mayor Williams. ?It's putting the cart before the horse.?

Throughout the meeting, the decision was also made to send the Library budget back to the Library Board for clarification and a report on the need for many of the items on the list, before Council could review their budget. According to Councillor Wilson, the Library Board will not be able to meet until April 22nd, which means the earliest it could be brought back under review will be late April.

Currently, no date has been set for the next budget meeting