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Cop compromise caps city's tax take

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Calgary's property tax grab for this year is now in the bag, says the mayor.

Council Monday approved a notice of motion by Ald. Gord Lowe to put an extra \$2 million budget reduction on the police budget on the city balance sheet.

Mayor Naheed Nenshi said that means the city's portion of property tax will increase by 4.4%.

The final number, and the ultimate hit to taxpayers, will be set in the spring when the province determines its take of education taxes.

"This was the last bit that was remaining," Nenshi said, referring to the extra cuts council asked of cops.

Aldermen Diane Colley-Urquhart and John Mar, who both sit at the Calgary Police Commission, didn't support the budget cuts for cops.

Colley-Urquhart said council's request to find more cuts without affecting frontline services generated a lot of discussions and debate at the police commission.

"It was somewhat divisive," she said.

"We didn't have anyone resign over it, but I think at times we did come close."

To balance the cops' budget, CPS will be dipping into the traffic fine revenues which totalled \$36.4 million in 2010.

The total fine revenue for 2010 is broken down as follows: \$18.9 million – officer generated enforcement citywide; \$10.9 million – photo radar and \$6.6 million – speed on green.

Mar said he can appreciate that cuts are needed but he doesn't agree with dipping into the traffic fine revenue.

The move is setting a precedent and "creating a police service, effectively as a tax wing of the City of Calgary," he said.

The city and police are going to develop a joint proposal on how traffic revenue is managed including the potential transfer of accountability from CPS to the city, starting with the 2012-2014 budget cycle.

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