

2024/25 Budget Highlights

Did you Know?

According to the Federation of PEI Municipalities, PEI is the only provincial government that collects more property tax than the municipalities in the province at nearly 70% of property taxes and:

- PEI municipalities have the lowest average per capita municipal tax revenue of all provinces and territories;
- PEI municipalities have the lowest local tax revenue growth rate of all the provinces and territories in Canada. The Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) for PEI between 2008-2020 was 2.33%, while the national average was 3.97%;
- The national average for share of tax revenue between municipalities and the federal and provincial government is 9.2 cents per tax dollar. In PEI municipalities only receive 2.2 cents per tax dollar.

On behalf of your Stratford Town Council, it is my pleasure to bring forward some highlights from the 2024/25 Town of Stratford Budget. Preparing the budget has once again been a challenge as it has become increasingly difficult to maintain the level of service and growth required for our community within the current means available to us. PEI municipalities, including ours, have been without a revenue sharing agreement with the Province of PEI since March of 2022. Though negotiations continue and we remain hopeful municipalities are also not able to project a deficit when preparing our annual operating budgets. As a result of the current needs, and in preparing for future needs and investments in our community, your council are unified in our preparedness to make the difficult decisions necessary to meet these current and future needs of our community. With this realization, it has been agreed to a planned residential two cent municipal tax increase for each of the next three years, starting from the 2024/25 budget. This increase will assist the Town of Stratford in delivering the various projects and making investments that are needed for the Town's continued growth and development.



We recognize that residents are experiencing increases elsewhere in today's economic climate, and we too have inflationary pressures on our budgets. Through feedback in the draft budget survey however it was positive to note that while a mix of views on the tax increase were expressed, a majority of respondents did favour the direction of the budget and the proposed areas of expenditures and investments.



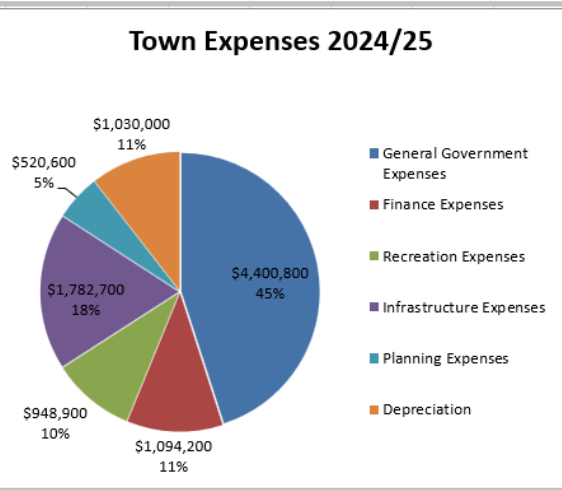
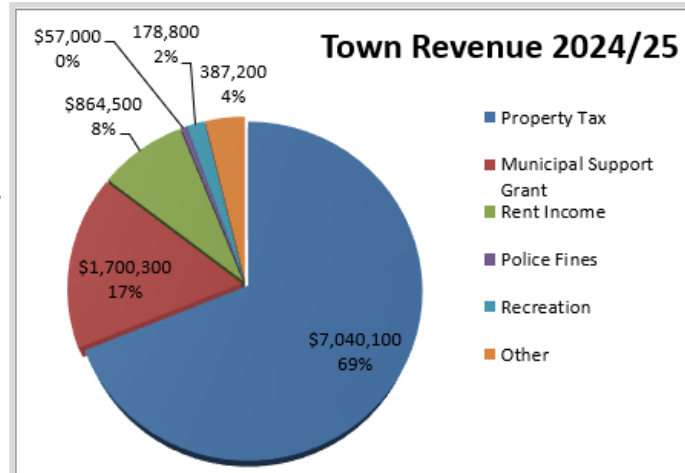
We have a lot to celebrate in Stratford. As a community that is growing; one which recognizes and celebrates our increasing diversity and culture alongside an appreciation of our history, where residents appreciate our natural environment and enjoy the ever growing active transportation connections,

and where residents are willing to engage with us and participate in various opportunities to provide feedback, thoughts and ideas - we should all be proud and hopeful of the future. We continue to listen and look out for the best interests of both our current and future residents. We are truly building the best community possible!



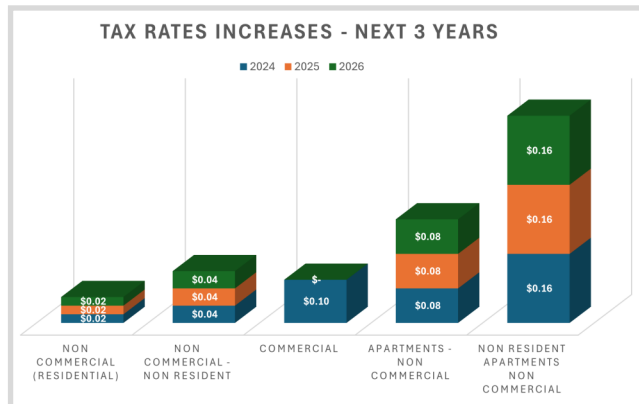
Revenue and Expenses

The 2024/25 Town of Stratford budget forecasts an operating surplus of just \$500 for the upcoming year once depreciation and the principal payments on long-term debt are accounted for. Like all Island municipalities, the Town of Stratford is limited in the sources of revenue available and, relies primarily on property taxes, utility charges and fees to pay for our services and infrastructure. Our ability to maintain, and particularly to expand or offer additional services, programming and infrastructure, is limited. As we continue to negotiate with the Province of PEI, alongside our fellow municipalities, for a stronger, more predictable and stable funding agreement, your council recognizes that as a growing community,



our needs too continue to change and grow. In order to meet the needs today, as well as into the future, a two-cent residential property tax increase is proposed over the next three years with a commitment that any surplus will be placed in a reserve for future Town of Stratford growth investments. As with the previous council, the current council remains committed to being fiscally responsible with your tax dollars while also balancing the needs of our community, both now and looking forward to the future.

Our 2024/25 budget includes continued investment in our community through priorities important to you - active transportation, policing and fire, technology, parks and recreation, tree planting and forest management planning,



climate change mitigation, and more. We will continue to make decisions which are in the overall Town's greater interest and invest in projects and infrastructure which will better the overall community life for our residents. We look forward to working alongside all of you to complete these projects, and as we do, reflect back to 2002, when the Council of the day made the tough decision to construct our Stratford Town Centre building. Despite strong opposition at the time this building has proven to be a good investment and operates at capacity on many days throughout the year. In fact, this building could be expanded and used more, which speaks to the foresight of the previous council. This also serves as a reminder to the current council that consideration of investments in Stratford must be made with not only the needs of the present in mind, but also of the future.

Capital Budgets

The Town's capital budget for 2024/25 is \$20,622,150 which after infrastructure funding and other funding partners in the amount of \$12,242,826, will have a net cost of \$8,379,324. Funding for Town capital includes \$11,290,326 in Investing in Canada funding and \$952,500 in other funding.

The Utility Capital Budget is \$8,938,200 of which the Town will receive infrastructure funding of \$1,469,894 from Municipal Strategic Component Funding and \$2,200,638 from the Investing in Canada Fund for a net capital of \$4,867,668.



Community Campus

The past year was the first of many exciting ones to come for our community on this project. The tender for site servicing was issued with the first phase of work well underway on this multi-phase, multi-year project. Later in 2024 the road is anticipated to be made public, expanded business park lots are expected to be sold and potentially developed, and the construction of the high school by the Province of PEI will continue.



Along with this, a solar project which will assist with the future community and wellness centre being constructed to net zero.

The full buildout of the Community Campus project will require support from all levels of government and the community.

Council and staff are working hard to ensure that all the necessary partnerships are in place and ready to help Stratford realize this community changing initiative.

The Town continues to have many positive conversations with a variety of organizations expressing interest in becoming partners with the Town of Stratford at this site. We will continue to work with these groups, where possible, for the development of recreational and cultural infrastructure on the Community Campus.

This property will become a focal point of our community in the future and in time, the Community Campus will provide Stratford residents with a recreational, cultural and social hub that will provide physical, social and mental health benefits. Council and staff look forward to hosting an open house with residents in the future to further showcase the Community Campus plans.

Pondside Watershed Restoration

The Pondside Watershed restoration project continued this past year and in 2024 will see dredging at Kelly's pond and the replacement of culvert crossing Keppoch Road completed in tandem by the Province of PEI. Town staff, council and residents are excited to see this project moving closer to completion.



Michael Thomas Waterfront Park

The first phase of the new park on our waterfront began in 2023 with the installation of a boardwalk and lookouts to allow residents and visitors better access to this space. This work is anticipated to be completed in late spring and we hope to

welcome the community to the space by summer of 2024. With the connection to Charlottetown from the boardwalk

across the active transportation lane on the Hillsborough Bridge, and with the plans on the Charlottetown side for a new park, this will bring opportunity for further development of the commercial lands around the waterfront park, as well as for additional phases of development in the park in accordance with our master plan.



Shape Stratford and Housing Accelerator Funding

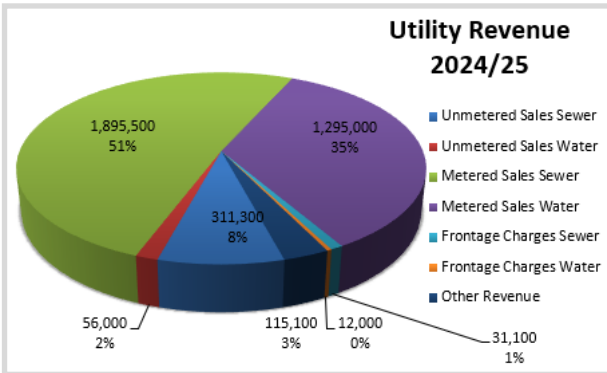
While one exciting project wraps up officially, another is just getting underway, and both are helping to see The Town of Stratford continue to have important conversations and lead change in our community. Shape Stratford is an 18-month funded project through Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)'s Housing Supply Challenge for with a goal of finding solutions around barriers to new housing supply through conversations and education. By working together and having conversations in our community we worked towards identifying and closing gaps to achieve suitable housing for all. This project has led to the newly announced Housing Accelerator Funding the Town was recently awarded (also a CMHC project). This funding will support projects and initiatives which lead to more housing units in the Town of Stratford, including an Official Plan and Bylaw review. Shape Stratford has identified that there is a systemic challenge built into the existing process in building public and council support for projects that increase density due to the values associated with traditional patterns of low-density development, but Housing Accelerator Funding recognizes that changes are needed and can be planned for, leading to both successful projects and community growth.

Other Highlights

- Expansion of the transit system
- Additional RCMP officer
- Opening of a new mini ballfield at Fullerton's Creek Conservation Park
- Solar panel installation at Stratford Emergency Services Centre and Town maintenance buildings (subject to funding)
- Implementation of additional supports identified in the first annual business survey and other consultations
- Hiring of a human resource position and implementation of other recommendations from the organizational review
- Increase to the Stratford Youth Centre operational budget
- New Town website
- Expansion of the paved parking lot at Fullerton's Creek Conservation Park (subject to funding)

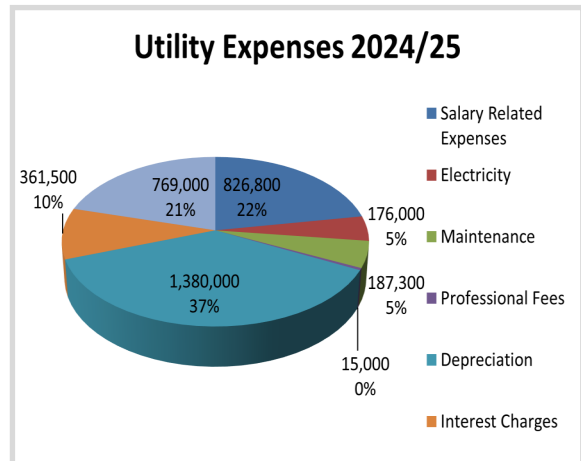
Stratford Utility Update

The Stratford Utility operates on a cash recovery basis and as such, the Town continually analyzes expenses to ensure that the rates for customers are equitable among our customers, while being sufficient to meet our long term needs. With rising inflationary expense increases over the past year, a modest increase to the water and sewer rates is required with amounting to a 5% increase to base and consumption rates effective April 1, 2024. This increase will mean an average increase of just under \$40 over the coming year, or approximately \$10 per quarterly billing cycle. Stratford Utility customers continue to demonstrate




their support by limiting their personal use of water where possible, and supporting conservation methods and programs. The upcoming year will see projects by the Stratford Utility including:

- Completion of the additional water reservoir tower
- Completion of upgrades to Bunbury and Corish sewer lift stations
- Investigative video surveying of sections of the Town’s sewer system
- Installation of standby generators at a few of the larger sewer lift stations
- Addition of fire hydrants in the core area
- Continued implementation of the inflow and infiltration program



Residents who have not had a water audit completed are encouraged to contact the Town to learn how you might save even more water through this process. Visit our website to learn more!

Other water saving initiatives in place currently are a low-flow showerhead exchange program and low-flow toilet rebate program .



At the end of 2023, our water usage averages 166 cubic meters per household, a reduction from an average of 172 cubic meters at the end of 2021. Both residents and commercial users have continued to embrace and support our water conservation efforts and thank you for doing so.

Please also continue to be mindful of how much liquid is leaving your home and entering our system, making changes where you can - every drop saved counts!

Closing

In closing, on behalf of all members of Council, I first would like to thank our Town staff for their ongoing efforts. I can assure you they are working hard for you every day, and are mindful of the budgets set forth and any expenses incurred. I would also like to thank my fellow council members for your respectful and thoughtful input into the budget, and shared vision and passion for our community.

I would also like to thank our great residents of Stratford. We appreciate hearing from you, whether through the draft budget process as we’ve just come through, or at other opportunities you come out to and get involved with. You are passionate and dedicated, you give of your time and you put your trust in us to make the best decisions, on your behalf. You help make our community better every day!



As we continue to be a growing community, our needs also continue to change and grow. This budget considers the needs we have today, while also looking ahead to the future. Like you, we are excited about the future opportunities ahead for our community – both those you can easily see such as the Community Campus development, new high school or expanding commercial businesses, and those which you cannot see as easily, things like additional RCMP and fire coverage, or investments in our sewer and water infrastructure.

We will continue to work hard for our community, to make the investments needed, to save and cut when and where we can, and to remain open and transparent in our decisions.

Respectfully submitted,
Ron Dowling
Chair of Finance & Technology