

Here are the highlights from the regular Lanark County Council meeting held Wednesday, Dec. 9.

▪ **Budget Approved:** The 2021 Lanark County budget – themed “Challenging Times” – was approved with an estimated 1.9 per cent tax increase. The overall budget increased by 3.4 per cent, with an estimated assessment growth of 1.5 per cent reducing the tax increase. The county will collect \$37 million from property taxpayers this year, up from \$35.8 million last year. Estimated gross expenditures are \$95.4 million. “The status quo has been turned upside down in the last eight months with the first worldwide pandemic in 100 years,” said CAO Kurt Greaves at the special budget meeting held Nov. 20. “This has accelerated changes to long-term care staffing, social services service delivery and public focus on low-income housing. The pressure on municipalities to deliver quality services in a rapidly changing environment means difficult choices are necessary. The 2021 budget focuses on improving core services while maintaining capital spending during these challenging times.” The county is slightly under its goal regarding investment to maintain capital, Greaves explained. The target is \$12.1 million; the 2021 investment is \$11.5 million. “The provincial debt,” he said, “continues to be the single largest threat to Ontario residents.” Provincial debt has increased to \$360 billion, with a sharp rise in the deficit, from \$10 billion to \$39 billion, which translates into \$25,000 per capita. Lanark County’s long-term debt is now just \$32 per capita. The county has not taken on new debt since 2010. “Our \$6 million contribution to the redevelopment of Fairview Manor in 2006 will be paid off in May 2021, and the \$3.5 million for the administration building rehabilitation matures in December 2022,” Greaves said. “We self-financed the Eastern Ontario Regional Network Cell Project and the Ottawa Valley Recreational Trail, and we are borrowing from reserves to complete our social housing redevelopment project in Carleton Place, with payback of \$300,000 per year.” Among impacts to the budget this year are increases in staffing and capital budget for Lanark Lodge, liability insurance, and child care costs due to downloading, as well as enhanced infrastructure and security for information technology. Funds were allocated for the Last Mile (broadband expansion) project, increased contributions to Valley Heartland and the Small Business Advisory Centre, a local municipal tourism fund, a Junior Planner position, evaluation of the fire communication system, and \$350,000 to hospital capital funding. Community grants were approved in the amount of \$260,000, including \$46,000 with allocations to seven different organizations for one-year programs. The public works budget represents 38 per cent of the county levy, followed by emergency services at 22 per cent, social services and housing at 18 per cent, long-term care and administration/other both at 10 per cent and economic development at 2 per cent. With assessment growth estimated to be 1.5 per cent, residential ratepayers with a property assessed at \$300,000 can expect to see an increase of \$21 on the county portion of their tax bill. The bill also includes the local municipal and the education portions. Tax rates and ratios for 2020 will be set by county council in the new year. For more information, contact Kurt Greaves, CAO, at 1-888-9-LANARK, ext. 1101.

▪ **County Asks Province to Prioritize Child Care in Recovery:** Council has approved a motion seeking adequate funding support and planning for licensed child care facilities and early learning to support Ontario’s recovery from COVID-19. The motion resulted from 2021 budget deliberations and an update provided by Children’s Services Manager Tammy Kealey-Donaldson outlining the negative effects of the pandemic on child care options for local families. The motion states the pandemic “has profoundly increased the cost to operate safe child care, forcing child care spaces or centres to close.” Ontario has among the highest average child care fees in Canada and they continue to rise, and the motion indicates passing costs associated with the pandemic onto families

is not possible. It also notes investment in early years and child care results in positive economic benefits. "The economic recovery of Lanark County and Ontario is dependent on families having access to safe, reliable and affordable child care that incorporates early learning principles." The motion indicates the county is committed to working with the province to deliver positive and affordable options, and asks the province to prioritize children and child care as part of the overall post-pandemic recovery plan, to provide adequate funding and a comprehensive plan to support facilities through provision of licensed child care and early learning education, and to provide increased funding to child care providers to reflect COVID-19 operating costs increases to ensure safety and sustainability. The motion is to be widely circulated. For more information, contact Emily Hollington, Director of Social Services, at 1-888-9-LANARK, ext. 2101.

- **Upcoming Meetings: County Council, Wednesday, Jan. 13, 5 p.m.;** Community Services, Jan. 13 (following County Council); Corporate Services, Jan. 13 (following Community Services). **County Council, Wednesday, Jan. 27, 5 p.m.;** Public Works, Jan. 27 (following County Council); Economic Development, Jan. 27 (following Public Works). Watch for details about public access to meetings on agendas and through online notifications. For more information, contact 1-888-9-LANARK, ext. 1502. Like "LanarkCounty1" on Facebook and follow "@LanarkCounty1" on Twitter!

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