



A Message From
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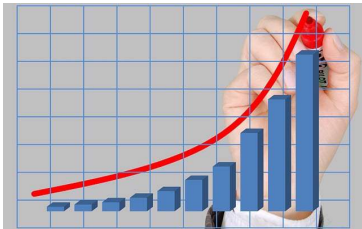
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Dear Friend,

You're receiving this email because of your previous interest in issues I've raised, and I hope you'll welcome an occasional update from me during the current Town Council term. If you'd prefer not to receive these newsletters, you can unsubscribe by clicking the link above.

WHY I SAID 'NO' TO THE 2023 TOWN BUDGET



On April 4, the Town Council voted on its proposed budget for 2023.

The budget passed with a vote of six councillors to three. Along with Councillors Burroughs and Cheropita, I voted against the budget, and I'd like to tell you why my vote was "no".

The budget approved an operating levy of \$14,996,567, which translates to an 8.25% increase in the property tax paid by NOTL residents. There are many reasons for this increase, and the rationale is explained in the town's [Media Release Town Council Approves the 2023 Budget](#). (You may have to open the email in [your browser](#) to activate the links)

To explain why I couldn't support the budget I first have to talk about changes to NOTL's transit management.

At the beginning of 2023, responsibility for NOTL transit transferred to [Niagara Region Transit](#). NRT is charged with building and sustaining a regionally integrated transit system, and I'm all for this goal.

Beginning this year, all property tax bills in the Region will include a [regional levy to support NRT](#). Previously, most local municipalities levied an annual tax for local transit. For most municipalities, such as [Welland](#), this appeared on bills as part of the Town's operational levy. Not so in NOTL.

In 2022, NOTL transit was funded from money raised from parking revenues and some gas tax revenues, rather than through the operating levy (that is, property taxes). This year, to compensate taxpayers for the regional transit tax that will now appear on NOTL bills as a separate tax levy, the NOTL budget proposed that one million dollars should be transferred from parking revenues to offset the regional transit tax levy.

However, the million dollars was applied to the Town's operating budget, thereby offsetting the Town's increased *operating budget* instead of offsetting the *regional tax levy* as intended. This results in an operating levy calculation arriving at an average of 8.25% tax.

(Here I should explain that the *budget* is the amount needed to cover the costs of operating and delivering the Town services as agreed by Council. A *levy* is the amount that will be raised through property taxes to contribute to the Town or Region's budgets. See the [Media Release](#).)

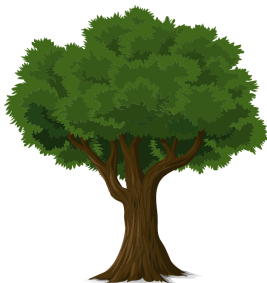
To achieve transparency, and achieve the intended relief for taxpayers, the total increase in the operating budget should have been calculated *excluding* the million dollars.

A million dollars is roughly 7.3% of the operating budget of almost \$15 million. If it had been excluded from the operating budget calculation, the true increase would show an operating budget increase of 15.55%.

The intended benefit of offsetting the increased *regional* tax levy for transit could only have been achieved if the million dollars had been subtracted from the *Town's operating levy*. As a result, there's a million dollars more in the budget passed by Council, but it won't affect the levy: NOTLers will be paying an increase of 8.25% this year *plus* the new transit tax. This means a real tax increase of 15.55%, which I cannot support, and this is the first reason why I had to vote "No".

The second reason I was unable to vote in favour of this year's budget was because it shows no priorities for caring for the Town's vulnerable environment, or taking proper action on climate change. I was able to discuss this in detail with Penny Cole of *The Local* and, if you haven't seen the article, you can view the [April 12 edition here](#). The interview starts on page 5.

IF A TREE FALLS IN A SUBDIVISION, DOES IT REALLY MATTER?



At a recent meeting of the Committee of the Whole, a tree appeal was received that asked for the removal of a mature tree from a residential front yard. The request was based on the applicant's wish to plan a new landscape. The applicants cited that the tree caused a safety problem due to the sight-line it blocked, and that they weren't comfortable having the tree so close to the sidewalk.

Town staff reported that the sight-lines were not a safety issue, and that there was no issue regarding the tree's position near the sidewalk (the Town is responsible for sidewalk safety). The By-law doesn't permit cutting down a mature tree for the purpose of landscaping, and Town staff recommended denying the removal of the tree.

Because none of the cited reasons met the By-law's requirements, I moved to deny the appeal. No other member of the Committee (which comprises all councillors and the Lord Mayor) seconded the motion. A motion can't be discussed by committee unless it's seconded by another member. The Committee voted seven to two to permit the removal of the tree, and it has now been cut down.

Why does it matter when just one mature tree is removed?

It hardly needs stating that a tree is a wonderful thing, and brings pleasure to homeowners and passers-by.

Undisturbed mature trees also have a real dollar value for your home. There's evidence that mature trees increase the selling price of homes, and affect the value of properties throughout the neighbourhood. Some cities, such as [Edmonton](#), identify the dollar value of a mature tree, including an estimate of cost-benefits to the community.

In day-to-day terms, compared with the bare landscape and small tree plantings of a new housing development, it's the large trees that create a sense of permanence, transforming "housing" into homes. Each tree adds to the local microclimate that shades the community and encourages biodiversity. Just by being there, it contributes invisibly to a great home and a sustainable community. The list of benefits includes: release of oxygen, carbon dioxide absorption, flood mitigation, pollution removal, and increase in the local biodiversity and animal habitat. Importantly, all these benefits also fight climate change and global warming.

It's sad enough to lose a tree if it's diseased, damaged, or in some other way presents a hazard. Every time a permit is issued to cut down a healthy mature tree, decades of investment in your neighbourhood is lost. I will continue to oppose any application to remove healthy trees, and I urge you to add your voice in protecting all the big, healthy, beautiful trees we enjoy in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

To learn more, you can [Google](#) "mature trees impact on environment" for links to plenty of reports confirming all the work a tree does, just by being left alone. You might like to start with [Arbor Day Foundation Tree Facts](#).

If you found this newsletter useful, please feel free to forward it to others who may be interested.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to sending you more updates in the future.

Sandra O'Connor