

What We Heard Report

Cochrane 2026 Draft Budget Public Engagement Summary

November 17th, 2025

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Executive summary

Communication and advertising mediums for survey and engagement

November 4-16, 2025:

- Online: Cochrane.ca home page banner plus link to LetsTalkCochrane dedicated landing page
- LetsTalkCochrane e-newsletter on November 12
- Media release and media advisory
- Town of Cochrane app notifications
- Social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) – paid and organic plus promoted posts
- Radio (Cochrane Now) – 30 second ads, 10 second traffic tags, home page banner notice
- 8' x 4' road signs x 10 placements on high traffic areas (commercial and residential)
- Cochrane digital owned signs (2)
- Sandwich boards: four at SLS, one at RanchoHouse, Library, The Station
- CaptureTV – rotating TV screens in SLS Centre
- Cochrane Eagle Newspaper half page advertisement, week of November 5 and 12

Advertising examples:



Fall focus group (in-person)

The Town of Cochrane convened a second budget consultation focus group on November 4, 2025, to validate the Town's 2026 engagement approach and gather direction for the 2027 cycle.

Of the original 16 participants invited to attend the spring budget focus group, six returned. They provided detailed, experience-based feedback that was aligned, consistent and action-oriented. Their insights reinforced the need for clearer strategic context and a more intentional engagement model focused on quality over volume.

Key themes outlined by participants

1. Residents need clear strategic line-of-sight
2. Growth pressures are influencing budget expectations
3. Communication channels must shift toward high-trust, low-noise formats
4. Engagement quality outweighs quantity
5. Focus groups build trust through a visible feedback loop
6. Survey design friction is reducing completion rates
7. Engagement must "Meet residents where they are"
8. Civic literacy is a necessary pre-condition for effective engagement

A detailed report is attached in Appendix B.

Survey (online)

The draft budget 2026 feedback survey was available on Cochrane’s engagement portal (www.letstalkcochrane.ca) between November 4 and 16, 2025.

The survey consisted of three main questions, was open to all users, and widely promoted across both paid and owned Cochrane channels. A total of 46 survey submissions were received.

Questions asked:

1. Provide any specific questions or comments you may have about the budget process.
2. Provide any specific questions or comments you have surrounding the 2026 draft budget.
3. Please provide any additional comments.

Summary of findings by participants

The survey signals clear resident pressure points around service levels, fiscal stewardship, growth management and communication transparency. The dataset reflects strong sentiment polarization: residents want improved services but are fatigued by tax increases and uncertain about long-range planning assumptions. Residents are willing to support investments when the value proposition is clear, the plan is coherent and the rationale is transparent.

Across all themes, residents are asking for:

- Predictable, transparent decision-making
- Clarity on where dollars go
- Infrastructure and utilities that keep pace with growth
- Strategic communication that explains the “why” behind every major decision

A detailed report including all responses received is attached in Appendix A.

Budget engagement sessions (in-person)

In-person engagement sessions were held at the SLS Centre, providing community members the opportunity to ask questions of Council and Administration, and provide comments for Council. This engagement was staffed by members of Council, the senior leadership team and corporate communications.

Engagement sessions took place:

- Friday, November 14th from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- Saturday, November 15th from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The set up included several boards that provides information on the draft 2026 budget, as well as the responsibilities of different levels of government.

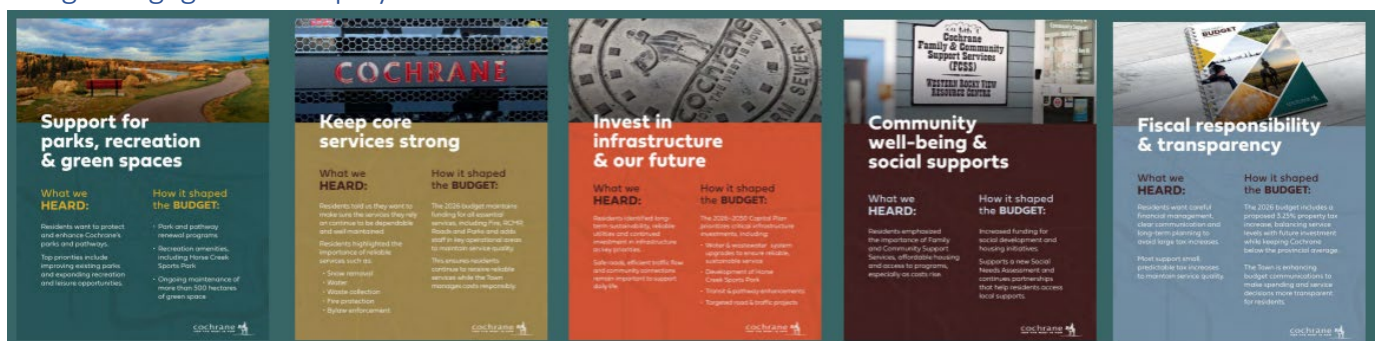
Budget boards:



In addition, the set up included a series of five themed boards, each representing a community priority area. Each board included:

- What we heard: highlights from previous engagements
- How it shaped the budget: showing how input shaped the proposed plan

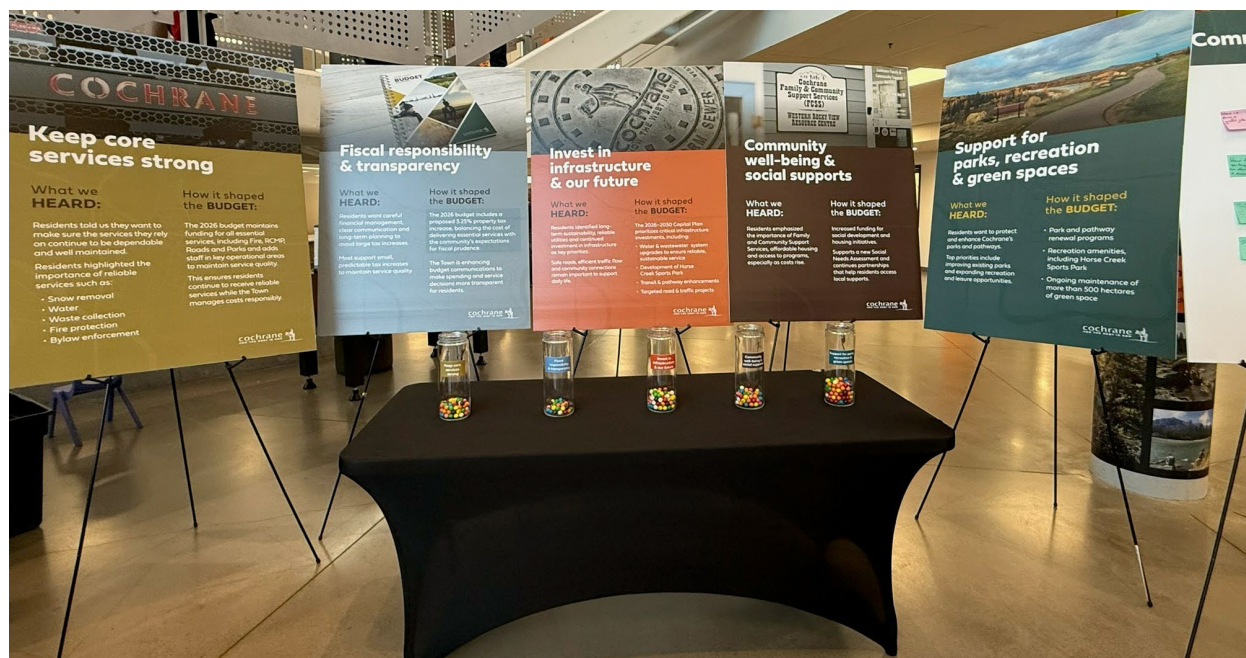
Budget engagement display boards:



Engagement activity

Residents were invited to participate in an interactive engagement opportunity that highlighted the community priorities identified through the spring public engagement and focus group session.

In front of each board was a glass jar. Participants were given a bag with 10 gumballs to distribute among the jars based on the priorities that matter most to them.



Gumball voting summary

Based on the number of gumballs visible in each jar, the results show the highest level of support for parks, recreation & green spaces, followed by invest in infrastructure & our future.

Fiscal transparency, community social supports and core services remain important but ranked slightly lower in comparison.

Participants were also encouraged to provide comments for Council. These included:

- We need a new recreation centre.
- Sports, activities, greenspaces. Less density and traffic. Better infrastructure. Let kids be kids. Stop bringing city problems to Cochrane.
- Keep public parks accessible for local communities. Don't turn more open space into cities.
- Admin is doing a great job. No more growth/development in Cochrane. Keep the town small.
- Transparency. I will support what is right for Cochrane.
- What are we doing with the +2.6% increase? Where is it going?
- How about a forensic audit?
- How about a town hall on budget?
- Get ICLEI out of the budget.
- How do you keep taxes affordable in a recession?
- I appreciate the engaging manner and budget process—good job!
- We need more local business to support Cochrane.
- A new elected council. We need the people of Cochrane to step up.
- Many stop signs—why? Who is the traffic expert?
- Keep up the great work—town staff and council!
- The Town should invest more in infrastructure, not in other things.
- Transparency and updates more often.
- Stop rapid development until infrastructure catches up.
- More health clinics—our walk-in clinic system is not great.
- Affordable housing options.
- Commercial growth and investment.
- Green spaces matter—keep them.
- Do we need this big of a rec centre?
- I do not support local transit.
- Water is life - continue to prioritize the environment including wetlands, etc.
- Improve transit connections to Calgary and relook at on demand (decrease)
- If only 1000 people completed the survey the findings are not representative

Appendices

Appendix A– Online survey results:

Q1 Provide any specific questions or comments you may have in regard to the budget process:

- Need more public engagement. 758 Respondents is not enough to say there has been sufficient public consultation.
- More public feedback needed.
- More focus groups.
- Reasonable increase to maintain with service levels.
- None
- Should be communicated significantly better by engaging residents of Cochrane with how the overall process actually works. Education goes a long way. Share across social media platforms and not just on the TOC app.
- N/A.
- The process seems to provide very little hard information about the reasons for the water rates increases, the nature of and necessity for the new positions, and why a disguised increase in the form of a pillaging of the Reserve is appropriate. The "bottom lines" are clear; the reasons for them are obscure beyond anodyne assurances of necessity to maintain existing levels of service without any detail at all.
- Can we please eliminate/ ban left turns into a d out of west rock road to and from highway 22. These turns create havoc on highway 22. Or can we have a passing lane on the east side of 22
- My question is below
- My taxes jumped \$400 this year. Spending is out of control.
- Probably need to see higher taxes to improve community safety and maintenance. Won't get any cheaper in the future to make big purchases with the way things are going.
- When citizens overwhelmingly express opposition to budget items, how are decisions made by council? How much input is considered from corporations?
- I would like to see a freeze on any housing development and more money spend on infrastructure. The traffic in Cochrane is out of control.
- The budget must respect the residents. There is little appetite for a taxation increase. Costs are out of control in many personal budgets these days and that would just make things more challenging. Growth (Town foot print) needs to be placed on a dull roar. Urban sprawl is not appreciated. Equally, cramming as many people into an area is also a bad idea but is acceptable if there were property size options in town (which there are not).
- Personnel have increased drastically over the past 3 years. The staffing added have been at the directorship level which provide little direct impact on our community.
- I think the town administration should be commended for the level of engagement surrounding the budget. There are so many opportunities for engagement, no citizen should feel left out or be able to fairly criticize. In fact, I think the town needs to ensure the dollars spent on engagement match the perceived value. We don't have to bend over backwards to plead our citizens to get involved. Just get the feedback from those that are inclined, passionate, and informed.
- My comments are in section 3 of this page

- Unfortunately .. I do not know what the budget is for 2026?
- The engagement process feels genuine, but the draft budget doesn't always reflect what residents prioritized. I'd like to see more transparency on where public input aligned or differed from final decisions and why.
- Thank you for the opportunity to provide written feedback on the process. Please see notes in Q2 below.
- With all the insane building that is going on in Cochrane why would you raise the property tax of those that have lived here for years and are the backbone of the community
- What happens if the citizens don't approve the budget but council does?
- I support a modest property tax increase to ensure our community can maintain quality public services, invest in infrastructure, and continue to support community safety and well-being. Sustainable funding today prevents larger costs down the road.
- What determines the increase? What factors are taken into account to reduce the increases? Does council provide any guidelines for determining the budget increases?
- Management costs and consulting costs are out of control. Cochrane could be run much more efficiently. Since Cochrane is near its debt limit it would be prudent to control additional spending or examine how to generate more revenue from our non-existent industrial business base. The Tax Burden is majority on home owners. It seems that Government seems to think that people have an endless supply of money. As Margaret Thatcher said; Socialism works until you run out of other people's money.
- Critical infrastructure and emergency services should be the first buckets to get filled. When doing a personal budget you must know your fixed costs then allot to the discretionary spending (recreation, parks). I can't live off a two week vacation to Rome, I need a place to live, food to eat, access to water. What good is the town if it doesn't have reliable water, waste, fire response, RCMP response, connected roadways, etc. Each service must have a service level agreement or some performance measurement (PM) and it should be publicly available and easily accessible and be the foundation for budgeting. Example being fire response time, there should be a PM such as "respond to fire within X minutes" or "X number of firefighters per 1000 people" and if it's not being met then address it. I have heard that current fire response strategy is to allow the impacted house to burn down and save the neighbouring houses. If budget increase changes that to allow fire fighters to save the burning house that's something residents should be told, what could budget increases do. I imagine that each department could say "this is how much money we get, this is where it goes, this is what we need and this is what we propose we do with that budget increase". Not necessarily throw money at it but things like staffing obviously need money. I've heard that the town's water license is in jeopardy and that should be addressed. On the flip side, asking the public, who may largely be uninformed or self motivated, may not be qualified to direct the town in how to allocate funds and how to change property taxes. Not saying there should not be public forum but rather better education for the public. The same way the town states that ~29% of property taxes go to the province for education then X% must go to fire services to maintain staffing, stations, etc. to respond to an emergency within X minutes and to keep up with anticipated population growth and town capacity limits (focus group document quotes CAO stating existing town limits could accommodate 70,000 people). Even though education falls largely under provincial jurisdiction I was told by a town planner at a past engagement session that the MGA and possibly town bylaw sets out minimum requirements of a developer to allot land to parks which, for some reason, includes potential school

spaces. If there is a town bylaw that states such thing, increase that minimum amount or separate out the space required to hold for a future school.

- I felt engaged with pre budget survey and the contribution resulting in the budget compiling.
- The draft budget strikes a fair balance between financial sustainability and spending priorities.
- Slowing down growth is preferred.
- Would love to see the relationship with local media continue. The relationship with the town and Cochrane now has been an asset to how the people of Cochrane receive town updates, from community events to town improvements, it's where we stay connected.
- I would like a freeze on all further spending and property tax increases until the new council has a firm understanding of its relationship with Administration.
- n/a
- Please do not ask biased questions ie. raise your taxes or cut "the high-quality services and infrastructure Cochrane residents rely on". Already you are setting up for a tax hike.
- I want to make sure that the staff at the town is paid fairly but do want pay/benefits being looked at carefully. Every time I see job postings for the town, the salary's are sky high and at the end of the day, we are the ones paying for that. We want efficiency, not waste.
- Dear Council Members: I am writing to respectfully request increased transparency and community engagement in the development and approval of Cochrane's municipal budget. Specifically, I would like to see an itemized budget made available to residents well in advance of its formal acceptance by council. This would allow residents the opportunity to review the proposed allocations thoroughly and provide meaningful suggestions or comments before final decisions are made. In addition, I seek greater clarity on the process by which the budget is developed and finalized. Understanding the deliberations and considerations that shape the budget is essential for fostering trust and ensuring that community priorities are accurately reflected. Finally, I believe it is important for residents to be informed about how each council member votes on individual budget items. This level of transparency would promote accountability and help constituents understand the positions of their elected representatives. Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I trust that increasing openness around Cochrane's budget process will strengthen the relationship between council and the community and lead to more informed, inclusive governance. Sincerely, Sherry Obenauer MA Med
- Please do not increase our property taxes
- You have asked citizens for input into the 2026 budget. I am concerned that in spite of voiced issues with expenditures tax hikes will continue.
- The process is pretty straightforward. I was kinda hoping for an actual survey to take. It looks like there's just three questions and none are very specific.

Q2 Provide any specific questions or comments you have surrounding the 2026 draft budget:

- Budget is well done and seems responsible. Lots of acronyms and buzzwords/phrases. Simple language would be better for such a public document. Nice breakdown of town sections.
- Increases make sense. Growing and maintaining means increases.
- Glad to see increase in public safety. As town grows so will problems. Like seeing RCMP and bylaw around town.
- The cost for the eco center could be eliminated if the ToC manages domestic and construction waste differently. Why is there no alternative for landfill disposal? Waste can be converted into energy, as landfill disposal is a relocation strategy with long term liabilities.
- We should be lowering taxes! Not increasing them. In times like these where we've got a lot of expenses and groceries are ridiculously priced high. We need more options when it comes to affordable grocery stores like a fresh co to create more competition. We have too many of the same grocery stores in being costly for groceries. We need more health food stores like a community
- The Town has not added funds to the Tax Stabilization Reserve since 2023, but has pulled out funds in 2024, and now proposed again in 2026. Given that the Tax Stabilization Reserve is governed by the Operating Reserves Policy and contributes to the 8% operating-reserve target, will the 2026 draw reduce the Town's combined operating reserves below or close to the policy minimums? What are the plans to fund this reserve moving forward? 2. Several large capital projects are advancing in 2026. What are the estimated ongoing operating and maintenance costs once those assets come online?
- Why pillage the Reserve? In particular, what is the relationship between the new positions and the raid on the Reserve? What are the new positions for? Why are they essential (as opposed to desired)? The increases in the various rates for water and related matters are outrageous in percentage terms: this is not the first time that these rates have been manipulated to exceed actual estimated costs and they amount to an inappropriate use of these rates as a form of disguised tax increase.
- Please look at businesses when approving growth. The town has grown too fast for the current infrastructure
- Why is property tax more in certain neighborhoods than others. We drive on the same streets, use the same amenities. Have our garage and recycling picked up the same amount. I purchased my house for \$500,000, but it has now increased. I can hardly afford to pay my property tax because my house is now assessed at a high rate. If one neighborhood was receiving more amenities or perks, I could understand why property tax is more...but you're just assuming because I live in a neighborhood deemed high class, we should pay more. I can't afford to use the amenities in the community because I pay so much per month for my taxes. I feel it should be more balanced:
- More money to parks maintenance.
- Need to stop with being so scared of tax increases. It's not a bad word.
- Taxes were designed so they actually reduce over time, how is council going reduce taxes? How will council ensure incidents such as water main breaks by contractors and poor work is addressed immediately and remedied without the cost falling to residents ?
- There appears to be a surplus of town employees. I often see two people in a truck doing nothing - parked on the side of the road on their phones or standing around and smoking. Also, in the summer I see multiple employees weeding and again often on their phones and talking - not

working. Considering cutting staff for savings or considering contracting private companies to do much of the work town employees currently do.

- I would ask that an outside agency look and audit the town's finances and provided feedback and new direction to how the town is run. Although costs have increased, revenues have also increased with continued development. I firmly believe that upper management and leadership is top heavy and that over 1.5 Million in savings could be found in flattening those positions.
- My primary comment is around Transit. I firmly believe this is an outdated transportation model that simply is a fiscal black hole. In today's society there are so many alternate transportation options. There is ride sharing, and electric scooters for example. I don't think it is a key responsibility of a municipal government to provide the transportation. It is the municipal governments responsibility to ensure the infrastructure is in place (roads, pathways, etc) to support the multitude of transportation models. If there is a demand for a mode of transportation create the regulatory environment to allow a private business to fill that need. That is what our taxes should be doing in nearly every instance. Providing the framework and key infrastructure to allow business to fill a need. Secondly, i'm concerned about the type of development that the budget is supporting. We seem to be bent on providing the same kinds of social services that the City of Calgary provides. It is ok to not be all things to all people. It is ok to be an affluent community that doesn't have services or residences that suit low income earners. Cochrane can be something people aspire to. This isn't a popular concept but it needs to be stated as many people feel this way but are afraid to say it.
- I'd like to see slower growth overall so taxes don't need to increase as much. The 14 new FTEs seem high — are they all needed right away, or could some be delayed or repurposed? The 16% increase for fire services also feels steep compared to the others — can that be phased in? Transit seems overfunded given how often COLT buses look underutilized. I'd also like more clarity on what "partner organizations" includes and whether that budget could be reduced. Parks and open spaces, on the other hand, are really important to residents and should be maintained or even increased.
- Good morning, I live in Sunterra Ridge and would like to respectfully request that the Town of Cochrane (TofC) Council and Administration consider planting three new trees in C.W. Fisher Park. Over the past two years, at least three mature trees have been removed from the park, understandably, likely due to age or other factors. I have submitted two previous requests during this time, and understand from the TofC's responses that replanting is not currently planned but has been noted for future consideration. As the Town continues to grow and develop new parks and infrastructure, I believe it's equally important to maintain and replenish the green spaces that existing residents already enjoy. Thank you for your consideration and any feedback you may provide. Sincerely, Chris Strawson
- Why are the developers NOT paying for their OWN roads and maintenance while construction is still on going
- With new property taxes and increase in home value happening every year, why must there be an increase in tax on top of all that. My house increased over 100,000 in two years, I am paying a lot more tax with that alone.
- 1. Will the reserves be increased through this proposed budget? If not, why not? 2. Since the property values have significantly decreased and house taxes are based on appraised values, will our taxes be adjusted to reflect these decreases? 3. What efforts are being made to curb these annual increases?

Especially during these turbulent economic times and uncertainty, how can the town council also reduce spending and reduce this increase of 3.25%?

- You cannot please everyone. Some projects should be shelved until funding is secured.
- Have not reviewed yet. will submit subsequent form.
- I was unable to identify off site levies revenue separate from fees for new capital projects, ie Horse Creek Rec.
- The size of the ToC workforce is large and has experienced high growth rates. Approximately 35% of the budgetary expenses are staffing related. Any possibility of finding savings in this area?
- I love hearing about our town on the radio, it keeps us in the know about what's happening in our community and what the town is doing to make it even better
- IMO a lot of wasteful spending has occurred in previous years. Projects need to be aligned with available funds to prevent further tax increases.
- I found lots of information but no direction on sending feedback. As a senior on Govt pension I am asking if you can increase assistance on property taxes. Home values are rising and so are property taxes. We need to remain in our homes as long as possible to reduce over populating assisted living in the community. Thank you
- Simple. The extra amount of money you raise will go to what? Inflation? Hiring (what position or department)? Extra service? Etc.
- It has been nice hearing radio ads for the town and to have more direct communication to the people of Cochrane. It is the town's job to reach people, not people's job to go out of their way to dig through the town's website.
- Dear Council Members: I am writing to express my growing concern regarding the rising cost of living in Cochrane and the impact that recent financial and development decisions are having on residents. The cost of living continues to increase each year, yet the average person's income does not rise at the same rate—if it rises at all. The average individual salary in Cochrane is estimated at approximately \$66,800 per year, and the median household income in 2022 was about \$130,550. My partner and I fall within this range, and we do not have children. Despite steady incomes, neither of us has received a raise in several years. Meanwhile, our property taxes increased from \$3,000 in 2022 to \$3,468 in 2025—a 15.6% increase in just three years. To put this into perspective, an equivalent wage increase for me would be an additional \$8.43 per hour, which has not occurred. This tax increase is only one example of the broader financial pressures residents face, including rising utility costs, fuel, food, insurance premiums, and other essential expenses. At the same time, Cochrane has experienced a significant surge in development. Many of these projects appear to move forward with limited consideration for infrastructure capacity, traffic congestion, noise levels, environmental impacts, or the long-term financial burden placed on residents. Increasing development has also contributed to rising local prices. People choose Cochrane for a quieter, friendlier, and more affordable lifestyle, yet our town is rapidly transforming into a smaller version of Calgary—the very city I moved away from years ago. I am concerned that some development decisions seem to benefit those with business interests in the community—such as realtors and local business owners—rather than the residents who elected council and who consistently express the desire for responsible, measured growth. Cochrane residents want financial stability and the preservation of our town's character, not higher taxes and additional services required to accommodate unchecked expansion. I respectfully request the following: Property taxes be reduced or at least stabilized, rather than continuing to rise at unsustainable rates. Greater transparency in

council decision-making, including clear records of how each council member votes on issues that affect residents. Stronger accountability for developers, ensuring: multiple access points for each community, road designs that allow safe two-way traffic even with full street parking, full adherence to Cochrane's existing bylaws, including height restrictions. Limits on the number of home daycares and rental properties permitted within each community. On my street, River Heights Crescent, both sides of the roadway are often lined bumper-to-bumper with vehicles day and night, despite each home having a single or double garage. Many properties are rented to multiple occupants, each with a vehicle, effectively turning the street into a one-way road. Additionally, rental properties frequently lack proper exterior maintenance, which lowers property values for the entire area. This raises valid concerns regarding whether such rentals meet legal standards and who within council is responsible for enforcing these regulations. Cochrane deserves thoughtful planning, responsible development, and leadership that prioritizes the well-being and financial stability of its residents. I urge council to consider these concerns seriously and to take meaningful action that reflects the values and desires of the community you serve. Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to seeing positive steps taken to ensure Cochrane remains a safe, vibrant, and affordable place to live. Sincerely, Sherry Obenauer MA Med

- Please do not increase our property taxes
- I am opposed to any tax increases. Cochrane has a great level of services at present. If need be, we can reduce some services that have low usage to maintain the current tax burden.
- Roads are atrocious and only getting worse, with the new developments filling in, yet road improvements don't seem to be a high priority.

Q3 Please provide any additional comments.

- Majority seems to indicate maintaining service levels, with the overall growth in community, this directly results in the reasonable tax increases just to maintain services.
- Our community is nice, nice things do tend to cost money.
- We should not be approving the concrete batch plant whatsoever. It has no place to be directly across where people live and along our river. As Mayor and councillors you still have significant influence over what gets approved/not. Our health and environment will benefit significantly if this is shut down. Do right by the people who voted you in.
- Thank you to administration/mayor & council for opening this budget forum up to members of the community.
- I had hoped that the new Council might exercise greater control over the Administration's desires than this Draft portends.
- Something needs to be done about the lack of policing on our roads. Too many close calls lately. Lots of red light runners
- Clear policies need to be in place, so contractor incompetence does not cost citizens a dime. Infrastructure needs to be worked into any building contracts and paid for by the developer. Reduction in taxes are necessary, people who have lived here for decades are being priced out. If services aren't increased then taxes should be the same or decrease every year.
- More money on infrastructure, reduce town staff for cost savings, freeze on all housing development until the infrastructure improves.

- You have a new mayor and council, take the appropriate steps to fully understand the numbers, ask hard questions, remove the excess fat that we have in our municipal town government.
- None, thank you.
- a) The intersection of Quigley and Hwy 22 traffic light control are abused daily. I drive across 22 at that junction daily to get to my home. Many times a week I see drivers on 22 run the red light. It is only a matter of time before there will be a serious accident. We need to have light/speed cameras at that intersection to at least deter some of those drivers. b) I walk the paths of Cochrane every day. I find there are many cyclists ride far too fast on many of the paths, paths that are also used by children, families, and accompanying pets. I've been a road cyclist for many years and I would never consider riding at road cycling speeds along public pathways. It is too dangerous. I think it is only a matter of time before the town will witness an accident on our paths —children injured and/or pets injured. A start on managing this is to at least put up some 20km/hr signs, as Calgary has done. Enforcement is a whole other discussion, mostly because of the costs. The new trend to electric bicycles is an added challenge. Not only can these go fast, they are often handled by people who haven't ridden a bicycle for years. Their instability and ability to take evasive action is questionable. c) New trees, bushes, and lawns in public and commercial places. When budgeting for these please ensure sustainment costs are included in the budget for the year they are planted as well as the budget for following years. The loss of new trees planted by the town within one summer and winter is astounding. If there is no sustainment money planned in future budgets please don't plant the trees in the first place. I'm discouraged to see my tax money wither and die. In addition, when providing approval to developers and builders for commercial property, ensure those approvals include sustainment responsibilities for landscaping after it has been installed initially. One glance at WallMart, Safeway (etc) mall, or SaveOn is a demonstration of what I'm talking about.
- I've filled out these questionnaires several times and each time I have asked for one project to be considered. I've never heard back from town counsel, as of yet, so needless to say it's very frustrating. I'm going to give it another try today. I believe that Glenbow Drive desperately needs one cohesive fence. It's an older part of town but has extremely high traffic the gateway to downtown. There have been many projects, that are cosmetic, that the town has completed... so I feel strongly that this stretch of road (running east to west) parallel to the Cochrane Alliance church should have all the same fencing . Each residence has a different fence and in some cases, in dire need of repair. I would be more than happy to explain my concerns, if anyone would like to discuss this further. Thank you, Carlie Mae (403-851-0295)
- Wages aren't keeping up with inflation. We need to keep our tax increases low so people can afford food.
- I would like to see council curb/reduce their spending, demonstrate austerity and lead by example.
- Seems disappointing that only 6 out of ~250 employees of the town of Cochrane participated in the budget survey as reported in the What We Heard Report. Was it just town council that answered? Maybe only a small percentage of staff reside in Cochrane therefore are invested in it but I would hope that people employed by the town are engaged and invested enough to participate. I would hope that future surveys would see an increase in staff responses and that staff are encouraged and given the opportunity to respond to the surveys.
- The format is effective for layperson review. I would have expected a note, reserved value or line item for the damaged waste water line rehab cost & potential environmental fines. I would think this would be an insurance or legal claim that most conservative businesses track.

- The planned tax increase seems Reasonable given the current financial landscape.
- Local radio plays a vital role in keeping residents informed about community initiatives and the town's ongoing efforts to enhance our town and stay connected.
- Cochrane needs to show some austerity and freeze further development until spending can be brought in line with affordability of taxpayers particularly seniors.
- If we have a lot of beautiful services but it's unaffordable to live here, it makes no sense..
- I hope waste is cut from the budget but not in ways that positively impact the town.
- I realize it's difficult to reduce services but I feel that some services specifically for certain groups need to be examined to determine if tax dollars should continue to be used for all the current expenditures

Appendix B – Fall Focus Group What We Heard Report



TOWN OF COCHRANE

2026-2028 Budget Engagement

Fall Focus Group 2 - November 4, 2025

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Executive Summary

The Town of Cochrane convened a second budget consultation focus group on November 4, 2025, to validate the Town's 2026 engagement approach and gather direction for the 2027 cycle.

Of the original 16 participants invited to attend the first group, six returned. They provided detailed, experience-based feedback that was aligned, consistent, and action-oriented. Their insights reinforced the need for clearer strategic context, stronger channel discipline, and a more intentional engagement model focused on quality over volume.

1. Residents Need Clear Strategic Line-of-Sight

Participants want budget information positioned within the Town's long-term goals—not as an isolated, annual decision.

Evidence:

- Direct requests for visibility into multi-year planning, not just the upcoming cycle.
- Calls for benchmarking Cochrane against comparable municipalities.
- Direction to explain service levels *before* presenting budget numbers to provide context and rationale.

2. Growth Pressures Are Influencing Budget Expectations

Growth, affordability, and density remain top-of-mind and shape residents' interpretations of budget priorities.

Evidence:

- Concerns about narrow roads, parking constraints, and high-density developments meeting only minimum standards.
- Questions around whether growth patterns will evolve and whether developers are paying an appropriate share of infrastructure costs.
- Requests to integrate growth considerations directly into budget discussions.

3. Communication Channels Must Shift Toward High-Trust, Low-Noise Formats

Residents prefer communication methods that offer clarity, reach, and minimal negativity.

Evidence:

- Strong support for road signs, direct mail, printed materials, radio, and the Town app.
- Consistently negative feedback on social media due to hostile comment culture and low-quality dialogue.
- Interest in an “uncluttered” communication environment where the Town can control tone and reduce misinformation.

4. Engagement Quality Outweighs Quantity

Participants emphasized that informed, passionate residents provide more actionable input than large groups of disengaged respondents.

Evidence:

- Clear sentiment that chasing participation volume dilutes meaningful insights.
- Recognition that not all residents have the time or inclination to participate deeply—and that is acceptable.
- Strong desire to continue engaging participants who demonstrate a sustained commitment to the budget process.

5. Focus Groups Build Trust Through a Visible Feedback Loop

Residents value the opportunity to see how their input influences Town decision-making in real time.

Evidence:

- Positive feedback on the transparency and dialogue created in facilitated sessions.
- Direct requests for more focus groups—both at the beginning of the process and again to review results.
- Appreciation for the Town explaining how June feedback materially shaped the draft 2026 budget.

6. Survey Design Friction Is Reducing Completion Rates

Participants identified specific improvements needed to increase survey participation and data quality.

Evidence:

- Need to state survey time requirements upfront.
- Desire for save-and-resume functionality.
- Recommendation to front-load priority questions and streamline the overall survey length.
- Expectation that each question produce actionable insight, not generic sentiment.

7. Engagement Must “Meet Residents Where They Are”

Participants want the Town to embed engagement in existing community spaces and events.

Evidence:

- Strong support for pop-up engagement at festivals, markets, and other high-traffic gatherings.
- Interest in trade show-style engagement that makes officials more accessible.
- Concern that requiring travel or attendance at standalone events creates avoidable barriers.

8. Civic Literacy Is a Necessary Pre-Condition for Effective Engagement

Residents acknowledge gaps in understanding municipal responsibilities, service levels, and budget constraints.

Evidence:

- Specific requests for clearer explanations of service standards and government roles.
- Interest in school partnerships to build foundational civic literacy.
- Desire to link Citizen Satisfaction Survey results directly to budget decisions for clearer continuity.

Introduction

The Town of Cochrane conducted an annual budget survey from April 4 to May 7, 2025, to understand how residents wanted to see their tax dollars allocated.

Following the survey, two focus groups were held to dive deeper into specific topics and augment survey insights. The first focus group on June 3, 2025, explored preferences around spending. The second focus group on November 4, 2025, focused on:

- How their feedback was incorporated into the draft budget
- Communications preferences during the budget consultations
- Engagement strategies for future budget cycles.

This was the final engagement session before a public open house on November 14-15, where residents will have the opportunity to review the draft budget and provide feedback before Council deliberations.



Preparing for the Focus Group

Step 1: Establishing Objectives: Parsons Dialogue collaborated with the Town's Engagement team to develop engagement objectives. The team included:

- Kristin Huybrecht, Manager Intergovernmental Relations & Corporate Communications
- Kevin Blanchette, Director, Strategic Services
- Karla Schultz, Public Engagement Advisor
- Robin Parsons, Facilitator
- Dave Robertson, Facilitator

We established the following objectives for the focus group:

- Understand resident preferences for budget communication channels and formats
- Identify which engagement activities should be repeated or enhanced in 2027
- Gather input on survey design and completion strategies
- Explore ideas for expanding budget engagement participation

A goal for the experience was for residents to find the environment welcoming, casual, and comfortable, and to get to know their fellow residents a little. At the end of this discussion, we wanted residents to leave knowing more about Cochrane's budget process and feeling that their contributions had been helpful and appreciated.

Step 2: Selecting the Participants The Town invited the same sixteen participants from the June 3rd focus group, recognizing that their previous engagement demonstrated strong interest in budget processes and their familiarity with earlier discussions would enable deeper conversation. Six residents attended.

Step 3: Developing the Facilitation Guide: A facilitation guide was prepared to structure the evening around five key questions.

- What did we hear in June and how did we use the feedback?
- What communication tools are most and least effective?
- What should be repeated in the subsequent budget cycles?

- What would improve the budget engagement and communications process?
- What questions should be on the budget survey?

Step 4 - Facilitate the meeting: The focus group was held on Monday, November 4, 2025, from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM. Kevin Blanchette provided a brief presentation on the 2026 budget process and how the Town incorporated feedback from earlier engagement activities, followed by facilitated small-group and large-group discussions.

Summary of Findings

Immediately following Kevin Blanchette's presentation, residents asked questions about infrastructure challenges in new developments, particularly narrow roads, inadequate parking, and high-density housing in communities like Greystone. While these developments meet provincial standards, residents expressed frustration that they create practical problems older neighbourhoods don't experience – streets too narrow to feel safe cycling, insufficient parking, and density exceeding infrastructure capacity. Residents questioned whether these patterns would continue in future developments.

Additional questions addressed wastewater infrastructure (clarifying that the Town sends wastewater to Calgary rather than building its own treatment facility) and whether transit planning encompasses holistic transportation beyond buses, including pathways and scooters. Kevin confirmed the Town is studying connected pathways and comprehensive mobility options.

Communication Channels: What Works & What Doesn't

Residents expressed clear preferences for how they want to receive budget information.

"Everybody loves the road signs, right?"

Most Preferred Channels

- Road signs and boards received enthusiastic support, with multiple participants emphasizing their effectiveness.
- Direct mail was consistently mentioned as a reliable way to reach residents.
- Printed materials remain valued, though residents noted the challenge of newspapers no longer being delivered to every door.
- Radio was mentioned positively as an effective channel.
- The Town app received positive feedback from participants who use it.

Least Preferred Channels

- **Social media received consistently negative feedback.** The primary concern was not the platform itself, but the comment sections. One participant stated directly, "Comments are terrible." Residents described social media conversations as hostile and unproductive, creating environments where constructive dialogue becomes impossible.
- **A key insight emerged about the need for an uncluttered communication channel that allows the Town to control negativity.** Residents want spaces where they can receive information and provide feedback without wading through inflammatory comments.
- Participants want to hear from the Town on social media, but also want comments turned off so that they can focus on what the Town has to say about important initiatives.

The Value of Focus Groups and In-Person Engagement

Participants strongly advocated for continuing focus groups as part of the budget engagement process. The reason is straightforward:

"We can see a feedback loop."

Focus groups offer something other engagement methods cannot: the ability to observe how their input influences thinking in real-time. Residents appreciate seeing Town staff process their feedback, ask clarifying questions, and explain how various considerations factor into decisions. This visible feedback loop builds trust and demonstrates that engagement is genuine, not performative.

Residents emphasized they want to "do more focus groups to review results" – not just provide input on the front end, but reconvene to see how their feedback shaped outcomes.

Quality Over Quantity

A significant discussion emerged about who the Town should prioritize engaging. One participant articulated a perspective that resonated with others:

"If people don't want to be engaged, I don't want their opinion... It really is about passion. People have to be passionate."

This statement sparked discussion about the value of allocating resources to residents who demonstrate genuine interest and investment in the budget process, rather than trying to achieve broad participation from people who lack the time, interest, or knowledge to engage meaningfully.

Residents suggested that high-quality feedback from serious, engaged participants provides better guidance than collecting input from everyone in the entire community. They acknowledged that not everyone has the bandwidth to participate deeply, and that's acceptable – the goal should be reaching those who care enough to stay informed and contribute thoughtfully.

Survey Design and Completion

The Town noted that survey completion rates were lower than desired, with many respondents starting but not finishing. Residents offered practical suggestions:

- **Be transparent about time requirements upfront.** One participant stated, "If you tell people upfront how long it will take,

they will do it." Being honest about how long a survey takes — 5, 10, or 20 minutes — allows people to decide when they have enough time, rather than abandoning a survey midway when they realize it's longer than expected.

- **Allow people to save progress and return later.** Multiple participants noted they might need to complete a survey across multiple sessions, opening it several times before finishing.
- **Keep surveys short if broad participation is desired.** For people with limited time or interest, surveys should be very brief. One participant suggested that, if targeting the "30-second attention span" demographic, surveys should contain only two questions.
- **Ensure questions generate relevant, tangible feedback.** Residents want to know their input will influence actual decisions, not just check a box to meet an engagement requirement.
- **Place essential questions early in the survey,** so respondents can stop when they wish or continue if they have time.

"If you have a survey, and you said this survey will take five minutes, and it takes five minutes, they will do it."

Suggested survey questions included:

- Do you own or rent your home?
- What area of town do you live in?
- How long have you lived in Cochrane?
- How many adults and how many children live in the household?
- What age are you?
- How would you like to receive information about the budget, and how would you like to share your opinions?
- "Can I get back to you?" – providing a mechanism to think about answers and follow up later
- Benchmarking questions about how Cochrane compares to similar communities on spending levels, service delivery, and utility costs

Meeting People Where They Are

Residents emphasized the importance of bringing engagement to where people already gather, rather than expecting them to come to Town-hosted events. Suggestions included:

- Pop-up engagement at street festivals and community events. One participant noted, "When we have weekends, the street festivals and stuff like that, do we still have the town of Cochrane engagement there?"
- Trade show format engagement. A participant recalled a successful trade show at which Council members and staff were present, and many residents stopped to engage in conversation.
- Focus on accessible locations and times. Residents noted that requiring people to travel across town to participate creates barriers, particularly for families with young children.

The underlying principle is that meeting people where they already are is more effective than creating new events and hoping people attend.

"So when we have weekends, the street festivals and stuff like that, do we still have the town of Cochrane engagement there, like, could we not give them something where it's wanted?"

Connecting Budget to Strategic Planning

Residents want to understand how annual budget decisions connect to the Town's long-term strategic direction. Specific suggestions included:

- **Providing a clearer view of the Town's longer-term plans (years ahead)**, not just the immediate budget year. This helps residents understand whether current spending supports a coherent long-term vision.
- **Connecting budget decisions to the Town's long-term strategy** so residents can evaluate whether resource allocation aligns with stated priorities.
- **Explaining levels of service first, before discussing budget numbers.** Residents emphasized that understanding what services the Town provides and at what standard is essential context for evaluating whether proposed spending is appropriate.

"You have to know the level of service people expect... once you have an idea of what people think about that, you can't satisfy it, then you have an idea of where you're going."

Measuring Return on Investment for Communications

Residents encouraged the Town to track which communication channels generate the most engagement and adjust resource allocation accordingly. One participant asked, "If your direct mail campaign was expensive, what was your return on investment?"

The suggestion was to measure response rates by channel—how many people took action after receiving direct mail, seeing social media posts, or hearing radio ads—and focus resources on the most effective channels.

Residents also appreciated hearing that the Town's email newsletter has an approximately 80% open rate, and the Glenpatrick project email updates achieve a 98% open rate. These metrics demonstrate that when communications are targeted, relevant, and delivered through the right channel, residents engage.

"If you don't have a way to measure (response), that's pretty hard to justify spending more money on something if you can't measure how successful it was?"

Promoting Civic Literacy

Multiple participants emphasized the importance of helping residents understand how municipal government works before asking them to engage with budget decisions.

"It's amazing how little we all know about those service levels."

Suggestions included:

- **Promoting and establishing better civic literacy as a foundation for meaningful engagement.** One participant noted, "It's amazing how little we all know about those service levels" when discussing the differences between municipal, provincial, and federal responsibilities.
- **Connecting with high school civics programs to build knowledge among younger residents,** and potentially having high schoolers create budget proposals as a learning exercise.

- **Connecting the Citizen Satisfaction Survey to the budget** so residents understand how their feedback on service satisfaction informs budget allocation decisions.

Growth, Affordability, and Density Considerations

While not the primary focus of the November 4th session, residents reiterated concerns about growth that surfaced in the June focus group. Comments included:

- "Too much, too fast," and concerns about growth changing the character of the town
- Frustration that new developments meet minimum provincial standards but create density and parking challenges that older neighbourhoods don't experience
- Questions about whether developers are paying their fair share of infrastructure costs

Residents suggested that considerations of affordability, growth, and density should be part of budget conversations, not separate discussions.

*"My general sense is that growth is... too much, too fast.
It's changing the character of the town."*

Future Considerations

Based on the November 4th discussion, the Town may wish to consider the following for the 2027 budget engagement cycle:

Communication Strategy:

- Prioritize road signs, direct mail, printed materials, radio, and the Town app
- Consider how to manage or moderate social media comments to create a more constructive environment, or explore alternative platforms that allow for feedback without comment sections
- Track return on investment by communication channel and adjust spending accordingly

- Continue email newsletters for project-specific updates, given their exceptional open rates

Engagement Activities:

- Maintain or expand focus group offerings, including follow-up sessions where participants can see how their feedback influenced decisions
- Hold public meetings with compelling messaging to attract time-starved younger residents
- Send reminders to review posted materials as the budget process advances
- Experiment with pop-up engagement at street festivals and community events where residents already gather
- Consider the trade show format for certain engagement activities

Survey Design:

- State time requirements clearly before people begin
- Enable save-and-resume functionality
- Add questions about homeownership status, neighbourhood location, communication preferences, and benchmarking against similar communities.
- Include a mechanism for follow-up engagement ("Can I get back to you?")
- Ensure all questions generate actionable feedback that will inform real decisions

Strategic Context:

- Present budget information within the context of multi-year strategic plans
- Explain levels of service before discussing budget numbers
- Connect Citizen Satisfaction Survey results to budget priorities
- Provide comparative data showing how Cochrane benchmarks against similar communities
- Address growth, affordability, and density considerations within budget conversations

Civic Education:

- Develop civic literacy initiatives to help residents understand municipal responsibilities and budget processes
- Explore partnerships with high school civics programs
- Consider how Council participation in engagement activities can enhance credibility and demonstrate responsiveness

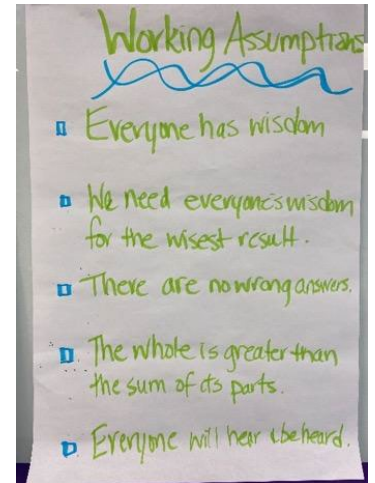
Focus and Philosophy:

- Consider prioritizing quality engagement from passionate, informed residents over broad participation from disengaged community members
- Try new approaches and pursue what works, learning from other communities' successful practices
- Be willing to experiment, but avoid being the first – adopt proven strategies from similar municipalities

Conclusion

The November 4th focus group provided valuable direction for the Town's 2027 budget engagement strategy. Residents demonstrated sophisticated thinking about communication, engagement quality, and the importance of strategic context for budget discussions.

Appendix A: Verbatim Results



Working Assumptions

- Everyone has wisdom.
- We need everyone's wisdom for the wisest result.
- There are no wrong answers.
- The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- Everyone will hear and be heard

Agenda

- Welcome & Overview of Cochrane Budget Sources / Uses / Constraints
- What does responsible Community growth look like?
- What are our infrastructure priorities and how do they rank against each other?
- What would make the budget process more transparent?

- Wrap up

The following verbatim results were captured on flip charts during the November 4, 2025 focus group discussion.

What things could be part of a budget engagement process?

- Council Meetings & Focus Groups
- Council Participation in Engagement
- A clearer view of the Town's longer-term plans (years ahead)
- Connect the budget to the Town's long-term strategy
- Connect H.School Civics Program → have high schoolers create a budget
- (Cit. Sat Survey? Connected to budget?)
- Promote/Establish better civic literacy
- Response measurement on \$\$\$ channels (letter)
- Explain levels of service first

Preferred Communication Tools

Preferred

- Direct Letter
- Printed Material
- Road Signs!!
- Radio
- App is great

Less Preferred

- Social Media ✓
- →Comments are terrible
- Would prefer an uncluttered channel, permission to push back

Additional notes

- Love newspaper, but all isn't delivered to dothe ors
- Focus Group (→can see feedback loop. YAY!)
- Do more focus groups to review results

What should be repeated in the next budget cycle?

- 2× Focus Groups
- 2× Public Meetings
- Reminders to look @ posted materials
- Messaging to attract people to the open house
 - More compelling tag lines
- →Time-starved young people
- Meet people where they are at

What questions would you like to see on the budget survey?

- Own or rent?
- Location of home
- How do you want to receive information about the budget & your opinions about it?
- "Can I get back to you?"
- Ask for feedback on previous surveys
- Info about the budget
 - Share some benchmarking
 - Relative to some communities
 - Comparative increases

What matters most in the 2027 budget engagement process?

- Try stuff, pursue what works
- Avoid the bleeding edge, look at what others have tried successfully
- Continue to provide "reasonable" services
- Ensure that questions generate relevant, tangible feedback
- Making sure people are informed

Consider affordability, growth, and density in conversation