

Brockville funds Y pool; tax hike at 1.79%



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Swimmers complete laps in sunshine streaming through the windows of the D.B. Green Pool at the YMCA of Brockville and Area on Wednesday. (DARCY CHEEK/ The Recorder and Times)

The city will give the YMCA of Brockville and Area \$60,000 to fund upgrades to its pool area, but is still managing to bring its tax levy increase below the two per cent mark.

Councillors made a series of decisions at their latest budget meeting that brought the increase in the total tax take to a level below what officials expect will be Brockville's two per cent growth rate.

The 2016 budget process is definitely in the home stretch, added mayor David Henderson. "We're down to the fine-tuning here," he said.

The tax levy – the amount taken from property owners to cover operating costs and some capital work – now sits at \$33,942,831, or a 1.79 per cent increase over last year.

City hall is relying in part on its fiscal policy reserve, a tax-smoothing fund in place to deal with unpredictables, to keep its tax increase at a manageable level.

Despite a series of draws from that reserve, officials expect it to remain above \$1 million.

The YMCA is the latest beneficiary of that reserve fund. On Tuesday, YMCA board chairman Catherine Deplaedt and chief executive officer Diana Deakin-Thomas appealed to councillors for \$60,000 to help with work on the aquatic facility.

The Y is looking at four capital projects: Replacing two boilers, repairing a hot water tank, recirculating pumps and the installation of money-saving LED lights. The Y's pool serves as the community's aquatic facility in a longstanding arrangement with the city and Deakin-Thomas noted it's been 17 years since the YMCA has had a capital contribution from the city.

Councillors were favourable to the request. Jeff Earle looked back to the days the city ran its own pool and suggested the cost of an aquatic director would amount to close to \$60,000 a year for the city.

"For 17 years, we have abdicated the pool responsibility to the Y," said Earle. "Frankly, this is doing a bit of catching up."

The grant beats building a new municipal pool, added Henderson. "It would cost us more to get less if we had to do it today," said the mayor.

Councillor Jason Baker, while supporting the motion, rejected the idea the Y was doing city hall any favours, noting the arrangement was part of an agreement with the city. He urged councillors to find off-setting savings to cover the \$60,000.

Councillors then approved a series of cuts to bring the levy increase down. They included reducing the increase in the contribution to the capital budget from \$397,000 to \$300,000; reducing the increase in the fiscal policy reserve contribution by \$100,000, bringing it down to \$300,000; and cutting \$50,000 out of the city's annual street repaving program.

Council is hoping low oil prices will allow it to get the same number of streets paved for less. Should the tenders come in higher, that \$50,000 will go back into the budget.

Council also opted not to add a precautionary extra \$75,000 to the snow clearing budget, hoping the weather will co-operate.

City councillors hold their next budget meeting next Tuesday.