
Earlier county budget paves way for earlier tender process

Lanark County Council passed its 2010 budget during the regular meeting Wednesday night, enabling the county to get an earlier start on tendering for capital projects.

Warden John Fenik (Perth Mayor) congratulated staff and councillors for their hard work. "This is the first time the bulk of the budget has been completed in time for the new fiscal year, and it helps us to be more competitive when it comes to tendering earlier for our capital projects," he said. "I commend 2009 Warden Paul Dulmage for his leadership in starting the process earlier. It was streamlined and went very smoothly."

CAO Peter Wagland noted council is experienced and familiar with the budget process as well as the county's programs and services. "That helped us to move along more expeditiously," he said. "As council completes the final year of its term there was an emphasis on finishing projects rather than starting new initiatives, which also improved the bottom line."

The budget increased this year by 4.8 per cent. The county will collect \$26.1 million from property taxpayers, up from \$25 million last year. Estimated gross expenditures are at \$75 million, an increase of 0.8 per cent from 2009, while gross revenues are estimated to be 1.3 per cent less than 2009, at \$49 million.

"We were aiming to keep any increase close to the inflation rate, especially when there is still some economic uncertainty," said Kurt Greaves, director of finance/treasurer. "We're fortunate in Lanark County because we have had strong growth in both the residential and commercial sectors, and that helped to offset budget increases."

The county's total taxable assessment is \$5.3 billion, which is up \$85 million or 1.6 per cent over 2009. "This is a true increase from growth and does not include assessment increases from the continued phase in of the 2008 reassessment," Mr. Greaves said, adding almost 90 per cent of the county's total assessment is residential.

Major capital projects planned for 2010 include \$4.7 million in road work, namely the rehabilitation of parts of County Roads 12, 16, 29 and 43 and the paving of Cty. Rd. 9. Capital bridge work for this year amounts to \$1 million, with the major project being the rehabilitation of the Clydesville bridge on Cty. Rd. 511, which is two-thirds (federal/provincial) funded by a Build Canada grant.

Unknowns that may affect future budgets include cost-of-living increases in wages as the county negotiates collective agreements and the possible effect of the harmonized sales tax.

"At this point there are too many variables for us to be able to determine whether the HST will have an effect or not," Mr. Greaves said. "We receive tax refunds for some items, but we will be paying HST on others. We also don't know what will happen with prices as suppliers and contractors sort out how the HST affects them." Any negative effects, he said, will be minimized for the 2010 fiscal year because the new tax doesn't begin until July.

The county's tax rate increase is 3.2 per cent, which means for the county portion of the tax bill residential property owners can expect to see an increase of \$14.60 for every \$100,000 in assessment. Tax rates and ratios are slated for approval at the April 28 meeting of county council.

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