



THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF SOUTHWOLD

MINUTES

Special Council Meeting – Budget Deliberations
Wednesday January 15, 2025
7:00 p.m. Council Chambers, Fingal/Via Video Link

COUNCIL PRESENT: Mayor Grant Jones
Deputy Mayor Justin Pennings
Councillor John Adzija
Councillor Sarah Emons
Councillor Scott Fellows

ALSO PRESENT: Lisa Higgs, CAO/Clerk
Michele Lant, Director of Corporate Services/Treasurer
Aaron VanOorspronk, Director of Infrastructure & Development Services
Jeff McArthur, Director of Emergency Services/Fire Chief
Paul Van Vaerenbergh, Public Works Superintendent (attended virtually from 7:00 pm – 8:35 pm)
Corey Pemberton, Director of Building and Community Services(attended virtually at 8:21 pm)

Mayor Jones called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

DISCLOSURES:

Deputy Mayor Pennings provided a disclosure with respect to Fire department wages.

REPORTS:

FIN 2025-03 2025 Budget Report #3 and 2025 Draft Budget

Treasurer Michele Lant provided a report to Council on the 2025 draft budget, indicating that the total budget presented for the property tax levy is \$7,409,841. Ms. Lant explained that the capital budget presentations were made earlier in the year and that the focus of tonight's meeting is the operating budget and comprehensive budget

including capital and operating elements. Treasurer Lant reviewed the summary budget amounts and the key numbers showing the overall change in various accounts. Deputy Mayor Pennings asked about the re-assessment in other jurisdictions as a possible predictor for anticipated decisions from the Assessment Review Board to help guide the discussion on amounts to allocate to the tax stabilization reserve. Staff were reminded to investigate ARB decisions related to similar buildings in other jurisdictions.

COUNCIL

Treasurer Lant reviewed the costs associated with the Council budget, indicating that there is a slight decrease overall, but that costs associated with conferences and training is increased, in light of raising travel and attendance costs.

ADMINISTRATION

Treasurer Lant reviewed the total administration budget and reviewed the total costs, in particular focusing on computer and server upgrades and future website improvement costs. There was significant discussion on collaborating with municipalities to collectively push back against the transition to the new platform. Council reviewed the various Committee budgets as part of the review, noting changes to the Family Day Committee, Communities in Bloom, History Committee, and Greening Communities.

MEDICAL BUILDING

Treasurer Lant presented the budget for the medical building, indicating there is a marginal increase in rental income (as per the residential tenancies act) and a cost to connect the building to the sanitary sewer, which will result in lower holding tank pumping costs.

FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

Treasurer Lant, in concert with Chief McArthur provided a summary of the Fire and Emergency Services budget, beginning first by highlighting the major capital projects (Talbotville Fire Hall, notably). Chief McArthur outlined the various sources of revenue, indicating optimism in 2025 to increase these revenues, especially as the Fire Coordinator is more successful in invoicing for response and for grant success.

There were some questions about the ongoing policing costs and a reminder that the one-time funding from the province for cost relief is unlikely to be available in the coming years.

Fire Department wages were not specifically discussed with respect to individual members of the department.

BUILDING

There are very little changes in the building department overall costs or from anticipated revenues. A question was asked about the status of building department fees and whether these should be reviewed and total revenues increased in the budget to reflect changing fees. Council instructed staff to complete a review of fees in the building department and provide recommendations on increased fees.

BY-LAW, CANINE & LIVESTOCK

Treasurer Lant provided an update to the By-Law Enforcement budget communicating that the wages and overhead from other staff have now been appropriately attributed to the department.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

Roads

Treasurer Lant provided an introductory of the total roads costs including a summary of the priority capital projects and associated operating costs to operate the department. Director VanOorspronk indicated that staff have evaluated the operating budget line by line to create budget amounts based on historical averages, resulting in an overall reduction from the 2024 budget of \$65,094.00.

Councillor Emons asked whether there has been further investigation into the closure of Begg Road. Director VanOorspronk indicated that staff needs to study this further from both a legal and practical perspective. Mayor Jones indicated that he took a drive down the road and indicated that there is Hydro poles on the road which may cause some challenges. Staff will investigate and report back to Council.

Bridges and Culverts

Council reviewed the overall summary of the Bridge and Culvert budget, indicating that the Bridge and Culvert budget reserve shows a long-term deficit, suggesting that contributions may need to increase in future years.

Deputy Mayor Pennings indicated that there was some discussion about bridges located near Clinton Line area and a strategic retreat for some large culverts and potential bridge closures or road closures without significant impact on landowners. Director VanOorspronk indicated that there will need to be more substantial discussion about these topics, but that improvements to these bridges and culverts are not included in the 2025 budget.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Treasurer Lant reviewed the Waste Management budget, reviewing various revenues generated (many in the form of contributions from the Green Lane Trust and minimally from CMO) and the overall expenses.

CEMETERIES

Ms. Lant reviewed the cemeteries budget with Council indicated that there are very few costs associated with the operation of the cemeteries with their being a small amount typically required for minor maintenance or tree removal on various cemetery properties.

KEYSTONE COMPLEX

Treasurer Lant provided a summary of the 2025 Keystone Complex costs and highlight of Capital projects (namely the electronic sign proposed). Director Pemberton indicated that the City-Wide software will help to better allocate time for employees for budgeting purposes.

PARKS

Director Pemberton provided a summary of the annual parks department and spoke to the increase in mulch required for each park, which includes a recommended annual increase, based on feedback from the independent audit including the safety assessment of the playgrounds. Ms. Lant also explained that there are increases in small equipment and vehicle costs associated with the increase in staffing complement in the parks department for 2025. Director Pemberton explained that parks inspections are required every two years and balanced between various parks.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Treasurer Lant provided a report on the costs for Planning and Development, and there was a discussion clarifying that the revenues recorded assumed that Council adopts an increase in fees, representing a three-year phase in of recommended County planning fees.

DRAINAGE

Treasurer Lant provided a presentation to Council on the 2025 drainage costs, indicating that 2025 drainage costs may be impacted by recent requests for capital drains, however it is likely that these will fall in the 2026 budget to provide time for the drainage process to be completed.

GREEN LANE ASKS:

Councillor Emons vacated her seat and left the Council Chambers. Council indicated that there was a previous commitment of \$5,000.00 per year for three years to the Long Point Litoral Cell Climate Resiliency Plan. Council directed staff to include this in the Green Lane ask for 2025.

Councillor Emons returned to her seat.

BUDGET SUMMARY

Staff were instructed to bring various scenarios to Council on contributions to the tax stabilization reserve with an ultimate goal of reducing the overall tax levy increase to below 4 %.

Council agreed that there are not sufficient opportunities in finding reductions overall in the operating budget without losing services, so it was generally agreed that there should be sufficient contributions to the reserve.

Council agreed that making a similar contribution to the reserve as 2024 (\$850,000 in total) will likely achieve a responsible goal.

ADJOURNMENT:

2025-19 Deputy Mayor Pennings – Councillor Adzija

THAT Council for the Township of Southwold adjourns this Special meeting of Council at **9:34 p.m.**

CARRIED

Original signed by:

Mayor
Grant Jones

Original signed by:

CAO/Clerk
Lisa Higgs