

# No tax rate increase in proposed budget

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By Rob Gowan

### Council cuts grants, airport operating budget

South Bruce Peninsula has whittled down its budget so there will be no tax levy increase in 2015.

Council wrapped up its budget deliberations Thursday, with final approval expected at the Feb. 17 council meeting.

"I am so proud of this council because we worked really hard to come back with a 0% without any impact on the people," Mayor Janice Jackson said Sunday. "We didn't cut any services, we increased the roads budget, we doubled the capital equipment reserve fund - we cut a lot of fat."

Deliberations began back in December with a staff-proposed budget of just over 5%.

Jackson, who was elected mayor in October after one term as a councillor, said a 0% increase for the municipal portion of the budget was her target all along.

"I sat at that table for four years and I realized that 0% was absolutely achievable," said Jackson. "You can easily take what you have and just be smarter with it, but you do have to really look under every rock for savings and this council did it."

With a budget in the neighbourhood of \$10 million, Jackson said council was able to keep spending at about the same level as 2014 partly by reducing the number of grants it hands out.

"We cut way back on the grants and the money the town has historically given away to various groups," said Jackson.

Some of the organizations that saw major cuts were the Sauble Beach and Wiarton chambers of commerce. The Sauble chamber received \$10,000 for its Sauble Sandfest, while the Wiarton chamber received \$10,000 for the Wiarton Willie Festival.

Another grant that was cut was a grant to the Grey Bruce Health Services Hospital Campaign. Last year, \$60,000 was donated, while in 2015 council has decided to donate \$30,000. "We are really sensitive about donating the people's money," said Jackson. "We do commit about \$51,000 to the doctor recruitment program, along with this \$30,000 grant. The council believes we do support the medical community quite significantly."

South Bruce Peninsula also cut in half the amount it commits to the operation of the Wiarton-Keppel International Airport, which the municipality owns jointly with Georgian Bluffs. In 2014, the municipality contributed about \$ 150,000, while in 2015 it has committed \$75,000.

"The airport was definitely a factor as well," said Jackson. "I believe that we will be able to run that airport easily at \$150,000 a year."

The return of paid parking at Sauble Beach is also expected to bring more revenue into the municipality. Jackson said the town has pegged the revenue to be generated from paid parking in 2015 at \$100,000.

She said that revenue estimate is a conservative one. Paid parking at the beach brought in an

average of \$350,000 over the last five years it was operating. There was no paid parking at Sauble Beach in 2014 after the previous council elected to eliminate the program.

"With this program coming back we are going to have some startup costs," said Jackson. "We fully expect to make more than \$100,000, but just to be on the safe side we budgeted for \$100,000."

Jackson said a move last week to eliminate the administrator's position will not affect the 2015 budget, but will mean savings in 2016.

"We are too far into this year, but next year it will definitely have an impact," said Jackson.

Jacque Farrow-Lawrence was dismissed as town administrator on Thursday after two years on the job. Department heads will take on a greater responsibility in the decision-making process with manager of financial services Michael Humble likely taking on a lead role.

Jackson said a move by the previous council to reduce the size of council from nine members to five made the budget process run much smoother.

"It is so much easier to work with five people than with nine," said Jackson. "It is delightful, really."