

Job cuts debated during city's budget talks

Several proposals to trim staff positions ultimately rejected by council

BY DENNIS SMITH • Burlington Post

Jobs ranging from site plan technician to downtown coordinator were scrutinized during the city's budget approval process Monday, but few budget changes were made.

City council eventually reduced its 2003 current (operating) budget by \$38,500, for an overall increase of 6.17 per cent. That will increase the city portion of local property tax bills by \$52.41 for homes assessed at \$250,000.

But Ward 4 Councillor Jack Dennison warned some residents' final increases could be higher than the anticipated overall property tax hike (2.66 per cent) because of updated market value assessments.

"Taxpayers won't know what it means for the bottom line until they get their tax bill," he noted.

Most last-minute reduction efforts were spearheaded by Dennison, who noted the budget was "a long way over inflation."

Here are highlights of Monday's debate.

- Budget reductions — Councillors agreed to reduce contributions to Burlington branding initiatives by another \$15,000, leaving \$25,000 in funding.

Dennison suggested branding could still be done with the reduction and he also persuaded councillors to eliminate \$23,500 for additional library staff hours.

- New firefighters — two attempts by Dennison to delay starting dates for 12 new firefighters were rejected.

He noted the earlier May 1 start for firefighters (which increased the budget by \$282,000) wasn't in a package of optional budget items for council's consideration.

"Move it back to the staff recommendation to start 12 firefighters in October," he said. "We did approve the master fire

plan, but that was subject to budget approval."

- Building, development and engineering — Building permit revenues haven't grown enough to justify adding a site plan technician, said Dennison.

He urged removing the position and related equipment, which cost \$44,165. The councillor said adding staff won't increase building permit revenues.