

## Town's financial health improving

By Todd Taylor

I despise how much I pay in taxes. In 2018, I will pay more than \$10,000 in tax to the financial coffers of the Town of Orangeville. To me, and I imagine many others, this is a fair sum of money.

Although parting with my hard-earned money is difficult, I do not begrudge paying my fair share. That said, I simply want to be assured that my contribution is not be wasted and much thought is put into how it is spent. The good news is that Orangeville's financial situation is actually better than you might have thought otherwise.

In August this year, the town's financial situation was audited by BDO Canada Limited. The report, which can be found on the Town's website, showed that the monetary outlook for Orangeville continues to greatly improve.

In fact, for the first time in over 15 years, our fine town has moved from an annual deficit situation to a surplus! This is a significant accomplishment and a great indicator of our overall financial health.

Many of us are doing our best each month to save for a rainy day. Our houses will eventually require new roofs, driveways and furnaces. All of these costs require forward thinking and planning. A municipality simply must be ready for any issues that may need to be addressed in the future.

Larger projects that will require financial planning include things such as a new fire station, flood prevention measures, sewer replacement, and updates to our water treatment facility. I was quite pleased to learn that Orangeville's financial reserves have tripled since 2012.

Our town now has \$12 million in reserves for things such as water, sewage, roads, fire and police.

I like the feeling of having money in the bank. That said, our town politicians need to continue to be vigilant in this area. The funds that our forward-thinking politicians have fought for in the budget process can quickly evaporate.

As an example, the proposed new fire hall will cost at least \$4 million. Anyone in a decision-making position within the town needs to be cognisant of what we may need in the future. It is imperative that future budgets continue to contribute to the financial reserves.

Town staff under the leadership of CEO Ed Brennan and Treasurer Marc Villeneuve have done a wonderful job of securing grants from the federal and provincial governments.

As a member of the Transportation committee, I know first-hand that Orangeville received very helpful grants to help fund the purchase of new buses. The provincially shared gas tax has also been used effectively with many of the recent initiatives undertaken by the Town.

Lastly, Orangeville's growth allows us to be in a net positive situation regarding development charges. Builders are more than happy to pay the Town to build all of those wonderful new homes, condos, and townhouses that are appearing throughout the area.

In order for Orangeville to continue to be successful, we need all Town departments to continue to be vigilant with their budgets. As an example, the Orangeville Police Service (OPS) remains the Town's largest expense by consuming almost 22 per cent of every tax dollar. It is true that Chief Wayne Kalinski and team have put forth a very focused effort at controlling costs. The recent contract for uniformed officers struck a nice balance of financial responsibility and being mindful of the need to attract talent to our town. The size of future tax increases will be greatly influenced by the continued ability of the OPS and police board chair Ken Krakar to hold the line on expenses.

I am pleased that our town's financial situation is progressing in a positive fashion. I feel positive and optimistic about our future. That said, it is imperative that this next budget session continues on to be on solid financial footing.

It will be incumbent upon people like you and me to hold staff and our politicians accountable for their actions. If you happen to run into a council member, you should be prepared to ask them about their position on reserves, debt, infrastructure deficit, and tax rates.

I have long believed that I do not have to agree with a local politician. Instead, I simply want to be assured that they have thought through the problem and have spent time on what could be the eventual outcomes of their vote.

My point? Our finances are in decent shape. Yet, long-term debt, infrastructure deficits, and any promises of a zero percent tax increase without cuts to any other programs are problems that we simply must solve in the short term.