

Budget Crunch

City offers police 4.3% budget increase

Fantino wants 7.3% but says he'll 'have to manage'

'That \$26M could build 3 community centres,' Chow says

PAUL MOLONEY
CITY HALL BUREAU

The Toronto Police Service is being offered a 4.3 per cent increase in its budget to cover negotiated wage hikes and ensure a full complement of officers in 2003.

The increase, recommended by city councillors on the budget committee yesterday, would boost the police budget to \$630.6 million from \$604.6 million last year.

The force has permission to field 5,255 uniform officers. The plan for 2003 would see 5,386 officers, including 144 recruits, by the end of the year, according to budget papers filed by Chief Julian Fantino.

Councillor David Shiner, budget chair, said the city's offer would easily cover increases in wages, which represent 93 per cent of the police budget.

"We're giving them sufficient funds to maintain, in our opinion, all their complement of officers and maintain all their services," Shiner said. "So there should be no cuts to police services in this city at that increase, which is greater than almost any other department."

Most city employees won a 3 per cent wage increase for 2003, while the police were awarded 3.5 per cent across the board

plus pay upgrades for long-service officers that boosted the total labour tab by 4.2 per cent.

Fantino is seeking a budget increase of 7.3 per cent, which would bring the 2003 budget to almost \$649 million, but the budget committee is requesting that Fantino trim his request by about \$18 million.

Fantino said he was willing to work with city budget officials.

"There will be some accommodations and some adjustments made and of course we'll work through that," he said. "If at the end of the day someone cuts a cheque that represents a shortfall, obviously I'll have to manage that."

Councillor Olivia Chow, who tracks the police budget, was taken aback that Shiner's committee was offering to add \$26 million for police at the begin-

ning of budget negotiations.

Deliberations began this week on the budgets for city departments and agencies, and will continue until council sets the final budget in February.

"Wow. They must think money grows on trees," Chow said. "That (increase) builds three community centres. I think spending the money on community centres and libraries would prevent crime."

The city is seeking a \$95 million special payment from the provincial government to cover increases in costs of police, fire and ambulance services, public transit and garbage disposal.

The provincial money is needed just to limit next year's property tax increase to 3 per cent, city officials say. That would hike the tax bill by about \$57 — to \$1,948 — on the average home

assessed at \$295,000 (not counting school taxes).

Municipal Affairs Minister Chris Hodgson said yesterday Toronto is just one of many municipalities with its hand out looking for money from the province. "Quite frankly, every municipality would like more money. They've got to manage their own finances."

Hodgson added that Finance Minister Janet Ecker will meet with city officials on Monday.

Shiner said he will argue Toronto has good control of its finances but should be considered a special case in that it faces costs not borne by other municipalities. "We continue to get our house in order. We're able to quite clearly demonstrate the pressures we're facing are quite extraordinary in nature."

WITH FILES FROM RICHARD BRENNAN



'Wow. They must think money grows on trees.'

Councillor Olivia Chow on budget committee decision

Where residents vote on budget

Toronto studies Brazilian model

People have say on 20% of spending

KERRY GILLESPIE
CITY HALL BUREAU

Toronto's proposed budget is out and if taxpayers don't like it, all they can do is shout at their councillor and vow never to vote for them again.

In the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, locals think they've found a better way — they get input, and a vote, on about 20 per cent of the budget.

The idea has spread to other cities in Brazil and is gaining international recognition.

Torontonians were introduced to "participatory budgeting" at the St. Lawrence Centre Forum last night.

Change in Toronto is needed, said Debbie Field, one of the speakers and executive director of FoodShare, which promotes access to affordable food.

She has spent the last 15 years making deputations at committee meetings, urging funding for programs and going to city council meetings to find out if she was heard.

"What we have come in Canada to believe is we elect people and they will decide on our behalf," Field said yesterday.

"People are so alienated from that model that they don't even vote because they don't think they're being heard," she said.

In the last municipal election, only 33 per cent of Torontonians eligible to vote actually bothered to do it.

Citizens need more reasons to get involved in the political process and giving them direct control of some of the city's budget

is one way to do it, said Chris Cavanagh, a facilitator with the Catalyst Centre, which promotes innovative community developments.

Cavanagh is involved in a group calling for "10 by 10" — 10 per cent of Toronto's budget to be allocated through community participation by 2010.

If that existed with today's \$6 billion budget, citizens would have a direct say in how \$600 million was spent.

The Participatory Budget Network, comprised of individuals and community, labour and academic groups, has been meeting for eight months and hopes to have proposals by spring.

While the group is looking at how it's done in Porto Alegre, the state capital of Rio Grande Do Sul, Cavanagh acknowledges the situation there is quite a bit different from Toronto.

With 1.3 million residents, the

city is half the size of Toronto and the poorer areas, which have benefited the most under participatory budgeting, had very clear needs such as sewer hookups, water connections, street lighting and road paving.

In Porto Alegre, yearly participatory budgeting is a 10-month process, which begins in March with public meetings and gets more formal as it goes along. There's a review of last year's budget, electing community members to a budget advisory committee and finally voting on priorities for district and city-wide spending, which are then allocated money according to population and need.

Cavanagh said while it's hard to envision how it could work in Toronto, he's convinced it can.

Starting with a small amount of money or just one budget item are some ways it could be managed, he said.

3.8% tax increase looms in Mississauga

MIKE FUNSTON
PEEL/HALTON BUREAU

Mississauga homeowners face a property tax increase of 3.8 per cent if city council endorses staff's budget proposal for 2003.

The owner of an average home valued at \$240,000 would pay an extra \$26.60 on the city portion of their taxes under the proposed budget, released yesterday by city manager Dave O'Brien and treasurer Janice Baker. Residents must also pay taxes to Peel Region and the school boards.

The plan will be presented to council's budget committee on Monday to begin what's expected to be a month of deliberations before final approval.

The city actually proposes to spend 10 per cent more than 2002 with a gross budget of \$400 million, but O'Brien and

Baker point out in their overview statement that the tax increase can be reduced to 3.8 per cent by using revenue from interest earned on reserve funds.

Such income isn't quite the bonanza it once was, though, having dropped by 50 per cent since 2000 because interest rates have been near 40-year lows.

The proposed budget includes funding for 21 new transit buses and 56 more staff to boost service on congested routes and serve newly developed areas.

It also calls for a fire station to serve Churchill Meadows, plus 20 more firefighters.

The budget includes \$4.2 million for site preparation and infrastructure for the city's future public gardens at the former Chappell estate, along the Credit River between Burnhamthorpe Rd. and Highway 403.