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District of North Vancouver budget 'cautious but reasonable'

Property taxes likely to jump 2.5 per cent

[Jeremy Shepherd](#) / North Shore News

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District of North Vancouver Photograph by: file, North Shore News

District of North Vancouver homeowners may be shelling out an extra \$47 this year as property taxes are slated to rise 2.5 per cent.

Council got their first look at the 2014 budget on Monday.

The district faces major capital expenses over the next three years, including \$49 million for the William Griffin Community Centre, \$31 million for the Philip Avenue overpass, and \$12 million for the Keith Road bridge.

However, in the case of the Philip Avenue overpass, the district has leveraged private, federal and provincial money to limit the municipality's contribution to \$400,000, according to chief administrative officer David Stuart.

Construction, energy and police costs are escalating faster than the rate of inflation, according to the district's finance general manager, Nicole Deveau.

The new police contract accounts for approximately one-fifth of 2014's tax increase.

The budget continues a trend of fiscal responsibility, according to Coun. Doug MacKay-Dunn.

"We're much better than we were some years ago when we were always dipping into the reserve fund and using it inappropriately, so I'm very pleased to see how far we've come. And unlike the city, we're not developing to their extent," he said.

According to the district's five-year financial plan, developer contributions are slated to rise from \$1,461,000 to \$5,765,000 in 2015. Those numbers are "overly optimistic" according to frequent council-watcher Hazen Colbert.

"The district, in fact the North Shore, is over-built with several years' supply of new residential units either complete or being built," he said.

In the event that developer dollars run dry, the district should form a contingency plan to avoid higher tax hikes for residents, according to Colbert.

Colbert was also concerned about the B.C. municipal employee pension plan. The plan's unfunded liability could be financially ruinous in the future if not addressed, according to Colbert.

"There is no explicit disclosure of the dollar amount of the liability that is assigned to the district in the financial plan," he said.

The unfunded liability could be addressed by capping post-retirement inflations adjustments, reducing benefits, or increasing benefit premiums, according to Stuart.

The budget is "cautious but reasonable," according to Coun. Roger Bassam.

"We see some communities who do pride themselves on zero per cent tax increases and pull that off for a couple of years and then cave under the pressure. ... and admit that it's not sustainable," he said.

The district has cut 20 full-time core staff positions since 2009.

Following workshops scheduled throughout March and April, final adoption is set for May 5.

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