

## HE prepares to pass budget

### By Chad Ingram

Highlands East residents should prepare for a tax increase of approximately 2.4 per cent for 2017.

Councillors for the township discussed the draft budget during a Jan. 23 meeting, a budget council expects to pass at its next meeting.

Many township residents experienced large assessment increases in a new round of appraisals from the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation in 2016.

Deputy-reeve Suzanne Partridge said she was particularly worried about how this increased assessment might affect waterfront property owners.

‘Even though their houses may be crumbling down around them,’ Partridge said. ‘That’s my concern.’

The budget contains \$10.1 million in spending, including just more than \$1 million for general government; \$2.7 million for protective services, which includes the fire department as well as policing costs; \$2.5 million for transportation services, which includes roads maintenance; \$2.5 million for environmental services; \$73,000 for health services; \$1 million for culture and recreation services; and about \$180,000 for planning and development.

Highlands East’s OPP bill will increase by more than \$156,000 in 2017, from just less than \$900,000 to more than \$1,056,000.

However, the township will use about \$240,000 in equalization payments it is receiving through the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund to offset the increase in policing costs.

This is the third year of the five-year phase-in of a new OPP billing model that redistributes total OPP costs throughout the province on a per household basis. Because seasonal residences are weighted equally with year-round ones, cottaging communities are getting hit hard by the formula. The collective OPP bill for Haliburton County’s four lower-tier township will double from approximately \$3 million to approximately \$6 million during the phase-in.

For a house assessed at \$150,000 the tax increase will increase property taxes by \$15.90 for the year, up to \$676.20 from \$660.30

Council intends to pass the 2017 at its next meeting.