

Budget and Tax News Feb 24th 2023

The 2023 Draft Financial Plan has now been released allowing for public feedback before it is finalized in March 2023.

You can find the draft financial planning document at

<https://srd.ca/government/finance/financial-planning/>

Summary of Key Function Changes

1. There is a reduction of taxes for the Area D northern water service. I know this has been a very sticky point for many residents on the Northern Water System. Over the years many have complained as to why there are both taxation and yearly water bills. For all the homes that are on the Northern Water System there has been a savings of \$150,000 for this year.
2. Feasibility Studies. The budget for this function has been increased for this year. In order to get grants, launch projects most often you need to have completed feasibility studies. Quite frankly as a new Director it was very disappointing to see the lack of an adequate funds in this function. For this year I have bumped this budget up to \$75,000 as I would like to get a detailed traffic study in the works for 2023.
3. Community Parks. This function will see an increase in budget this year. As a new Director it is very disappointing to not only watch previous budget meetings from other years, but how this function has continually had its reserves moved to other functions to give the illusion of lower taxes. In addition there have been a number of capital improvement projects and new projects that have been waiting for years to move forward.

For example

Hagel Park has been waiting for years with capital improvements and the Salmon Point Trail Head improvements requested by the public have been waiting for years with no action.

With the increase in budget the vast majority of the capital projects for parks will be moving forward including the Salmon Point Trail improvements as requested by public. There is also budget for a Parks Master Plan that has also been waiting for the last several years.

4. Strathcona Gardens. This function will see a tax increase this year, and further increases next year due to the new construction that has finally been approved by the new Strathcona Gardens Committee. As Area D and the City of Campbell River are the only 2 participants in this function the \$73 million project does fall on taxpayers of Area D and The City of Campbell River. As previous mentioned \$53

million is for a new pool complex and the remaining \$20 million is for improvements to the building and skating rinks.

Other increases can also be noted with

- Campbell River Fire Protection
- Planning - which is needed for OCP and Zoning changes
- Vancouver Island Regional Library

Conclusion

As a new Director working through my first budget I made the decision that completing a status quo budget really does not benefit the community as a whole.

For example

Gas Tax monies have been largely uncommitted despite the growing number of capital projects across a few functions for the last several years. Reserves for many functions like community parks are quite low which makes it difficult to fund capital improvement projects without dipping into gas tax monies. Other functions such as BC Transit have been largely ignored making it difficult to get items such as Bus Shelters and new concrete pads and pullout lanes for Buses.

While it is my aim to balance taxes to the community needs I also recognize that when needed capital improvements remain stagnate for years with no action, it is no wonder many question taxes when they do not see value.

So yes there will be a tax increase this year, and I am confident that the community will recognize that this increase is to start addressing all those capital improvements that have been waiting for years.

As always I welcome constructive feedback.