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# HALDIMAND COUNTY

## Report FIN-15-2020 Budget Guidelines for 2021

For Consideration by Council in Committee on December 8, 2020

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### OBJECTIVE:

To receive approval of the 2021 budget guidelines for the preparation of the 2021 operating and capital budgets for rate supported and tax supported functions.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report FIN-15-2020 Budget Guidelines for 2021 be received;
2. AND THAT the principles, as approved during the 2013 water/wastewater rate study, be utilized for preparation of the 2021 Draft Rate Supported (Water and Wastewater) Capital and Operating Budget, including:
  - Full cost recovery of all operating and capital costs;
  - Net costs (i.e. revenues required from rates revenue) will be recovered 50% from fixed revenues (i.e. basic charges) and 50% from variable revenues (i.e. consumption revenues);
  - Leachate costs to be allocated based on relative loading at the treatment plant and recovered 50% from fixed revenues and 50% from variable revenues;
  - Annual indexing of all miscellaneous revenues based on annual increase of underlying costs.
3. AND THAT the following guidelines be approved for the preparation of the 2021 Draft Tax Supported Capital Budget and Forecast:
  - A 1.0% increase in the tax levy to fund the capital requirements for the 2021 Capital Budget; and
  - Capital related expenditures targeted to be at 35% of the total tax levy within the forecast period but at a future date beyond 2021; and
  - Maintain an 80:20 ratio of capital expenditures for replacements/"state of good repair" to new/enhanced projects over the 10 year forecast period;
4. AND THAT the following guidelines be approved for preparation of the 2021 Draft Tax Supported Operating Budget:
  - Annual assessment growth is to be used as follows:
    - i. *firstly for increases in the tax levy to fund the annual capital-related tax supported capital requirements; and*
    - ii. *secondly to fund growth related impacts and new initiatives/service level enhancements; and*
    - iii. *lastly, any unutilized annual assessment growth be transferred to the Contingency Reserve to offset future growth related cost increases if necessary; and*
  - Additional new initiatives for new/enhanced services, beyond available assessment growth, should only be considered during the budget review if the net levy impact can be mitigated on a consolidated, corporate-wide basis and the individual business case provides for offsetting revenue sources, efficiency improvements or cost savings; and

- Funding related to Council approved new initiatives would be considered above and beyond the base budget requirements; and
  - Mitigation measures will be presented for Council review, to offset the anticipated one time COVID related impacts to operations, firstly utilizing any remaining funds received from the Safe Restart Agreement Phase 1 funding..
5. AND THAT, unless approved by a specific Council resolution and until the 2021 tax supported budget is approved by Council, staff are delegated the following purchase authority, subject to the provisions of the County's Procurement Policy:
- Capital Purchases: Up to the approved budget for the applicable project, conditional on the project being approved by Council in the 2020 Capital Budget, including approved 2021 Capital Forecast Projects for State of Good Repair only;
  - Operating Purchases: Up to 50% of the previous year's base budget expenditures, adjusted for the impacts of one-time expenditures approved in 2020, and excluding any proposed new initiatives or service level changes.

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**Approved:** Craig Manley, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The County employs several key financial principles to ensure the budget document is understandable and meets the municipality's needs. These include ensuring the budget(s): are accountable, credible and reliable; manage expectations; are transparent; and meet legislative compliance. The budget cycle is continuous and ever evolving, including the following integral steps: preparation, approval, monitoring and reporting.

Starting in 2015, staff have presented a multi-year operating tax levy projection, along with suggested mitigation measures (if necessary to stabilize the overall annual impacts) that was aligned with the current term of Council. The initial projection covered the years 2015 to 2018 inclusively. As 2019 was the first budget year for the new term of Council, this practice was continued to ensure anticipated tax levy increases are sustainable, predictable and service levels meet the expectations of the end users. At that time, the targeted overall increase, averaged over the term of Council, based on the combined municipal and education taxes on an average residential property was set at 2.0%.

Higher expenditures and reduced revenues related to service delivery changes arising from the COVID pandemic will be a major driver for the 2021 budget. Staff are reviewing the budget impacts on several services and due to uncertainty surrounding the future of Provincial funding, it is expected that these impacts could exceed approximately \$1.4 million, or a **2.0%** levy impact in 2021. Future COVID impacts and how we do business are unknown beyond 2021, so in the absence of more details, these impacts cannot be quantified at this time. Due to this uncertainty, mitigation measures will be required for Tax Supported operations to stay within the targeted overall increase. Proposals will be reviewed using the principles outlined within this report, ensuring continued sustainability and flexibility to deal with future changes.

Further pressures on the overall targeted increase for average residential properties are being experienced as a result of the lack of education room that may be available. Typically, the education

tax room offsets the total increase by approximately 0.5% on average. Staff will continue to review as more information becomes available.

Staff recommend approval of the 2021 Budget Guidelines, as outlined in this report, including the use of proposed mitigation measures, to provide the framework for developing proposed capital and operating budget estimates for presentation to Council. The impacts of increased expenditures and reduced revenues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the lack of education room available, will likely result in an average residential tax increase in the range of **3.0% - 5.0%** (in the absence of any mitigation measures or support from upper levels of Government).

As well, given that the tax supported capital budget is not scheduled to be approved until March, and the tax supported operating budget is not scheduled to be approved until April, this report recommends that staff are authorized to expend funds in 2021 for certain capital projects, and up to 50% of the approved 2020 base operating budget.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Section 290(1) of the Municipal Act requires local municipalities to prepare and adopt annual estimates required during the year for the purposes of the municipality, including amounts sufficient to pay all debts of the municipality falling within the year, as well as amounts for any boards, commissions or other local bodies. In addition to these legislative requirements, the adoption of annual budgets provides the basis for prudent fiscal management by identifying expenditures required to match operational short and long term plans.

A budget is a guide to ensure corporate strategic priorities and departmental business plans are achieved. Annual budget estimates ultimately determine the County's revenue requirements and the impact on taxation and other fees to County residents. Long range financial planning and multi-year budgeting are increasingly becoming best practice at all levels of municipal organizations.

The County currently develops annual budgets for both the rate supported and tax supported operations. The capital and operating requirements are segregated into three (3) separate budget documents for Council deliberations as follows:

1. **Rate Supported (Water and Wastewater)** - Combined Capital (current year plus 9 year capital forecast) and current year Operating
2. **Tax Supported Capital** (current year plus 9 year capital forecast)
3. **Tax Supported Operating** – current year

An integral part of the budget preparation process is the establishment of budget principles and guidelines which assist the Senior Management Team (SMT) and staff in developing budget estimates that fall within Council's fiscal objectives. The budget preparation process involves each Manager reviewing their operational requirements and service levels to ensure that the needs of the County are being met.

Typically, this report is presented to Council in late fall, prior to staff's preparation of the coming year's budget estimates for both capital and operations.. As the 2021 Rate Supported Water and Wastewater Operating Budget and Capital Forecast is essentially developed, it was based on previously approved budget guidelines. This budget will be brought forward for Council review on January 14th, 2021.

The budget guidelines set a framework for staff to work within to develop proposed budgets and proposed changes to services/service levels for Council's review. Council has previously approved a multi-year operating budget guideline, aligned with the term of Council. As 2019 represented the first year of a new term of Council, tax levy projections for the years 2019 to 2022 were presented to Council. The specific budget guidelines will be updated annually for Council's review and approval, while recognizing the overall target, averaged over the term of Council.

## ANALYSIS:

The County's budget process has been focused on long term financial planning necessary to support Council's adopted strategic objectives of:

- **Growing our Local Economy by Creating Economic Opportunity** – *Does the expenditure support the strengthening of the economic base of the County? Examples: new infrastructure investment to allow growth, urban re-development, generates assessment growth, retains existing business/industry, tourism enhancement.*
- **Community Vibrancy & Healthy Community** – *Does the expenditure relate to high quality sustainable services that promote the well-being of communities? Does the expenditure contribute to the betterment of the quality of our communities? Does it contribute to a better natural environment or the health of residents?*
- **Corporate Image & Efficient Government** – *Does the expenditure result in a visible, positive image for the County? Does it contribute to more accessible, more efficient or more cost effective local government for our residents?*

Using the above as a strategic focus throughout the budget process provides direction to management and staff when identifying service level needs and implementing the County's key financing/budgetary principles.

The following have been established through prior budget approvals as the underlying principles utilized to develop the Draft Budgets for Council's review:

### 1. Three (3) Pillars of Financial Planning

- a. **Focus on Sustainability:** The County has adopted several principles to provide and maintain services and infrastructure without resorting to unplanned increases in tax levy/rates or cuts to services. One of the key principles to sustainability is to ensure the County maintains its infrastructure to ensure safe and reliable services. The County has developed asset management plans and conducted condition assessments to plan the timely replacement of existing infrastructure. Pro-active maintenance plans, specific to various types of infrastructure, ensure the assets meet anticipated performance measures and maximize their useful life. A dedicated focus on the "state of good repair" and prioritization of all capital projects based on a standard evaluation criteria, ensures that competing projects are evaluated consistently and the respective merits of these projects can be considered on a corporate basis. Financial principles to ensure services are affordable and meet public expectations include: a dedicated capital levy to meet targeted capital related expenditures; capital replacement reserve fund principles to ensure adequate capital reserves are in place for planned replacements and growth related infrastructure needs ("pay as you go"); and establishing a planned overall tax levy/rate increase covering the term of Council to provide predictability to residents/taxpayers.
- b. **Protect Against Vulnerability:** Principles have been adopted to assist the County's ability to address vulnerability to external sources of funding or exposure to costs beyond Council's control. The County has developed a Local Service Policy and Development Charge by-law to ensure "growth pays for growth". Council has established a User Fees and Charges Policy to govern the setting of fees based on who benefits, type of services and recovery/subsidy levels. These fees are indexed annually based on increases to underlying costs as well as "full cost recovery" reviews are conducted periodically. Given that Council has limited control over a number of services that the County provides, provisions are made to ensure overall cost controls/reviews are in place to offset unplanned costs in these areas. The County also

maximizes external revenues or grants from upper levels of Government to ensure full cost recovery of the applicable services.

- c. **Maintain Flexibility:** It is also critical to have the flexibility to limit tax levy/rate increases while responsibly issuing debt without impacting service levels or credit rating. The County has established annual debt repayment limits to ensure there is the ability to utilize debt in a planned approach while maintaining the flexibility to issue additional debt for unforeseen costs and future opportunities. The County has also established an Investment Policy and an Investment Committee to maximize investment returns while protecting the underlying principle investment portfolio. The County has also utilized short and long term mitigation strategies to phase in the impacts of lost revenues or increased costs to “smooth” these impacts over several years.

## 2. Specific Principles

- a. **Annualized Costs:** The development of the County’s operating budgets includes the annualized costs of new initiatives or changes in service delivery. This ensures the entire year’s costs of these services are considered when evaluating a program or service. This principle also avoids unnecessary levy impacts in future years as these programs or services are fully implemented. Additionally, any potential savings during the initial year of these programs/services can be utilized to offset unfavourable impacts associated with unknown costs/estimates. This principle is conservative and financially protects the interests of the municipality. It also places the accountability for the full financial impact of the initiative on the decision makers at the time of approval.
- b. **Assessment Growth:** As development occurs within the County, new assessment is generated which results in additional tax revenues (all other factors being equal). The revenues generated from this assessment growth can be used to offset other tax levy impacts (i.e. growth related costs, expenditures related to new initiatives/service enhancements, increases in capital infrastructure needs, etc.). Annual budget guidelines will identify the most effective use of this additional revenue source. This principle helps to alleviate the burden of additional costs, due to growth or new infrastructure, on the existing tax payers.
- c. **Education Tax Room:** During service delivery realignment in 1998, the Province downloaded several services to the municipal sector under the premise that there would be offsetting revenues to ensure this “realignment” was revenue neutral to the municipalities. Although this premise has been contested in recent years, the Province has advocated that the use of “Education Tax Room” is one such revenue tool to offset costs downloaded to municipalities. “Education Tax Room” is created from property tax revenues when the Province maintains or reduces the education tax rate in a given year. This provides “room” for the municipality to offset additional revenue requirements through reduced education levies and overall reduced tax rates as a percentage of the property owner’s total tax bill.

Based on the aforementioned principles, the following instructions and guidelines are proposed for Council’s approval for the applicable budget(s) as outlined below.

### A. 2021 Draft Rate (Water & Wastewater) Capital and Operating Budget

The Rate Supported Operating Budget is reviewed and considered separately from the Tax Supported Operating Budget. Water and Wastewater Operations are self-supported and funded entirely from user rates, not property taxes. The operating environment for water and wastewater operations is highly regulated and monitored. Several of the County’s treatment facilities are operated through contracts with an independent company qualified to meet these stringent legislative requirements. The County’s current systems are diverse and geographically dispersed, creating financial and operational challenges. As a result, several operational factors are beyond Council’s control. Legislation indicates that, to ensure sustainability of these systems, municipalities will be required to prepare a financial plan

to report both the full cost of the water services and a cost recovery plan, representing a period of at least six (6) years. Council will review this financial plan with the 2021 Rate Supported Operating Budget in early January 2021.

Due to the limited number of ratepayers to fund the County's water and wastewater systems, a change in the customer base will have a significant impact. Although development in the urban areas may have a positive impact on consumption, heavy reliance on large industrial users has substantial potential negative impacts on the remaining users. As a result, the recommendations from the rate study completed in 2013 guided future budget development for water and wastewater services by focusing cost recovery methods into the fixed and variable components. Such a policy has provided improved stability in water and wastewater revenues. Staff continue to assess the implications of growth in the number of customers compared to the costs required in order to provide the service.

The main principles approved by Council in 2013 continue to provide the basis for the budget guidelines for the rate supported water and wastewater services, as follows:

- Rates to be based on Full Cost Recovery
- Encourage Water Conservation
- 50/50 Fixed/variable revenue recovery methodology;
- Elimination of current Block 2 rates (fully eliminated in 2016);
- Updated Bulk water rates and cost recovery methodology (including monthly administration fees), annual indexing beginning in 2018;
- Restructured fire protection cost allocations/recovery;
- Revised leachate treatment cost allocations/recovery;
- Revised holding tank and septic tank treatment cost allocations/recovery (including a "blended" rate methodology and monthly administration fees, annual indexing beginning in 2016);
- No capital upgrades/replacements of holding tank/septic tank waste receiving stations due to elimination of capital charge; and
- Implementation of long range funding plan for capital asset replacement.

The approval date for the 2021 Rate Supported Operating Budget has been set for January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021. As a result, the recommended rate increases will not take effect until February 1<sup>st</sup>. Any additional revenue requirement will need to be captured over 11 months, meaning a slightly higher rate increase than the annualized figure.

## **B. 2021 Draft Tax Supported Capital Budget and Forecast to 2030**

The Capital Budget process has evolved over the years to focus on strategic objectives and long term financial planning. A multi-year approach has better managed tax levy impacts while striving to meet specific financial objectives. These principles provide the basis for a long range financing plan to meet the anticipated replacement of the County's current infrastructure. Similar principles have been implemented and are continually refined by municipalities of all sizes to effectively plan for the timing and financial requirements associated with their infrastructure needs.

It is commonly accepted that there is a significant infrastructure deficit in the Province and across Canada. As a result, a planned approach to address this deficit will identify future needs and the associated financing sources to fund these needs. While this long range funding plan is being developed and refined, the County has implemented a scoring system that is aligned with the Council approved three strategic pillars in order to evaluate proposed initiatives relative to one another. In addition, proposed capital projects are segregated into two categories: projects falling into "replacement/state of good repair" or "enhanced/new initiative". This segregation of projects allows better management of existing infrastructure to ensure timely repairs and maintenance are undertaken and the appropriate resources are allocated to these needs.

Although municipalities are required to adopt a “balanced budget” (i.e. fully funding 100% of anticipated operating and capital costs), the Municipal Act allows municipalities to exclude estimates from annual budgets for expenses related to the amortization of capital assets. The County’s current budgeting principles for the Capital Budget are premised on a “long range financing approach”. As there is no direct relationship between the amortization of capital assets and the financing requirements associated with the replacement of existing infrastructure needs, there are limited impacts on budgeting for capital expenditures in 2021. For annual audited financial reporting purposes, the Capital Budget, as approved by Council, is converted to meet the Public Sector Accounting Board (PSAB) reporting requirements with details provided within the annual audited financial statements.

The following guidelines are recommended to Council to guide the development of the 2021 Draft Tax Supported Capital Budget and Forecast:

- *A 1.0% increase in the tax levy to fund the capital requirements for the 2021 Capital Budget; and*
- *Capital related expenditures targeted to be at 35% of the total tax levy within the forecast period but at a future date beyond 2021; and*
- *Maintain an 80:20 ratio of capital expenditures for replacements/“state of good repair” to new/enhanced projects over the 10 year forecast period.*

With regards to any new/enhanced capital projects, staff will be required to identify the related operating budget impact resulting from expanding the County’s asset base. In some cases, additional ongoing costs will need to be added to the annual operating budget due to maintenance, staffing, insurance, utilities, etc. of the new asset.

It should also be noted that the County’s current capital replacement reserves are for the purpose of replacing/maintaining current assets, not for enhancements or acquiring new assets. As a result, with the exception of Development Charges for growth related infrastructure, there is no dedicated source of funding for capital asset enhancements unless it is taken from the pool of funds needed to replace existing infrastructure. The impact on the ongoing tax levy from enhancing the asset base will need to be identified in order for Council to make an informed decision prior to approving such projects. Additional contributions to reserves may be required in order to ensure sufficient funds are available for replacement of the asset at the end of its useful life.

Council has continually supported a multi-year plan to increase the funding for capital related expenditures. The intent of this plan was to develop predictable annual levy increases whereby the target of 35% of the annual tax levy could be allocated to capital related expenditures. Although the capital related percentage increase in the total levy has changed over the years (ranging from a high of 1.5% to a low of 0.25% percentage points), Council has recognized the importance of addressing the infrastructure deficit related to the County’s capital assets. Council will see that the Draft 2021 Tax Supported Capital Budget and Forecast, continues to include a multi-year plan that provides for annual 1.0% increases in the total tax levy related to capital financing to meet the target levels indicated above. As a result, a 1.0% increase in the tax levy related to capital financing is also included for 2021 as a key budget guideline.

With the completion of the first phase of tangible capital asset reporting/management, an inventory of existing assets is available based on PSAB reporting principles. Although this is not a complete asset inventory (as smaller dollar items are not capitalized for reporting purposes), it does provide a basis to evaluate future replacement costs in relation to current capital funding. During 2013 and 2014, the County completed an asset management plan for core infrastructure categories of roads, bridges/culverts, stormwater management, water and wastewater. In June 2018, Staff presented to Council a draft asset management plan for the asset categories not included in the 2014 edition, which included buildings, machinery and equipment, land improvements, and vehicles. The intent is to continually update/refine these asset management plans with more timely/accurate information to

better understand any deficiencies in the County's current long term financing strategy for infrastructure replacements. The plan is intended to provide a sound basis for financial planning and asset management/maintenance practices, including annual reporting.

Moreover, beginning January 1, 2019, the Province has passed new legislation that will require all municipalities to adopt a service based asset management plan for all assets. Under this new legislation, every municipality will be required to prepare a strategic comprehensive asset management policy that includes a plan to maintain core infrastructure, defines levels of service and make the plan publicly accessible with updates at least every 5 years. These requirements will be phased in over several years. In June 2019, Council approved FCA-01-2019 Asset Management Policy, being the first step of this legislation. The remaining provisions will be implemented in future years with all components fully implemented by July 1, 2024.

### **C. 2021 Draft Tax Supported Operating Budget**

Starting in 2015, staff have presented a multi-year operating tax levy projection, along with suggested mitigation measures (if necessary to stabilize the overall annual impacts) that was aligned with the current term of Council. This practice was continued for the most recent term of Council, to ensure anticipated tax levy increases are sustainable, predictable and service levels meet the expectations of the end users.

#### **Budgetary Constraints/Economic Impacts**

It is important to consider the effect of external factors on the budget principles/guidelines on an annual basis. As some factors that effect the annual budget are either beyond Council's control or are influenced by more Provincial/global impacts.

**Level of Influence:** Premised on accountability and control over expenditures, budget development is focused on the controllable expenditures vs. uncontrollable/limited control expenditures. Several services and related costs are provincially mandated or controlled by other Boards and, to some extent, are beyond the control of Council and staff. Other costs are predetermined by past decisions (i.e. debt repayment costs) and, as such, the County is legally bound to specific costs. Given these constraints, the budget is developed with a focus on "controllable expenditures". These expenditures include the materials, supplies and services that the County has "control/influence" over their level of use and, ultimately, the associated cost of these items. Given the lack of control over certain Provincially mandated programs, the impacts associated with these programs will often need to be offset by reductions in controllable areas to meet targeted levy increases.

The "uncontrollable" services funded by property taxes include: Education property taxes, Ontario Municipal Partnership Funds grant (OMPF), Public Health, Social Assistance, Child Care, Social Housing, Policing (through OPP contract), Conservation Authorities (Long Point, Grand River and Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authorities) and the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC). Based on the approved 2020 Tax Supported Operating Budget, these uncontrollable services accounted for approximately 27% of the average municipal residential tax bill in Haldimand County.

As identified in 2019, several of these services are experiencing unknown budget impacts due to uncertainty surrounding Provincial funding. As the Province's focus has shifted during 2020, future impacts are anticipated in years beyond 2021 but, in the absence of more details from the Province, these impacts cannot be quantified at this time.

As noted above, COVID will be a major driver for the 2021 budget, affecting several service areas with uncertainty surrounding future Provincial funding to mitigate these pressures on municipalities. It is expected that these impacts could exceed approximately \$1.4 million, or 2.0% levy impact in 2021. During 2020, efforts were made to curtail expenditures, by laying off non-essential staff for a period of time, delaying hiring and reducing professional development and mileage, when possible, in order to



partially offset the extra costs and lost revenue being experienced by the COVID-19 pandemic. That, in conjunction with the receipt of funding from the Safe Restart Agreement Phase 1, should result in an overall corporate surplus that may be utilized in 2021 to mitigate some of the one time COVID-19 expenditures expected. Additionally, it is unknown if any Provincial grants will be made available to offset anticipated COVID impacts in 2021 – specifically related to anticipated Public Health costs. Future COVID impacts beyond 2021 are unknown, so in the absence of more details, these impacts cannot be quantified at this time.

In addition to these external impacts, the County has several unique factors to be considered. The pace of new development, local economic impacts, shared services agreements with Norfolk and unpredictable grant allocations from senior levels of government all substantially impact the budget requirements for future years. Due to the uncertainty and uncontrollable nature of these financially significant items, a consistent budgeting approach has been utilized until these issues are resolved. During budget preparation, strategies have been evaluated to phase-out/offset these uncertainties while mitigating the overall tax impacts.

The following summarizes known base operating budget drivers that will have tax levy impacts in 2021 and beyond:

**Positive issues:**

- Assessment growth (annual report on Assessment Growth scheduled for February 2021 Council meeting);

**Negative issues:**

- Reduced/uncertain funding from Province government;
- Impact of decisions by upper levels of Government on current operations and program delivery;
- Economic adjustments to employee compensation, including wages, statutory and non-statutory employee benefits;
- Staffing resource needs
- COVID related impacts on operations
- OPP contract;
- Insurance costs;
- Information Systems security needs
- Other direct operating costs (e.g. salt costs)
- Education tax room.

**Economic Impacts:** The anticipated economic conditions have been considered when developing the proposed budget guidelines. The financial pressures currently being faced on a global, national and provincial basis will undoubtedly have impacts on the local economy. Based on the National Bank's November 2020 Economic Forecast, Canada's annualized rate of change in key financial areas is projected as follows:

<b>Annualized Rate of Change</b>	<b>2017 Actual</b>	<b>2018 Actual</b>	<b>2019 Actual</b>	<b>2020 Forecast</b>	<b>2021 Forecast</b>
Gross Domestic Product	3.2%	2.0%	1.7%	(5.5%)	<b>4.3%</b>
Residential Construction	2.2%	(1.6%)	(0.6%)	(2.4%)	<b>3.3%</b>
Unemployment Rate	6.3%	5.8%	5.7%	9.6%	<b>8.6%</b>
Inflation	1.6%	2.3%	1.9%	0.6%	<b>1.8%</b>
Bank of Canada Prime Lending rate	Currently at 2.45% (major banks = 2.45%)				

Provincial legislation requires a mandatory 4-year reassessment cycle. As a result, any assessment increases will be phased-in over the four year cycle and decreases will take effect immediately. The most recent phase-in cycle was based on a January 1, 2016 valuation date. The coming taxation year, 2021, should have represented the first year of a new reassessment cycle, however the COVID-19 pandemic led to the Province delaying reassessment by one year. As such, 2021 assessment will continue to be based on the fully phased-in January 1, 2016 current values (i.e. the same valuation data in use for 2020 taxation year). Typically, with any reassessment adjustments, there are potential tax impacts on specific properties within a tax class, as well as shifts between classes, as such, the 2021 assessment should remain relatively consistent from this perspective, aside from the impacts of growth over 2020. Staff will present a separate report to Council, at the February 9<sup>th</sup> 2021 Council-in-Committee meeting, to outline these impacts and potential effects on tax policy decisions.

### **Projected 2019 – 2022 Targeted Overall Residential Tax Increases**

As noted above, staff recommend that Council approve a multi-year tax levy plan to align with the term of Council. Attachment #1 to this report outlines the proposed targeted increases for the term of Council, 2019 to 2022, based on the following parameters.

### ***Base Operating Budget Guidelines***

The “Base Budget” is the cost, net of revenues from user fees and other sources, of providing the same levels of service approved by Council in the prior year. Given the known base budget drivers and impact on the levy, there are no recommended provisions for growth in the level of service. Any recommended change in level/delivery method of service will be presented as a “New/Enhanced Initiative” in the 2021 Draft Tax Supported Operating Budget.

The following instructions are provided to staff when developing the base operating budget for 2021:

- 0% guideline for developing the base budget for controllable operating expenditures – materials, supplies, services, etc.
- Ability to reallocate funds within a Division’s base budget for supplies and services while still remaining within the 0% guideline.
- One time expenditures approved in the 2020 budget have been removed so as not to be considered in the “Base Budget”.
- Review and adjustment of user fees and service charges to maintain relative recovery percentage in relation to the associated costs.
- Review of whether budgets can be reduced, based on actual needs, efficiencies or decreased costs, etc.
- Identify COVID related impacts to operations (revenues and expenditures)

Additionally, as indicated above, some of the County services are beyond the control of Council and, as such, the levy impacts may not be at the discretion of Council. These impacts will be specifically identified in the budget document and form a component of the overall base budget requirements. Given the fact that Council has limited control over these impacts, to meet the overall base budget requirements, reductions in other “controllable” base budgets may be necessary to offset these impacts. Base budget impacts can fluctuate year to year depending on the specific circumstances – past term of Council base budget increases fluctuated from 3.25% to 1.20%. The intent is to limit the average base budget impacts to align with annual inflation, recognizing that some underlying services can have greater than inflationary increases on an annual basis.

In an effort to maximize the impact of user fees in relation to the associated actual costs, similar to previous years, staff provided a separate report on user fees for Council’s approval before the review of the Draft 2021 Tax Supported Operating Budget. This report was approved by Council on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020 and included a comprehensive review of fees and charges. Most fees were indexed by 2.3%

to reflect the estimated increase of the underlying associated costs. From a timing perspective, given the scheduled date of the 2021 Tax Supported Operating Budget review, this allows for the new rates to take effect at the beginning of the calendar year, avoiding unnecessary annualized revenue shortfalls (i.e. delays in implementing fees in the past have resulted in calendar year revenue shortfalls).

### ***Use of Assessment Growth and New/Enhanced Operating Initiatives Guidelines***

As previously noted, as development occurs within the County, new assessment is generated which results in additional tax revenues (all other factors being equal). The revenues generated from this assessment growth can be used to offset other tax levy impacts (i.e. growth related costs, expenditures related to new initiatives/service enhancements, increases in capital infrastructure needs, etc.). Annually, the budget guidelines have established principles to guide the use of anticipated assessment growth.

Historically, assessment growth has averaged approximately 1% annually up to and including 2017. Given the consistent principle of increasing the annual capital-related levy by 1.0%, growth has traditionally been allocated to this principle, with any deficiencies funded from other levy sources. However, given the anticipated sustained residential developments planned over the next 10 years, staff are anticipating increased annual assessment growth. The assessment growth in 2018 increased to approximately 2.3%, 2.7% in 2019, and 2.5% in 2020. Although the year end roll information is not yet received, 2021 growth is anticipated to be around 2.0%. The 2019 increase was high, because at the on-set of subdivision development, the conversion of the lands and the initial uptake on lots can skew the annual assessment growth impacts.

Given the impacts of increased development in the past three years and the anomalies noted therein, staff have attempted to determine what the most likely average annual assessment growth will be over the next four years. Based on this analysis, the budget guidelines for 2019 to 2022 have included a projected annual assessment growth of 2.0%. It should be noted that individual years may fluctuate above and below the target of 2.0%.

The base budget impacts presented above, do not include any “New/Enhanced Initiatives” to fund improvements to current operating budget service levels, additional/new services, or growth in the level of service. Given the anticipated increased annual assessment growth, the following principles are recommended for use of annual assessment growth:

- firstly for increases in the tax levy to fund the annual capital-related tax supported capital requirements, currently established at 1.0%; and
- secondly to fund growth related impacts and new initiatives/service level enhancements; and
- lastly, any unutilized annual assessment growth be transferred to the Contingency Reserve to offset future growth related cost increases if necessary.

These principles and proposed uses will provide the ability to fund growth related costs from growth related revenues, which aligns with one of Council’s underlying financial principles, as well as establishing a funding source to provide for improvements to current operating budget service levels and additional/new services.

An annual assessment shift and growth report will be presented to Council in February, based on the returned roll that will provide further details on the actual assessment growth prior to the review of the 2021 Draft Tax Supported Operating budget.

In the event that sufficient assessment growth is not available, additional new initiatives/service enhancements can be brought forward provided they have a zero net levy impact on a consolidated, corporate basis. As a result, these initiatives should be accommodated through additional offsetting revenue sources or by modifying current service levels or delivery to generate the required levy savings.

Although a specific new initiative may have a net levy impact in 2021, corporately, recommendations may be proposed to mitigate these impacts (i.e. through other efficiencies/savings/offsetting revenues). All new initiatives for enhanced programs or services proposed during the operating budget review require a standardized cost justification, business plan, or cost-benefit analysis and will be identified individually.

New initiatives, approved by Council prior to budget review, are considered above and beyond the base budget requirements and should contemplate additional levy funding.

### ***Mitigation Measures***

One of the principles of maintaining financial flexibility is to introduce “mitigation” measures to plan and phase-in anticipated budget impacts. In previous years, the County has utilized short and long term mitigation strategies to phase-in the impacts of loss revenues or increased costs to “smooth” these impacts over several years.

Staff anticipate the County will need to identify mitigation of approximately 2.0% or \$1.4 million, in order to offset anticipated COVID costs. Senior staff have developed potential mitigations measures to meet this target based on the following principles:

- *Alignment with 3 Key Corporate Pillars*
- *Impacts on the Long Term Financial Plan*
- *Probability of reducing the levy*
- *Risks/Impacts on service levels*
- *Risks/Impacts on operations*
- *Public sensitivity*

These mitigation measures will be incorporated into the 2021 Draft Tax Supported Operating Budget. As noted above, there are many unknowns at this time, including our ability to deal with COVID uncertainty and potential future Provincial announcements that could significantly impact the 2021 and future Tax Supported Operating Budgets. As a result, staff recommend that, if not required in 2021, the balance of unused mitigation measures be placed in the Contingency Reserve to offset future impacts.

### ***Offsetting Education Tax Room***

Education Tax Room is generated annually when the Province sets the Education Tax rates (typically at reduced rates due to increased annual assessment). Municipalities are allowed to utilize this reduction to offset their municipal budget impacts. Based on the targeted overall tax levy impact and estimated Education rates, the Education Tax Room would normally provide relief of approximately 0.5% on the overall tax levy. Staff anticipate that for 2021, as there is no reassessment, that the Province will not change the residential education tax rates. This will result in no education tax room available to assist in reducing the average impacts on residential taxpayers. This will impact our ability to meet a targeted 2.0% average residential tax increase. Staff will continue to review as more information becomes available.

### ***New Provincial Property Tax and Assessment Measures***

The Province recently announced new property tax and assessment measures in the 2020 Ontario Budget, released on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

As there are currently a wide range of business education tax (BET) rates across the province, the impact on business competitiveness, especially as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, were concerns expressed. In response, the Province announced that it will reduce all high BET rates to a rate of 0.88 percent in 2021. This is a significant reduction when compared to the Haldimand County

rate of 1.16 percent. Properties within the Commercial occupied tax class will benefit from reduced education taxes of approximately 24%.

The Provincial budget also introduces a new optional small business property subclass. Beginning in 2021, municipalities would be able to provide a property tax reduction for eligible small businesses through the adoption of a new optional small business property subclass. "Small Business" would be defined locally by the municipality. Defining "Small Business" will be difficult as traditional property assessment and tax data does not support an effective or objective assessment of whether a business is large or small. The vision of what should be included as a "Small Business" will be challenging to determine. Also, given that the assessment rolls will have been returned in late December, to be used for 2021 property tax purposes, it is difficult to understand how this program could be effective for the 2021 taxation year. Staff will update Council further as more details are provided by the Province.

### **Summary – 2021 Tax Supported Operating Budget Guidelines:**

Based on the preceding discussions, it is proposed that Council approve the following guidelines for staff's preparation of the 2021 Tax Supported Operating Budget:

- *Annual assessment growth is to be used as follows:*
  - *firstly for increases in the tax levy to fund the annual capital-related tax supported capital requirements; and*
  - *secondly to fund growth related impacts and new initiatives/service level enhancements; and*
  - *lastly, any unutilized annual assessment growth be transferred to the Contingency Reserve to offset future growth related cost increases if necessary; and*
- *Additional new Initiatives for new/enhanced services, beyond available assessment growth, should only be considered during the budget review if the net levy impact can be mitigated on a consolidated, corporate wide basis and the individual business case provides for offsetting revenue sources, efficiency improvements or cost savings; and*
- *Funding related to Council approved new initiatives would be considered above and beyond the base budget requirements; and*
- *Mitigation measures will be presented for Council review, to offset the anticipated one time COVID related impacts to operations, firstly utilizing any remaining funds received from the Safe Restart Agreement Phase 1 funding.*

To summarize, the current Council approved guideline for preparation of the 2021 Tax Supported Operating Budget as set out in the term of Council guidelines is an increase in the average residential tax bill of **2.0%** over the approved 2020 level for all tax supported services (details included in Attachment #1 to this report). This proposed increase is to cover the change in base operating budgets as a result of: inflationary cost for goods and services; utility rate increases; changes in salary, wage and employee benefit costs; contracted services price adjustments; and net of any increase/decrease in service charges and user fees revenue for base services. This is net of the levy impacts of base budget drivers, capital levies, assessment growth and educational tax room. It should also be noted that the proposed increase would be at the corporate level and does not automatically mean every Division's base budget increases by 2.0%.

As outlined above, while Staff will attempt to produce a 2021 Draft Tax Supported Operating Budget in line with these guidelines, there are many potential cost implications that are beyond the County's control and it may not be possible to achieve such a target without a review of current service levels. The impacts of increased expenditures and reduced revenues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the lack of education room available, will likely result in an average residential tax increase

in the range of **3.0% - 5.0%**. Staff will continue to carefully review the cost of existing services and financial strategies in order to identify efficiencies or opportunities. As a decision to reduce service levels rests with Council, the proposed budget delivered by staff will be based on maintaining current service levels.

### **Delegated Authority Based on Timing of Budget Approval:**

Due to the timing of Council's review of the 2021 budgets, a recommendation has been included in this report that delegates authority to management to make certain expenditures. The recommended authority is as follows:

- Capital Purchases: Up to the approved budget for the applicable project, conditional on the project being approved by Council in the 2020 Capital Budget, including the 2021 Capital Forecast Projects for State of Good Repair only;
- Operating Costs: Up to 50% of the previous year's base budget expenditures, adjusted for the impacts of one-time expenditures approved in 2020 and excluding any proposed new initiatives or service level changes.

This approval is consistent with past years' direction from Council. All expenditures are still subject to the provisions of the County's Procurement Policy.

### **FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:**

All aspects of this report have an impact on the 2021 Draft Rate and Tax Supported Budgets being prepared by staff for Council's consideration. The guidelines, once approved by Council, will be utilized in the development of the respective budgets.

### **STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:**

Participation and cooperation of all Departments is necessary in the preparation of the 2021 Draft Budgets and in meeting the budget guidelines as outlined in this report.

### **REPORT IMPACTS:**

Agreement: No

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: No

Policy: No

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Projected Tax Levy Impacts for 2019 to 2022 – Based on Average Residential Property