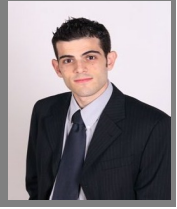




## Joe Traversa & Paul Liberatore



Burnaby property taxes will be going up by 3.95 per cent in 2010, according to a provisional budget that essentially maintains the status quo.

If council gives it final approval in the spring, the tax rate increase will translate to about \$52.75 more for the average home assessed at \$540,000.

The feeling is it's the best city hall can do without cutting services, said city finance director Rick Earle.

Wage increases set out in labour contracts for civic workers, the fire department and Burnaby RCMP, take up 3.5 per cent of the rate increase, he said. The remainder pays for an additional seven police officers council committed to in previous years, and amortization expenses.

The latter is a new requirement from the province that all municipalities must set aside money for future replacement of all capital projects. In Burnaby, that includes the Tommy Douglas library branch, fire hall No. 7 and road works that were all completed in 2009.

The new mandate isn't as much a stretch for Burnaby since for decades it has been putting money in reserves for just that purpose, something that's "quite unique in Canada." However, Earle said, he expects the new regulations will ultimately cost Burnaby more since it no longer has the discretion to not repay reserves for one-off capital projects funded by the gaming reserve, for instance.

Also posing a challenge in this year's budget is the drop in development revenue, from building permits and the like, for the planning department.

Earle said the budget expects that the department will receive \$1 million less than last year. By the end of 2009, such revenues were \$1.5 million less than what it was expecting.

Fortunately, the planning department realized what was happening early enough that it was able to cut back on spending and not fill job vacancies, saving \$700,000 in the process.

"When all the dust settles on planning they'll be ... maybe \$800,000 in the hole and we'll hope the other departments make up the difference." Typically, engineering and parks departments alone end up with surpluses of \$300,000 each, he noted.

City hall is currently accepting public comment on the provisional budget after which staff will further refine the numbers, Earle said. The final budget is scheduled for council approval by May 10 or earlier



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