

## 2013 tax increase passes Council on consent

**By Brock Weir**

Aurora's 2013 budget has been approved.

Councillors signed off on the 2013 budget, which comes with a \$78.5 million price tag, at Council last Tuesday. With the new budget in place, Aurora residents can expect to see a 3.42 per cent tax increase on the Town's portion of the bill which, combined with the Regional tax increase of 1.9 per cent and the regular school taxation, will result in a 2.02 impact on your overall tax bill.

With the numbers crunched, this collective tax increase will see the average homeowner's property tax bill, whose property is assessed in the neighbourhood of \$400,000 increase by \$83.37 this year.

Despite months of debate, discussion and handwringing, however, the 2013 Budget passed Council with little fanfare, or indeed even discussion, being passed on consent.

This issue, however, has caused a degree of consternation with some Councillors, however, who wanted the opportunity to take another kick at the can but, for a variety of reasons, did not pull the item for discussion.

It is outrageous! said Councillor Buck, who returned to Council last week after missing several meetings due to illness. People are entitled to hear from their Council and have it outlined: the purpose of this budget, what they're hoping to achieve with this budget, why it is an efficient management of their resources. They're entitled to hear something from their Council when they have that amount of taxation imposed upon them.

Councillor Buck said she was focused on getting through the meeting after her illness and, due to a persistent cough, was trying to get some discipline over my inclinations to talk all the time, and after Councillor Wendy Gaertner pulled a multitude of items from the agenda for discussion, Councillor Buck thought the budget was among them.

Wendy called all those items and I just thought she probably [called all the ones] I wanted to be called, but I was wrong, she said. I wasn't paying enough attention.

In a similar boat is Councillor Chris Ballard who admitted there was some confusion and there was an oversight.

I believed the item had been pulled and it wasn't until we were wrapping the meeting up in a hasty way at the end, and we had run out of time, that I had realised the item had not been pulled, he said. Normally when all the items are pulled, the Mayor would go through a list of all the items pulled. I don't believe we did that at the meeting, but regardless of that, it was an oversight and one that is easily rectified for us to talk about it.

Councillor Ballard said he would like a further opportunity to discuss the issue and have a debate around the table and the next opportunity may be at next week's Council meeting if either he, Councillor Buck, or Councillor Gaertner try to bring the budget forward for reconsideration.

We have opened up far less important events for reconsideration and this is perhaps one of the most important debates that we have on a yearly basis and we need to have it in public. We need to have it when we have pulled the entire budget together so the public can see all the pieces, how they fit together, and their thoughts.

Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, however, is of a different mind. He rejected the idea it was incumbent upon him to remind the rest of Council that the item had not been pulled for further consideration and discussion.

If someone wants something for discussion, it is incumbent upon them to pull it off, he said. If they didn't pull it, then you can

only assume they were either (a) not prepared or (b) weren't paying attention. We have had all sorts of discussions [on the budget]. We discussed it last Tuesday night. I appreciate that Councillor Buck has missed a couple of meetings because she hasn't been well and I understand that, but it is incumbent on her to pull it.

?I would like to point out that the Capital Budget also went through on consent at Council after much toing and froing on the subject, so I totally disagree with it, otherwise we would be pulling every damn thing from every meeting, so why have General Committee??

He added he would not be supporting a reconsideration unless the Councillors ?have a very good argument.?

Despite the ongoing deliberations over Aurora's 2013 financial plan, Councillor Ballard and Buck said they still had a number of issues they would like to see reconsidered. Although Councillor Ballard declined to elaborate on what specifically he objected to other than ?We could have sharpened our pencils and done better for the taxpayers of Aurora? preferring to save his thoughts until the next Council meeting. Councillor Buck was not as coy.

Her objections include increased and continuing funding for the Aurora Cultural Centre and a \$10,000 boost to the Town's annual contribution to the Aurora Historical Society to support their outreach programs to local schools. She has not voted in favour of a municipal budget for seven consecutive years.