



Staff Report

Finance

Report To: COW_Finance_Admin_Fire_Community_Services
Meeting Date: March 18, 2024
Report Number: FAF.24.021
Title: 2024 Draft Budget – Public Comments
Prepared by: Sam Dinsmore, Acting Director of Finance / Treasurer

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report FAF.24.021, entitled “2024 Draft Budget – Public Comments” for information purposes.

B. Overview

This report outlines the comments from the Public Meeting for the 2024 Draft Budget, which was held on March 12th, 2024, at 9:30 a.m., as well as Staff’s response to these comments.

C. Background

The 2024 Draft Budget has been reviewed by Council and the Public over a series of meetings throughout 2024. On March 12th, 2024, the Town held a Public Meeting to provide the public with the opportunity to review and comment on the 2024 Draft Budget and 2024 Draft Water and Wastewater Budget.

The timeline, as presented to Council, is to bring forward a By-law to adopt the estimates of all sums required for 2024 on April 2nd, 2024, for Council’s consideration.

The Town received twelve written comments and four verbal comments up to 12:00pm March 8, 2024 in advance of the Public Meeting (Attachment 1), three after the deadline prior to the Public Meeting (Attachment 2) and four verbal comments at the Public Meeting. Below is a summary of the comments received from the public.

This document can be made available in other accessible formats as soon as practicable and upon request

D. Analysis

The following written and verbal comments were received by the public prior to the 12:00pm March 8, 2024 deadline:

Ron & Lynda Mikulik

Ron and Lynda Mikulik feel the tax increase is ridiculously high in these inflationary times. Mr. and Mrs. Mikulik have had their cottage in Thornbury for 40+ years and taxes and increases reasonable. They feel some of these capital expenditures could be delayed for the short term or until the economy gets better.

Staff Response - the Town started the 2024 budget process with a 9.58% tax rate increase, through Council deliberations over multiple days in early January 2024, the tax rate increase now sits at 2.77%.

Denis Martinek, President of the Tyrolean Village Resorts 2021 Limited

Denis Martinek provided comments on the Tyrolean Lane Watermain Replacement and wastewater servicing project phase 2 and noted that this project is not included in the 2024 budget but should be and provided several points supporting their reasoning.

Mr. Martinek is requesting that Council include Phase 2 of this project in the Town's 2024 Budget and to immediately tender the project in order to secure a contract so that the project can be completed in 2024 at the best price available.

Lynda Ivardi

Lynda Ivardi provided comments on her disappointment of the announcement made in early 2023 that the Tyrolean Watermain Replacement and Wastewater Servicing project has been postponed indefinitely which makes future planning of her property challenging if not impossible. It is requested that Council provide direction to staff to include Phase 2 of the Tyrolean Watermain Replacement and Wastewater Servicing Project in the Town's 2024 Budget and tender the project as soon as possible.

Staff Response – the previous two comments received are both around the Tyrolean Lane Watermain Replacement and Wastewater Extension therefore staff has included one staff response.

This capital project was delayed through the 2023 budget to allow for a prioritization of staffing and financial resources to higher priority projects. Tyrolean Lane has some development potential which would impact how the area is serviced and the final costs that would be billed back to the property owners. At this time there aren't any concrete planning applications for these properties and therefore staff don't feel that it is an appropriate time to move forward with this extension.

However, at the direction of Council staff can re-prioritize the 2024 capital plan and move Tyrolean Lane up the list while other project(s) are delayed.

John Leckie (comment provided verbally on Jan 8, 2024 at the Special Committee of the Whole Meeting)

The Town has seen significant growth since 2010 with a lot more on the way. The Town isn't collecting enough to keep on top of the required works and upgrades to handle this growth.

Staff Response – the Town continues to fully leverage all available funding sources such as grants from upper-tier governments, development charges, and long-term debt. Included in the 2024 budget is \$2.2M in transfers to the Town's asset management reserve funds which are used to fund capital replacements throughout the Town to keep the assets in working condition and offer the levels of service.

Jim Torrance (comment provided verbally on Jan 8, 2024 at the Special Committee of the Whole Meeting)

The Town needs to make the upfront investments and build the necessary efficiencies to support growth. Council needs to decide what are needs versus wants and prioritize these asks. Mr. Torrance would like to see the 2023 surplus used to offset tax increase for 2024.

Staff Response – staff are continually looking at ways to streamline efforts and maximize efficiencies, a good indicator of this is the annual investments made in IT hardware and software. Through the 2024 budget deliberations in early January 2024 Council did make the decision to apply \$1.3M of the 2023 surplus to the 2024 budget to help offset the required tax rate increase.

Terry Thompson (comment provided verbally on Jan 8, 2024 at the Special Committee of the Whole Meeting)

The Town needs to improve the communications with the public around the budget and the budget process. Mr. Thompson would like to have a better understanding of the impact of the organization structure review on the 2024 budget.

Terry Thompson (comment provided verbally on Jan 10, 2024 at the Special Committee of the Whole Meeting)

Mr. Thompson was happy to see the use of the 2023 surplus to offset 2024 tax rate increase.

Staff Response – Mr. Thompson made two comments during the multi-day budget meetings with Council in early January 2024, staff have compiled one response.

Staff continue to work on the budget book and process to help residents better understand the impact to them and their property. In working with associations such as the Blue Mountain Ratepayers Association staff are confident that future improvements can and will be made.

Staff included an addition to the budget for the organization structure review which has a 2024 impact of \$125,000 being added to the tax levy or 0.64%.

Lynda Ardiel

Lynda Ardiel provided comments on garbage pickup. For many years she had garbage pick-up every 2nd week. This worked well for her and would like to suggest that the Town could all go back to this schedule. It would cut costs and help to teach children and adults about less garbage – wherever possible - the old reduce, reuse, recycle.

Staff Response – the Town has recently awarded the solid waste collection contract which kept the level of service status quo. Staff have and will continue to work with the contractor to lower the cost of the service as well as increase the diversion of waste into recycling and organics streams and out of the Town’s landfill.

Pamela Spence

Pamela Spence provided comments on the 2024 Budget. RE: Stormwater Natural Infrastructure Project – Page 53 and respectfully requests that Council approve the Stormwater Natural Infrastructure Project and direct Operations and Sustainability to modify the work plan in order to make the Craigleith area a priority and then monitor, study and create solutions to address any and all issues in Craigleith’s watercourses with haste.

Re: Proposed 2024 Budget

Ms. Spence understands that Council is considering applying 2023 savings to offset tax increases in the 2024 budget. That is admirable but she along with others have highlighted issues, such as safety, housing and water quality, that “must” be made a priority.

Ms. Spence respectfully request that not ALL the 2023 savings be applied to offsetting residents’ taxes and asks that some of the savings be applied to fund important projects that herself and others have highlighted. The community residents can and should accept a modest increase of 3.5-4.5%. A 4% tax increase is realistic and would align with real-world inflation and the impacts of increasing costs.

Staff Response – In initial budget deliberations in early January 2024, the Stormwater Natural Infrastructure project was removed from the 2024 Proposed Budget however at the January 29, 2024 Council meeting, Council did include the full study in the 2024 Draft Budget at a cost of \$500,000 with \$400,000 coming from a grant and the remaining \$100,000 from a Town reserve fund.

The use of a previous year surplus is at the full discretion of Council, if directed, a portion of the 2023 surplus could be reallocated towards issues as highlighted by the commentor.

Kathy Uram, Kim Harris, Su Penny, Ken Key, Raymond Frederick

Kathy Uram, Kim Harris, Su Penny, Ken Key, Raymond Frederick provided comments on the parking passes and are opposed to the new system.

Staff Response – there is currently a notice of motion in front of Council that looks to make potential changes to the parking pass system. At this time staff are waiting Council direction on how the Town will proceed with this program.

Stephen Granger and Jennifer Murdison – Craigleith Community Working Group (CCWG)

Written comments were submitted by both Stephen Granger and Jennifer Murdison on a number of key community needs and numerous 2024 budget requests and action priorities. The key community needs identified are Pedestrian Safety, Wayfinding Signage, Resident Parking, Trail Connectivity, Beach Improvements, Road Reconstruction, Sidewalk Snow Removal, Trail Protection, Increased Transit Hours and Craigleith Master Plan.

Staff Response – staff look forward to continuing the work with the CCWG and other stakeholders such as local developers within the Craigleith service area. Through continued collaboration, some of the items identified by the commentors (such as resident parking) can potentially be accomplished through the Town's 2024 operating budget.

Other items are longer term commitments with the Town and local developers. Examples of these include upgrading of Jozo Weirder Boulevard, working with the Town of Collingwood regarding indoor recreation facilities, and the Parks and Open Space Master Plan which is included in the 2025 budget.

Verbal Comments – Received at the Public Meeting held on March 12, 2024

Sarah Beveridge and Renee Desrochers, Chair and Co-Chair of Thornbury BIA

Sarah Beveridge and Renee Desrochers highlighted the BIA 2023 projects that were completed and accomplished including updated banners and rebranding in Thornbury, new website highlighting business ownership, and successful Canada Day and Olde Fashion Christmas events.

The BIA requested that Council provide direction to staff to work with the BIA to address their staffing concerns, as it is too much work for a volunteer board, the request would then be in line for the 2025 budget. In addition, the BIA also requested the continued support of the flower watering subsidy for \$20,000.

Staff Response – with Council direction staff can work with the BIA around staffing and bring any future requests they may have through the 2025 budget process. The Town has waived the \$20,000 annual flower watering costs since 2020 (due to the COVID-19 pandemic), the \$20,000 cost to the BIA is included in the 2024 Draft Budget, offsetting taxation, however this can be removed at the direction of Council.

Stephen Granger

Stephen Granger attended the meeting and reiterated his written comments as indicated above.

Staff Response – staff comments included above for this comment.

Jennifer Murdison

Jennifer Murdison attended the meeting and reiterated her written comments as indicated above.

Staff Response – staff comments included above for this comment.

Mark Maskens

Mark Maskens gave support to the Craigleith Community Working Group; however, does note that he does not want to see changes to the cottage feel of Price's Subdivision.

Staff Response – staff comments included above for this comment.

E. Strategic Priorities

1. Communication and Engagement

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders.

2. Organizational Excellence

We will continually seek out ways to improve the internal organization of Town Staff and the management of Town assets.

3. Community

We will protect and enhance the community feel and the character of the Town, while ensuring the responsible use of resources and restoration of nature.

4. Quality of Life

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

F. Environmental Impacts

N/A

G. Financial Impacts

The Town's 2024 Draft Budget has a tax rate increase of 2.77% over 2023 which equates to an additional \$60 annually for the average assessment house.

H. In Consultation With

N/A

I. Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has been the subject of a Public Meeting which took place on March 12th, 2024. Those who provided comments at the Public Meeting, including anyone who has asked to receive notice regarding this matter, has been provided notice of this Staff Report.

Any comments regarding this report should be submitted to Sam Dinsmore, Acting Director of Finance / Treasurer directorfit@thebluemountains.ca.

J. Attached

1. Public Comments received prior to the 12:00pm March 8, 2024 deadline
2. Public Comments received after the deadline

Respectfully submitted,

Sam Dinsmore
Acting Director of Finance / Treasurer

For more information, please contact:
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Report Approval Details

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Attachments:	- FAF.24.021 Attachment 1.pdf - FAF.24.021 Attachment 2.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Mar 13, 2024

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Sam Dinsmore - Mar 12, 2024 - 3:55 PM

Shawn Everitt - Mar 13, 2024 - 7:33 AM