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NEWS LOCAL

Shoemaker makes move to start budgeting now

By Elaine Della-Mattia, Sault Star Wednesday, December 14, 2016 11:47:55 EST AM



City council needs to start budgeting now for 2018 and should be looking at more ways to find efficiencies and cut spending, says Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker.

The first-term councillor says he's hoping to get enough support to a motion he will raise in January, asking staff now to cut their budgets by one per cent for 2018.

That means, Shoemaker said, a whole percentage point less than the current budget that was approved earlier this month plus any anticipated cost of living increases that are normally factored into annual departmental budgets.

The motion will be seconded by Ward 5 Coun. Frank Fata.

"I believe budgeting is year round and we need to ask staff to start looking at this now so they can find more efficiencies in their own budge before the crunch time comes. Everyone knows you can't do these type of things on budget night," he told The Sault Star.

Shoemaker was not present for the 2017 budget deliberation night because he was hosting a fundraising event that saw TVO's Steve Paik speak of his newest book Bill Davis National Builder and Not So Bland After All. The book- signing event raised money for Thrive Child Development Centre (formerly Children's Rehabilitation Centre Algoma).

"I don't apologize for holding that event. It was planned prior to the budget deliberation dates," he said.

Shoemaker is open to how the departments want to reach that one per cent threshold. They may want to find their own efficiences or trim various parts of their budget on their own or they may want to present ideas to council that include a menu or list of possible service reductions or cuts that council needs to make the decision on.

"If council accepts this motion, then the departments have a year to look at this and find those savings," he said.

Earlier this month, city council passed its 2018 budget. The tax levy will see an increase of 4.34%.

The increase is believed the be the largest increase on the tax levy in at least 25 years.

Certain 'uncontrollable' factors were attributed to a large portion of that increase, including the use of surplus and reserves to reduce the le in the 2016 budget, higher-than-anticipated costs for WSIB and PTSB, as well as adding in increases negotiated under the collective agreements.

Council heard a brief presentation from citizen Mark Brown Monday, who suggested that the tax levy could be reduced if the city borrowed \$2.3 million to fund its asset management improvements slated for the upcoming year.

The problem with that, said Mayor Christian Provenzano is that the subsequent debt would need to be serviced by taxpayers and the asse management allocation would still need to be re introduced into the budget the following year, creating the same problem.

"Council spent a long time on this budget and the only other way to reduce the levy was to cut services and the list was provided and there was no appetite to go that route," Provenzano said.

He said cutting the asset management plan would also take money out of the local economy for 2017, something else that council did not want to do considering the situation in the local economy.

In recent months, Shoemaker has penned a number of resolutions designed to reduce the impact on city taxpayers.

Those resolutions that have received the nod from council include freezing the salaries of non-unionized city staff, freezing city council's honorariums and reviewing city parking lot operations to determine if more revenue can be found.

Another motion he raised to review Public Works and Transportation operations to search for greater efficiencies, did not receive the support of city council.

Shoemaker's motion will be deliberated at a January council meeting.



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