

District of Saanich Municipal Budgeting

Understanding the budget process



Shaping
Saanich

Overview

Each year the District of Saanich updates its Five Year Financial Plan, in accordance with the Community Charter. The Financial Plan includes operating and capital budgets for each year contained in the Plan. As the District embarks on the process to develop the 2026 to 2030 Plan, we have prepared this document to assist the public better understand the municipal budgeting process.

Each year Saanich is faced with the challenge of balancing the budget, as mandated for municipal governments by provincial legislation. While a municipality can incur debt to pay for large capital acquisitions, it cannot incur a deficit to fund day to day operations the same way senior levels of government can. This is a key difference as it means we must identify revenue sources to cover off all anticipated expenditures. In order to balance the budget, a careful analysis must be done regarding the level of services required to meet the expectations of the community balanced against realistic taxation and user fees levels.



Saanich's overall principle

Long term financial stability

- Ensure adequate funding for services and infrastructure
- Access diversified sources of revenue
- Manage expenditures
 - contain costs
 - be efficient
- Provide for contingencies
 - manage business risks
 - operate prudently
- Maintain reserves for the future
- Use debt strategically



Revenue

Municipalities

Municipalities use a variety of revenue sources to pay for a wide range of services that residents and businesses depend on and use regularly. The major revenue sources that are typically used to pay for day to day services include:

- Property tax
- Utility user fees (sewer and water charges)
- Other user fees (e.g. recreation passes/registration fees, connection fees, rezoning application fees)
- Permits and licencing fees (building permits, dog licences, business licences)

Municipalities also have access to other forms of funding which are generally used for capital projects:

- Grants from the Provincial and Federal governments and their agencies
- Proceeds from borrowing
- Reserve funds (funds saved up over time for large projects)

Part of Council's decision making process each year is to determine what levels of funding for services should come from the various sources of revenue.





Interesting facts:

Grants

Grants from other levels of government are usually targeted to very specific types of projects (predominately capital) that may or may not align with the priorities of the community. The only ongoing, government grant funding that is available to offset the cost of annual operations is the Traffic Fine Revenue Sharing Grant which must be specifically allocated to policing service programs.

Examples of capital grants that the District has received include:

- Housing Accelerator Grant from the Canada Housing Mortgage Corporation
- Growing Communities Fund from the Province of BC.

Expenditures

Municipalities are service based organizations. Your local government provides a wide variety of services to an extremely varied client base. While not an exhaustive list, our customers include:

- Youth
- Families
- Seniors
- Pet owners
- Farmers
- Philanthropists
- Home owners
- Renters
- Business owners
- Workers/employees
- Pedestrians
- Cyclists
- Wheelchair/
▪ Scooter Drivers
- Drivers
- Developers
- Retirees
- Workers
- Sports enthusiasts
- Walkers
- Artists



Our challenge

Our challenge is striving to meet the needs of as many of our “customers” as possible in a fiscally responsible way. The process is further complicated where the needs and wants of our citizens are in conflict with one another.

There is frequently misperception about which services are under the control of the local government and which services are provided by other levels of government. While local governments collect revenues for the Province, BC Transit and the Regional District (among others) along with the annual municipal property tax payment, the funds are simply passed on. The reason for this approach is greater efficiency having one point of collection rather than having each organization bill separately.



Services Saanich provides

- Road maintenance, repair and snow removal
- Garbage and organics collection for residents
- Policing
- Fire protection
- Recreation Facilities
- Parks/Trails maintenance and development
- Sidewalks, curbs and gutters
- Drainage systems
- Sewer systems
- Water systems

Services Saanich contributes to

- Regional sewage treatment
- Affordable Housing
- Regional parks (eg. Elk-Beaver Lake)
- Regional Trails (eg. Galloping Goose)
- CREST (911)

Services Saanich doesn't provide

- Public Transit - BC Transit
- Education - Province and School Districts
- Health Care - Province
- Highways (Island Highway/Pat Bay Highway) - Province
- Recycling program - Capital Regional District
- Library operations - Greater Victoria Regional Library



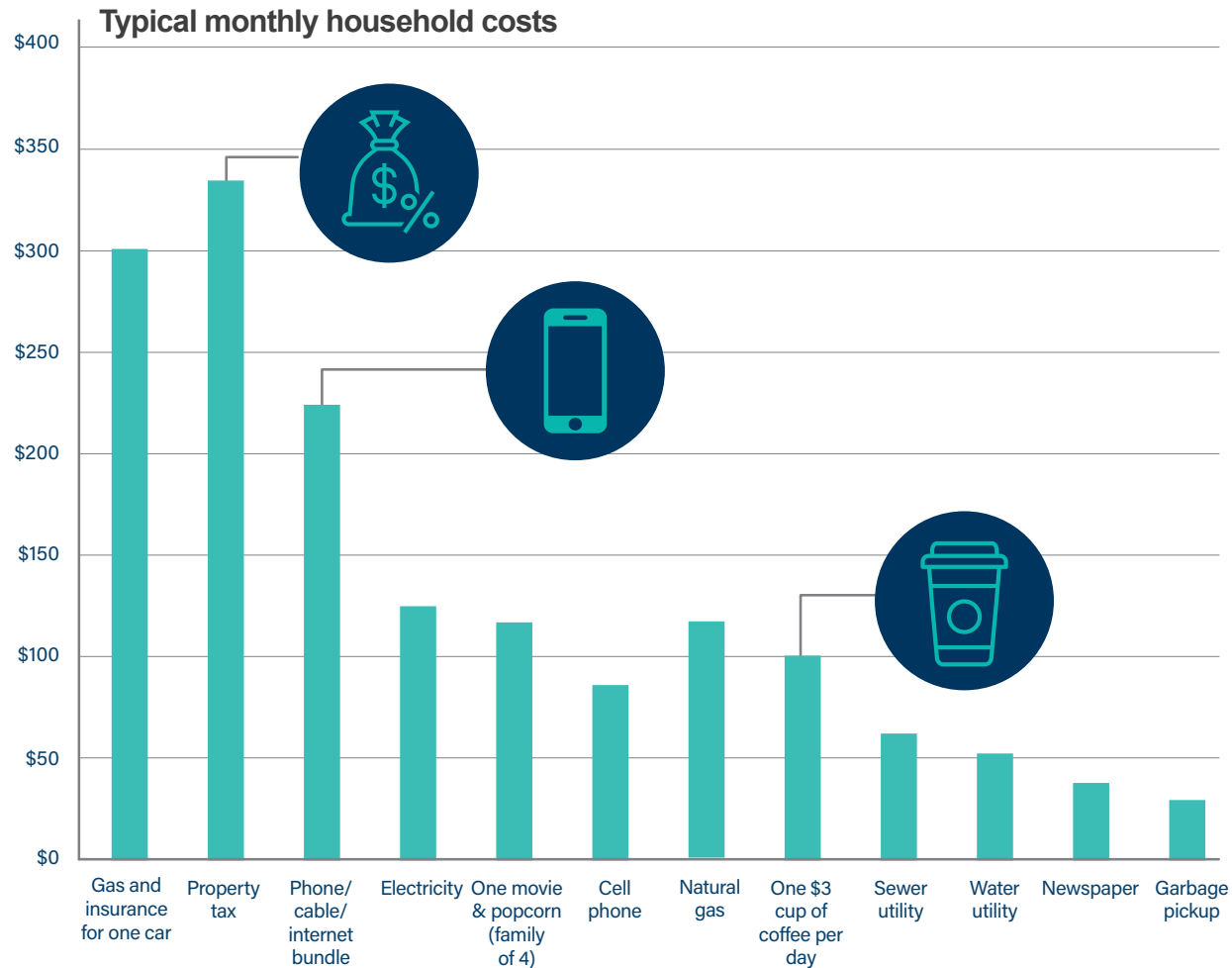
When considering if you feel you are getting good value for the services provided, it can be helpful to consider that many of our services are available 24/7. Municipal employees are always on call to deal with a wide variety of emergencies, from fires and accidents to blocked drains and fallen trees that are obstructing roadways.

Some sample costs of running the District of Saanich are:

- The cost to purchase one fire engine for the fire department
\$2,000,000
- The cost of one new police recruit
(Pay, uniforms, equipment, training and testing)
\$150,000
- The annual cost to insure the fleet of municipal vehicles
\$398,200
- The cost of one block of new sidewalk (including curb/gutters and driveway drops and retaining walls)
\$550,000
- The cost to resurface one km of residential road
\$350,000
- The cost to install traffic signals at one intersection
\$575,000

Comparison

Another way to consider value for money is to compare the cost of municipally provided services with other standard services households purchase, such as electricity, heating fuel and cable/internet service.



Each year Saanich must take into account “non-discretionary” increases in the cost of providing services. These are increases required to the budget for items Saanich cannot directly control. Some of these are similar to what we experience in our own homes – the cost of electricity, gas and phone/ internet connections.

Saanich continues to build new infrastructure such as sidewalks, trails, bikeways, facilities and streetscaping. This infrastructure must be properly maintained and there is an additional ongoing cost to accomplish this.

In addition, Saanich is committed to increasing capital spending to sustainable levels to ensure the long term viability of our infrastructure. This will ensure that our extensive investment in infrastructure assets is sufficiently protected and that our transportation, parks, water, sewer, drainage and facilities will be appropriately maintained and replaced to support the current community and future generations.

Municipal tax increases are frequently compared with the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). As we know, the CPI measures the change in the price of a “basket of goods” frequently purchased by consumers. However, municipal governments have their own spending patterns that are different than those of other sectors. The CPI calculates household spending patterns that focus on food, shelter, transportation, health/personal care, clothing/footwear and recreation; none of which are purchases typical of local governments.



Budget meetings

Budget meetings are held from February through April each year. These are open meetings held in “Committee of the Whole” style. This means that at each meeting an opportunity is available for the public to contribute their thoughts and suggestions or ask questions. The initial budget meetings focus on departmental budget submissions, budget reduction scenarios, ongoing resource requests and public engagement survey results.

At the meetings, the Director of Finance presents the budget in turn and highlights any particular pressures or opportunities the District is facing.

Councillors will ask questions or seek clarification from staff. Meetings are also held to focus on budgets submitted from other organizations requiring Council approval (e.g Greater Victoria Public Library).

Additional budget meetings are scheduled as required.



[2026 Draft Financial Plan Meeting Schedule](#)



[View Meeting schedules, Agendas, and Minutes](#)

Public input

The District of Saanich invites residents to give feedback on their overall impressions of the quality of life in Saanich, and their satisfaction with Saanich's services.

2024 Resident Pulse Check Survey

In addition to the regularly scheduled broader citizen and business satisfaction surveys, a Citizen Pulse Survey was conducted in 2024. This survey was created to capture more current perceptions of residents to help identify key opportunities for maintaining or improving awareness and satisfaction of Saanich's services.

Quality of life

The mean scores, or statistical averages, from the 2024 Resident Pulse Survey showed that overall, residents were positive about living in Saanich.

For statements regarding the Saanich community, residents highly rated "I am generally happy living in Saanich" (73) and "I would recommend Saanich as a good place to live" (71).

When rating different aspects of life in the district, Saanich rated highly as a place to go to school (77) and a place to raise a family (77), and the overall quality of life in Saanich (74).

Residents also positively rated indicators related to inclusivity and accessibility: "Saanich services are inclusive" (69); "Saanich is an inclusive and welcoming community" (69); and "Saanich services are accessible" (67).

However, residents of Cordova Bay, Gordon Head, and Rural Saanich say there is room to improve the accessibility of amenities in these neighbourhoods.



[View the Citizen Pulse Survey results](#)

Local government

When it comes to the issues that residents feel should receive the most attention from Council, the top two selections were *infrastructure, traffic and roads* and *community development and growth*.

Affordability continues to be a key concern for many residents, with some sharing the view that access to affordable housing options needs improvement. Saanich continues to prioritize providing high quality services and good value for municipal taxes, which are themes we know are important to the community.

When presented with several different options for how Council should manage taxation and service levels, the only option with a mean score greater than 50 was "maintain the same level of municipal services with a managed tax increase" (53).

A new question around whether residents believe "Saanich maintains respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples, both in the community and in neighbouring communities" achieved a mean score of 64.



The budget

Council establishes Budget Guidelines to instruct departments as they develop their budgets in the fall.

The key guidelines are:

1. Preliminary 2026 departmental net budget totals will be limited to a 0.0% increase over the 2025 adopted net budget totals, exclusive of existing personnel costs, phased in funding for positions approved by Council in a prior year, core capital increases and non-discretionary increases.
2. The Infrastructure Replacement Funding Strategy (IRFS) approved by Council in January 2024 will increase property taxes by 1.5% annually to reach sustainable infrastructure replacement funding targets for general capital projects in 15 years.
3. The Debt Servicing Funding Strategy approved by Council in January 2024 will increase property taxes by 0.65% for years 2026 to 2027, by 1% for years 2028 to 2031 and then by 0.65% thereafter.
4. Provision for an inflationary increase for new transportation infrastructure in the Active Transportation Plan by increasing property taxes 0.08% annually.
5. Consider resource requests for additional operating budgets (including one-time projects) and new tax funded personnel will be considered for critical capacity issues, implementation of the long-term staffing plan or where upfront investment will result in longer term savings.
6. Consider resourcing needs for strategic initiatives from the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan.
7. Consider budget reduction scenarios of 1% to 4% of the proposed tax increase.

A Departmental Budget Submission is the detailed action plan that supports the department's plans for the year. It is the "engine" to implement departmental strategy, and it:

- provides a narrative description of budget challenges for the previous year.
- communicates how departments will achieve their objectives.
- shows how departments plan to allocate resources to achieve priority departmental initiatives for the coming year.
- describes core services and the resources dedicated to those services.



Given the current economic uncertainty, the following significant factors continue to influence and challenge progress being made toward achieving an overall goal of long-term financial sustainability.

Infrastructure construction costs

Infrastructure construction costs have risen more than 4.5% in the last couple of years and are expected to stay at those levels in the near future. This requires increased annual funding to keep sustainable replacement funding for all municipal assets.

New infrastructure demand

Increasing demand for new infrastructure such as sidewalks comes at the same time that assets built during the last boom are reaching an age where their maintenance is becoming critical and more costly and infrastructure replacement funding is a priority.

Public safety costs

The cost to provide police and fire services in a more complex and demanding public safety environment continues to increase.

Aging population

As the number of older residents increase, the demand for age-sensitive services and infrastructure also grows.

Growing range of responsibilities

The breadth of social and environmental issues that municipalities are expected to address continues to increase. Regional Transportation and Sewage Treatment also continue to be key cost drivers.

Links

[Finance documents](#)

2026-2030 Draft Budget

General documents

[Strategic Plan](#)

[Official Community Plan](#)

[Business & Citizen Surveys](#)



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