

Understanding how financial planning works in Saanich

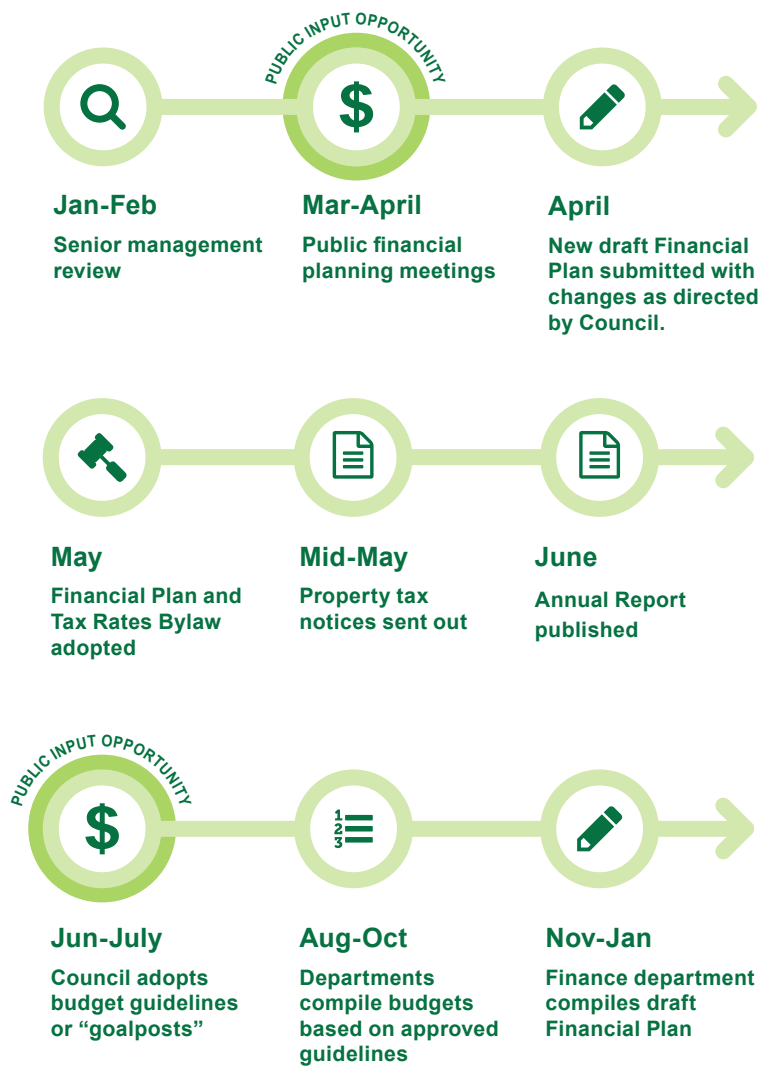
Shaping Saanich

Residents tell us they need more understandable and accessible information about our financial planning processes. This “at a glance” overview helps show how important financial decisions are made year-round.

Financial planning happens all year

The *Community Charter* requires that all municipalities create a five-year Financial Plan. Each year during the financial planning process Saanich focuses on the first year of this five-year plan. The plan starts with the adoption of budget guidelines each summer and continues to the following May, when the plan is adopted by Council. The Annual Report then provides a synopsis of the previous year’s strategic, financial and operational progress.

Public input is welcome throughout the year



View a copy of our [annual report](#).

[See schedule of financial plan meetings](#)

What informs financial planning?

1 Strategies, plans, and studies

Saanich has done a lot of work over recent years to determine the needs and desires of the community. Many plans and strategies which outline key goals or community improvements have been developed with your help through extensive public participation. Council makes decisions and approves these proposed plans based on alignment with the Saanich vision, achievement of the strategic planning goals and available funding.

All of the work contained in these plans and initiatives —the [Official Community Plan \(Sustainable Saanich\)](#), [Local Area Plans](#), [Active Transportation Plan](#), the Water, Sewer and Drain Master Plans and numerous studies on [Parks and Recreation services](#), among many others — contributes to our financial planning process.



2 Ensuring a consistent level of services

Saanich is over 100 years old. Over the decades our community has evolved through thousands of financial decisions made by Councils. The result is an organization that provides services for a healthy, safe and vibrant community.

Some of these services are essential and obvious: water, sewer and road systems; some are choices for highly-valued services such as fire suppression, parks, and recreation facilities. Each year, departments assess their budgets by examining what is needed in order to maintain established service levels.





3

Non-discretionary increases

While Council sets the budget guidelines to have a ‘zero’ increase in operating expenses, non-discretionary increases do occur. We report out to the public exactly what the increases are and the impacts to your taxes and fees.

Examples of non-discretionary increases include the wage increases as determined through collective bargaining processes, the insurance on fleet vehicles, the licensing and maintenance of information technology, and increases to the cost of asphalt, hydro and gas.

4

New choices to consider

Every year Council considers whether to improve certain services based on input from the public. [The Youth Strategy](#) and [Older Adult Strategy](#) are just two examples. Council considers these “resource requests” and decides whether to increase taxes or fees to provide these services. It is a Council choice, but their decision is always based on information obtained from community input and guided by the goal of working toward the best interests of the whole community.

5

Change = The one constant in financial planning

As our world continues to evolve, many factors impact how the municipality delivers services. A few examples are:

- Improved rules to keep workers safe;
- Climate change; and
- Cyber security needs.

We assess and consider all factors for their financial impact, risk to the organization and how they fit into the current (and future) strategic plans.





There are many opportunities to provide input to Saanich financial planning processes:

- Join us at Council meetings;
- Respond to our citizen and business surveys;
- Participate in conversations with our elected officials;
- Engage in the extensive public participation processes when plans and strategies are being developed; and
- Provide input during the council guidelines setting and financial plan meetings.

Remember: You can contact us anytime at budget@saanich.ca.

When Council discusses and approves budget guidelines in the summer there is an opportunity for any member of the public to provide input.

View [upcoming meeting dates and information](#).

Does Council just “rubber-stamp” a staff driven financial plan? Not at all.

Citizens wonder if Council can really change the financial plan once it's been prepared by staff. Understanding the financial planning cycle can help answer that question. (See page one)

1. Council discusses and approves budget guidelines in the summer before staff prepare department budgets. This is the opportunity for Council to set a change in direction if desired, and provide “goal posts” for staff. Council discusses the guidelines in a public meeting where there is an opportunity for the public to provide input.
2. Results from the citizen and business surveys show Saanich residents are highly satisfied with the services they receive and feel they get good value for tax dollars. As a result, Councils have adopted budget guidelines that call for staff to develop status quo budgets to keep service levels the same or better.
3. The draft budget reflects the budget guidelines Council established. Changes to the draft budget are made by Council during February to April meetings to ensure funding for new or strategic plan items or to enhance, reduce or alter a service that is currently provided.

Links for further study:

[Saanich Strategic and Financial Planning](#)

[Saanich Budget](#)

[Financial Plan 2020-2024](#)

Additional plans that inform financial planning:

[Active Transportation Plan “Moving Forward”](#)

[Climate Action and Adaptation Plan](#)

[Local Area Plans](#)

[Official Community Plan](#)

[Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan](#)



How do we know we've got it right?

Councilors hear face-to-face from many residents throughout the year about what is important to them. Saanich also conducts citizen and business surveys to understand how residents feel about the services they receive and Saanich's direction. This information is all carefully reviewed to ensure that decisions take us down the right path.

It is important to understand that a diverse community holds diverse views. There will never be complete agreement on most issues. However, Council has taken an oath to make decisions that are in the best interest of the community as a whole.

S A A N I C H O A T H

“ I will faithfully perform the duties of my office for the betterment of my community and my conduct in public affairs will be lawful and of the highest integrity.”

Questions about the financial planning process?

Contact the Finance Department at 250-475-5415 or budget@saanich.ca