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For immediate release

County holds line on budget

CENTRAL ELGN – Elgin County Council approved a budget today that faces head on challenges presented by the loss of tax income from St. Thomas Ford Assembly Plant and a cut in Ontario government funding.

The \$5.59 million budget has a tax rate reduction of .8 per cent and a levy increase of 2.4 per cent.

The average household with no change in assessment will receive a \$10 reduction in taxes. Taxes on a household with an average assessment growth will see an increase by \$48 per year, or 4 per cent.

The budgeted net income is a loss of \$3.9 million.

The county's director of financial services, Jim Bundschuh, said council is drawing on reserves to lessen the impact of a decrease in tax revenue.

"Council took bold moves to cushion the blow," he said. "By planning ahead and putting money away, the county is drawing on its reserves."

The income losses resulting from Ford and the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund total \$1.6 million.

Bundschuh said using the reserves lessens the impact on ratepayers.

The budget includes the Dexter Line Environmental Assessment (\$265,000); Social Services contribution (\$3.3 million); rehabilitation of Talbot Line (\$600,000); purchases of books for the county's libraries (\$233,000); renovations to Rodney Library (\$35,000); Furnival Road reconstruction (\$960,000); IV training for ambulance emergency service staff (\$60,000); grants to community groups (\$55,000); Imperial Road resurfacing (\$366,000); development of the art trail for tourism (\$38,000); and, increased hours of operation for the Bayham Library (\$31,000).

The county is also continuing to explore efficiencies in operations, said Bundschuh.

“I am pleased that county staff were able to come up with increased efficiencies – some \$400,000 this year,” said Warden Dave Mennill.

Department total operating budgets are: Warden and Council (\$348,152); Administrative Services (\$436,470); Financial Services (\$557,667); Human Resources (\$413,266); Engineering and Land Division (\$10,743,231); Homes for Seniors (\$4,604,527); Museum and Archives (\$368,243); Library Services (\$2,342,928); Economic Development and Tourism (\$1,088,536).

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