

What We Heard Report

Cochrane 2027 Draft Budget

Public Engagement

Summary

November 10th, 2026

cochrane
HOW THE WEST IS NOW

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3

COMMUNICATION AND ADVERTISING FOR THE SURVEY AND ENGAGEMENT 4

FALL FOCUS GROUP (IN-PERSON) 6

SURVEY (ONLINE) 8

BUDGET OPEN HOUSE (IN-PERSON) 9

EMAIL FEEDBACK 13

NEXT STEPS 14

APPENDICES 15

Executive summary

The 2027 Budget Engagement process provided Cochrane residents with opportunities to learn about the proposed budget, ask questions and share feedback before Council's budget deliberations. The process was designed to report back on earlier engagement, explain key budget considerations and trade-offs, and gather input on the proposed 2027 budget.

Engagement activities included an in-person focus group on Oct. 22, an online feedback survey from Oct. 20 to Nov. 6 and a Budget Open House at The Station on Oct. 24. Thirteen residents took part in the focus group, and 33 adults and seven children attended the open house. Residents also shared feedback by email. These opportunities were supported by information shared through Town communication channels and materials that explained the proposed budget, municipal tax and service considerations, and the roles of different levels of government. The open house also included interactive stations and a family-friendly pumpkin patch activity to support participation and conversations with Council and Town Administration. In this report, "Administration" refers to the Town's staff, led by the Chief Administrative Officer.

Feedback reflected significant concern about the proposed 9.68 per cent tax increase, the affordability of property taxes and the broader cost of living. Participants also emphasized the need to maintain core infrastructure, utilities and essential services as Cochrane grows. Common themes included accountability for spending, clear explanations of budget choices and service-level trade-offs, development-related costs, transportation, housing and the need for infrastructure to keep pace with growth.

Feedback also showed differing views about how the Town should balance affordability with investment. Some participants supported continued investment in infrastructure and services, while others called for reduced spending, deferred projects or service adjustments to limit tax increases. Across engagement activities, residents consistently asked for clear, transparent information about how tax dollars are used, what is being proposed and how their feedback was considered.

This report summarizes the feedback received through the 2027 Budget Engagement process. The findings are intended to inform Council's deliberations and support clear communication with the community as the Town moves toward final budget decisions.

Communication and advertising for the survey and engagement

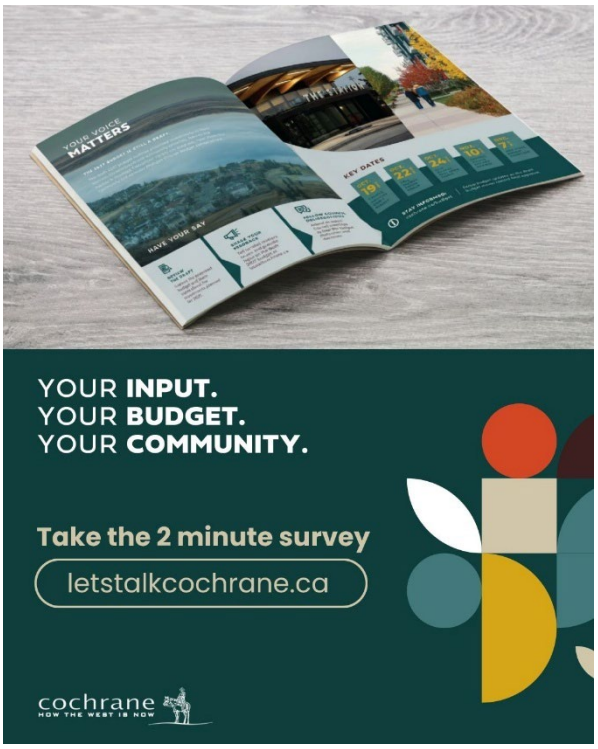
Promotion ran from Sept. 27 to Nov. 6, 2026, through the following channels:

- Online: Cochrane.ca home page banner
- Online: Let's Talk Cochrane landing page
- Town Round-up e-newsletter: Sept. 27 and Oct. 27
- Let's Talk Cochrane e-newsletter: Oct. 13 and Nov. 3
- Media release
- Town of Cochrane app notifications
- Social media (Facebook and Instagram): unpaid posts promoted ways to take part, including the online survey and the open house. Content included static posts, short informational videos featuring the chief administrative officer and a Facebook event to help residents plan to attend the open house. Posts directed residents to letstalkcochrane.ca.
- Radio (Cochrane Now): 30-second ads and 10-second traffic tags, Oct. 5 to 23, 2026
- Road signs: five 8-by-4-foot signs in high-traffic commercial and residential areas, Oct. 9 to 26, 2026
- Two Cochrane digital signs: Oct. 5 to 23, 2026
- Sandwich boards (one at RancheHouse, one at the library and two at The Station): Oct. 5 to 26, 2026
- Internal digital monitors and employee website
- Quarter-page advertisement in the Cochrane Eagle: Oct, 15, Oct. 22
- Advertising in Municipal Matters in the Cochrane Eagle Oct. 8, Oct, 15, Oct. 22.

Advertising examples:









Fall focus group (in-person)

The Town of Cochrane hosted a budget consultation focus group on Thursday, Oct. 22, 2026, to gather resident feedback on the draft 2027 budget, the latest Citizen's Budget Book and the approach to public engagement for the 2028 budget. The Citizen's Budget Book is the Town's plain-language summary of the proposed budget for residents. The session built on an earlier focus group held in April 2026.

Thirteen residents participated, including returning participants from the April 2026 and 2025 budget focus groups, as well as residents recruited through the Advanis 2026 Budget Survey. The Advanis 2026 Budget Survey was a separate survey of Cochrane residents conducted earlier in 2026 by the research firm Advanis on behalf of the Town

In total, 1,031 Town of Cochrane residents aged 17 and older completed the survey between April 2nd and May 6th, 2026.The focus group represented a mix of ages, genders and lengths of residency in Cochrane.

Participants reviewed how spring engagement feedback was reflected in the proposed budget. They recognized that the Town had considered previous input, particularly on investing in critical infrastructure, maintaining existing amenities and providing clearer information about taxes and the services they support.

Key themes outlined by participants

1. Water and core infrastructure are top priorities, with support for asset management and reserve funding.
2. Residents want the proposed 9.68 per cent tax increase explained, including the services, investments and trade-offs it supports.
3. The Citizen's Budget Book should tell the story behind the numbers and make clear the budget is a proposal.
4. Property tax information should be clearer, including the provincial education portion the Town collects.
5. Participants want year-over-year and municipal comparisons in clear, easy-to-understand graphics.
6. Other priorities included trail connections, road safety, housing affordability and communicating the value of the Spray Lake Sawmills Centre.
7. Views on transit were mixed: some supported expanded service, while others questioned the need for it.
8. Participants said the Town's budget process and communication are improving and appreciated seeing earlier focus group feedback reflected in budget materials.
9. Future engagement should use more channels and formats to reach younger residents, seniors and residents who may not use Facebook.

10. Participants supported continued investment in civic literacy to help residents understand municipal decision-making and budget trade-offs.

The full focus group report is in Appendix B.

Survey (online)

The 2027 draft budget feedback survey was available on the Town's Let's Talk Cochrane engagement platform (letstalkcochrane.ca) from Oct. 20 to Nov. 6, 2026.

The survey included five questions and was open to anyone. It was promoted through paid and Town-owned communication channels. It is separate from the Advanis 2026 Budget Survey described earlier in this report, and the results reported here are from the Let's Talk Cochrane survey only. A total of 126 survey submissions were received. Results reflect the views of people who chose to take part and are not a statistically representative sample of Cochrane's population.

Questions asked:

1. Did you provide input on the 2027 budget earlier this year?
2. Have you reviewed the draft 2027 budget information?
3. Do you see community feedback reflected in the draft budget?
4. How clear is the draft budget information?
5. What would you like Council to consider before budget deliberations?

Summary of survey findings

Respondents raised significant concerns about the proposed property tax increase and the broader cost of living, particularly for seniors, residents on fixed incomes and families. Views differed on the balance between affordability and maintaining or expanding services. Many respondents called for stronger cost control, clear service-level trade-offs and greater accountability for spending.

Growth management was also a consistent theme. Respondents want infrastructure, utilities, transportation and community services to keep pace with development while reducing the financial impact on existing taxpayers. They also asked for clearer information about developer contributions, funding sources, staffing and the rationale for major operating and capital investments.

Across all themes, residents are asking for:

- Affordable, predictable taxes and fees
- Clear information about how tax dollars are used
- Infrastructure and essential services that keep pace with growth
- Transparent budget choices, efficiencies and service trade-offs

- Accountability for growth-related costs and long-term planning

All survey results, including every open-ended response received, are in Appendix A. Open-ended responses are reproduced verbatim.

Budget open house (in-person)

The Town held an in-person Budget Open House at The Station on Saturday, Oct. 24, 2026, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The event gave residents an opportunity to review the proposed 2027 budget, learn how spring engagement feedback was considered, ask questions of Council and Administration and share comments before Council's budget deliberations.

In total, 33 adults and seven children attended the open house. Members of Council, the senior leadership team and Corporate Communications staffed the event.

Interactive displays and information stations outlined the proposed budget, key priorities, trade-offs and the roles of different levels of government. The event also included a family-friendly pumpkin patch, fall activities, and a hot chocolate and coffee station to create a welcoming environment for residents of all ages.

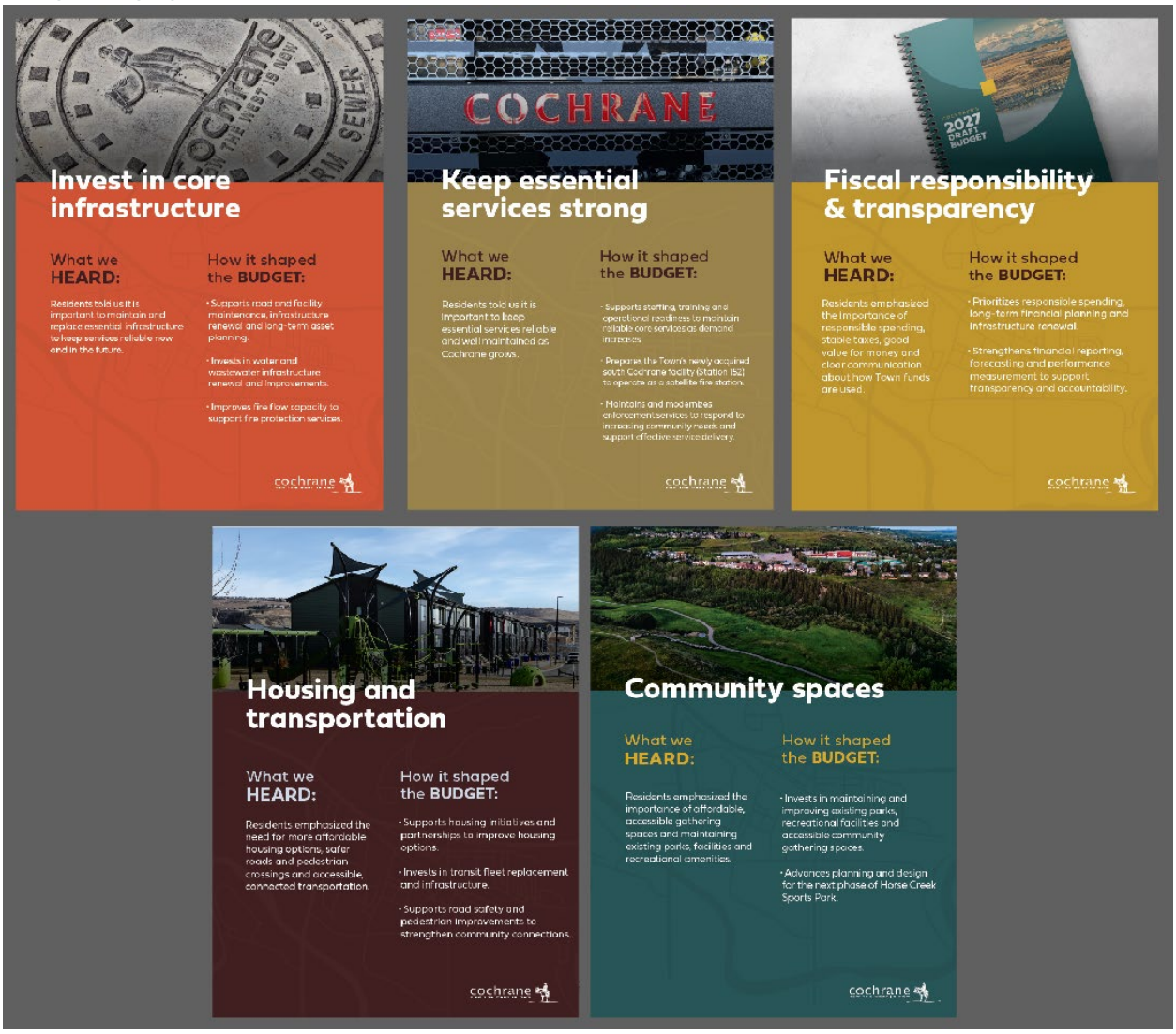
Budget boards:



The open house featured five themed boards, each representing a community priority area. Each board included:

- What we heard: highlights from previous engagement
- How it shaped the budget: how that input influenced the proposed plan

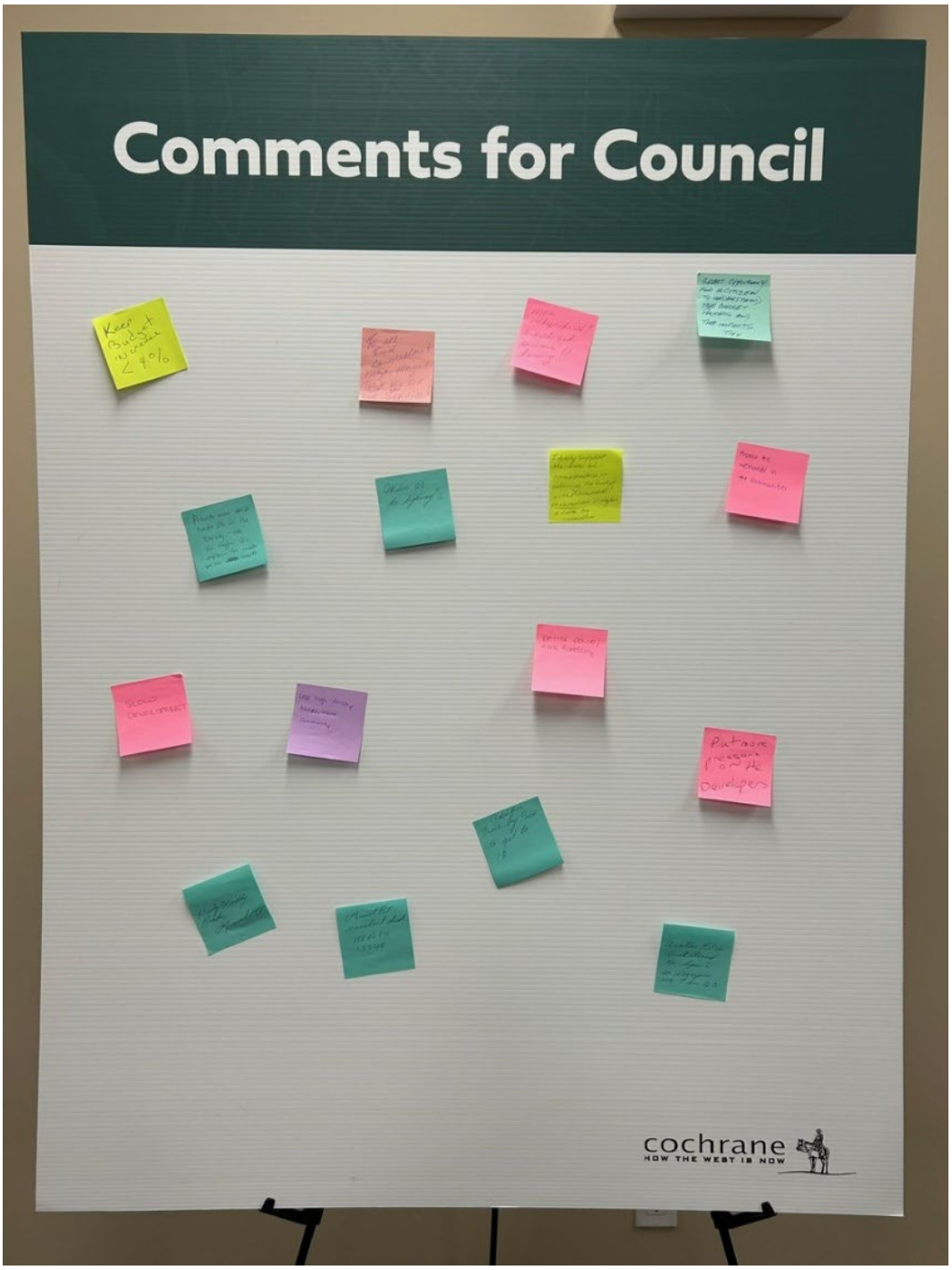
Budget engagement display boards:



Fall photo area



Comments for Council



Participants were also encouraged to leave comments for Council. Comments are reproduced as written. In these comments, "SOTB" refers to Seniors on the Bow.

- I totally support the work of administration in balancing the budget with 'future needs'. It is realistic of maybe a little too conservative.

- Provide more direct trade offs in the survey – ask the tough Qs, explain the musts vs. the wants
- Keep budget increase less than 4%
- Great opportunity for a citizen to understand the budget process and the impacts – thanks.
- Great opportunity for a citizen to understand the budget process and the impacts – thanks.
- Review of SOTB operating model and location
- Main floor blended with community
- We have a 85 year old hauling groceries upstairs
- It should Town lead, a program
- AB Transportation wildlife considerations
- Planning department should be helping with housing solutions for seniors, i.e. bungalows
- Sidewalk is amazing on Railway and Charlesworth
- Benches to sit on to wait for train would be great
- wooden, Woodal Woodworking or the Men's Shed could build them, extra wood or donated from West Frasier
- River Ave & Centre Ave are the crossings that need the benches
- Can the Falcon Shuttle, shuttle seniors to Calgary, i.e. Market Mall, it has to be reasonable rates
- Transit bus with no wrap, why?
- Increase capital spending for arts
- Can we get lights in the park across from our house?
- Lots of teenagers in the park at night, banging on doors and playing nicky, nicky, nine door
- Appaloosa playground / blue park, Paint Horse Drive

Email feedback

Feedback on the draft 2027 budget was also received by email. Some residents expressed support for the pathway and active transportation investments in the capital plan and asked about specific project costs and route choices. Others raised concerns about the size of the proposed increase, transfers to and from reserves and proposed staffing additions, and called for fuller disclosure and accountability in the budget process.

Email feedback is reproduced in Appendix C.

Next steps

This report will be provided to Council before budget deliberations, which are scheduled to begin November 10, 2026. Council will consider the feedback summarized here, along with Administration's budget recommendations, when making final decisions on the 2027 budget. Feedback from all engagement activities, including the appendices, is shared with Council in full.

After Council approves the budget, the Town will share the final 2027 budget and explain how resident feedback was considered.

Appendices

Appendix A– Online survey results:

Question 1: Did you provide input on the 2027 budget earlier this year? Select all that apply.

Answer choices:	Percent	Count
• Yes through Let's Talk Cochrane	30.95%	39
• Yes through the Advanis Survey	6.35%	8
• Yes through a Focus group	3.17%	4
• I did not provide input earlier this year	61.9%	78

Question 2: Have you reviewed the draft 2027 budget information?

Answer choices:	Percent	Count
• Yes, at the budget open house	10.32%	13
• Yes, through Let's Talk Cochrane	80.95%	102
• Yes, through a focus group	5.56%	7
• No	8.73%	11

Question 3: Do you see community feedback reflected in the draft budget?

Answer choices:	Percent	Count
• Yes	12.17%	14
• Somewhat	38.26%	44
• No	33.04%	38
• Not sure	15.65%	18
• Other	0.87%	1
• Skipped the question	8.7%	11

Question 4: How clear is the draft budget information?

Answer choices:	Percent	Count
• Very clear	23.48%	27
• Somewhat clear	47.83%	55
• Somewhat unclear	14.78%	17
• Very unclear	13.91%	16
• Skipped the question	8.7%	11

Question 5: What would you like Council to consider before budget deliberations?

- Lowering property taxes and water charges!
- With affordability a major issue with Albertans and cochrane residents what attempts did council make to freeze increases to utilities and property taxes.
- No increase to seniors or more of a tax rebate
- People in this town are struggling to pay rent, food, utilities etc… I am sure that there are areas that can be scaled back or cut. Any increase's is just going to hurt the people.
- The proposed municipal property tax increase of 9.68% is far too high. Please sharpen your pencils and approve a budget that is far more reasonable.
- The people of Cochrane who cannot afford this increase in fees.
- DO NOT raise the taxes again you need to work with the income that you are receiving enough already!! Start by cutting the FAT!. You need to cut services and do layoffs it's that simple work with the money you are getting if we the public can do it you can do it also I didn't vote on this it was said that things were going to change well then prove it!
- Why property taxes are being increase almost 10%? This year, property taxes are connected to house values and we never see a decrease in taxes when our home values go down. 10% increase I doubt the town would pay anyone 10% more for their homes this year compared to last year
- Do we have to have rate increases EVERY single year??? This is unacceptable!!
- Increasing taxes in 2027 is not acceptable, of touch with reality. Please re-distribute the amounts and focus on the issues that need attention like roads, transit system to Calgary, and fire departments - items that are beneficial for all. Some items like parks and recreation, arts do not need immediate attention. Actually, the Town is doing a job in those areas. Some areas like garbage collection/schedules need to be updated, the funds can be re-routed to other areas. People need to reduce the amount of garbage/proper disposal, recycling and that need to be reinforced by the Town. The funds for items within operating income as fines, penalties can increase if the Town really reinforces good and bad behaviors, e.g., lots of housing are being built and the developers are not following the bylaws. The Town needs to start thinking/behaving

like a city, Cochrane is not a small town anymore, e.g. libraries are important, but let's reduce the budget in that item. People do not read paper books or go to libraries in the way we used to do!

- Why are managers & directors receiving high six figure salaries when we're a town not a city? Why is the percentage increase almost double last year? Maybe look at reducing staff ie.. you don t need 6+ people in communication dept when large oil companies use less? Why $4 million in wage increases?
- Consider the cost of living. Seniors and families are struggling to pay their bills and consider leaving our community due to rising taxes. Put projects on hold (e.g. Horse Creek Sportspark) that are being asked for by people moving here making everything more expensive. Audit the administration ij regards to efficiency, fiscal responsibility and staff numbers.
- Impact to homeowner taxes
- Raising of property taxes. Things are already hard enough for most residents and we saw a GIANT jump last year. This may make it unaffordable for many.
- The council should consider the fact that recent inflation and rise in cost of living is already hurting the general populace of the town. With the proposed significant increases, it can drive out the established folks. The town should get some help to control their internal spending and making the operations more leaner.
- Clearly there has been an increase in operating costs, and taxes are the towns main source of income. However, Cochrane residents are looking for more transparency on decisions made for more spending and therefore the reasons for increases in tax base to work with. In addition residents want to know and understand cost savings initiatives being implemented resulting in how much savings. Spending budgets should be the first place to start.
- Is there a consideration for paying for parking 'downtown'? It is FILLED with people from Calgary for Mackay's Ice cream and other businesses. If businesses want to pay for a specific time for the people eating or shopping etc then let them do that. Look for other ways to make revenue for the town so our property taxes are not going through the roof! Why aren't developers paying for the streets and curbs and sewers etc in new developed areas....and why is the same increase of taxes put on everyone when some people choose to live in older neighbourhoods (established) and not the new ones. It shouldn't be on the shoulders of homeowners for an increase of infrastructure when I'm sure they didn't ask for it. Developers should be responsible.
- In this economy while many of us are fired and unable to provide for our families, raising taxes (property tax, water and waste and other utility fees like gas and electricity) while not really cutting costs but actually raising salaries, benefits and recruiting new employees is outrages. The town administration is supposed to work for the residents not drive us bankrupt. Budget should focus only on operation of

everyday (and future) necessities and leave development of 'nice to have', recreation, art, culture projects etc. for future years when the economy isn't struggling anymore.

- Not increasing the fees that much
- Stop spending money on useless * and CUT taxes. $40/month is insane. How about you CUT $40/month instead? If it's not ESSENTIAL SERVICE, then * CUT IT. Stop spending our money like it's a blank cheque. Grow up already you absolute children.
- cost of living, it is skyrocketing in Cochrane. Fuel constantly $.20 higher than 5km away! This increase is 5-7% higher than the rate of inflation. That is absurd under current conditions. Many pressures are from new developments and the failure to collect adequate off site levies. Recreation facilities, like ice surfaces and ball diamonds have not kept up for 15 plus years. Council was advised approx 20 years ago to start planning a second SLS - nothing has progressed. Do a full stop on residential development until we get more facilities. Also do a thorough review of each department not for the future but for now needs and adjust downward to that. Get to need to haves vs nice to haves. The peace officers, fire department and Colt all require serious review of want to have vs need to have. If we want a police force look to the sheriff's dept or RCMP do not start a 3rd one. Fire always wants more big toys, how many times has the current ladder truck truly been needed vs nice to have? We do not need another one and if someone want to build a skyscaper then let them include it in the costs. for the last 10 years taxes and other fees from the town have risen exponentially without any extra services to residents already here. That has to stop.

- priorities of the town, population growth is exponential and impacting travel through town, causing accidents, impacting pedestrian safety, and causing road rage....
- If someone could explain how our citizenry can keep up to all the increases. There are a very many number of households who are having a hard time even putting food on the table with the costs esculating over the past 6 years. Some are minimum wagers and some are pensioners who do not have the ability to increase their income. The increases are filtering down to the populace who in turn cannot pass it down as the buck stops here.
- The taxpayers burden and affordability! There are many people on the verge of complete insolvency. The cost of basic essentials is rising exponentially and an increase in property taxes and utility rates can push them over the edge. Folks are struggling to provide shelter, food, and other basic necessities for themselves and their families. Coming to residents to propose not one but two increases is unreasonable and unsustainable especially knowing that many are barely scrapping by. The town of Cochrane is growing. There many moving yo the town and becoming homeowners, which means many more folks are paying property taxes, utilities. Let that revenue be enough for now. Also, expecting residents to shoulder the burden of franchise fees to be passed down from utility companies is absurd. Residents already pay enough unrealistic and unreasonable admin fees and so many other additional fees tacked onto their bills every month. You are pushing people way too far and when too many get to the point where they cannot pay at all, what happens then. Look for ways the town can cut back on the unnecessary spending of residents tax dollars and fees before burdening residents to bleed more to make up for the Town's lack of fiscal responsibility.
- There are many residents that absolutely love this Town and don't want to leave but the year after year tax and fee increases are unsustainable. Many are just trying to survive at this point and it is getting harder every single day.
- More attention needed to upkeep of outdoor spaces. Paths are deteriorating and turning to ruts and mud in some places and repair requests are ignored. Developers create nice landscape features with plants in new developments but then when the town takes these spaces over they just let everything fall apart and get overrun with weeds. The town does nothing beyond grass mowing. Time to hire more students in the summer to maintain landscapes in our parks and green spaces. Things are looking more and more run down. I support an increase in taxes to make the town look better.
- I would like Cochrane to share the costs of the temporary fire station with Rocky View County. I DO NOT think we need more Peace Officers; we do however need more RCMP and paramedics.

- 346 pages….! What is it that has to happen in order for no tax increase! I am a senior on a fixed budget just how much more can we take!!! As it is I will probably have to cancel my membership to spray lakes to cover this tax increase…!
- Put long term infrastructure investments at the top of the list of priorities. It isn't sexy or popular but we need those things we can't see and have to have the reserves to maintain them.
- I remember the current CAO using the term growth pays for growth during a spring planning session. I categorically disagree with this assertion. Please stop saying and thinking this. Growth creates increases in necessary capital and ongoing operational expenditures.
- Getting a handle on the Cochrane Fire Services being the highest paid in the country.
- Why has legal expenses tripled? Failure in the system somewhere.
- Taxes are way to high already. Adding more burden on people is not a goid idea. And adding a 20% increase to Utilities come on do better
- Review & Eliminate wasteful Spending. Get rid of all these utility surcaharges.
- Please consider cutting costs and under efficient services before increasing fees. You've already cut the compost to every other week. Maybe you can cut more and actually deliver these savings to cochranites
- No increased spending
    - financial sustainability and affordability
    - taxpayer impact and affordability
    - community needs and public engagement
        - $481 is a lot of money in a year. Ouch…
        - I see mentions of pathways, but no specific information about cycling pathways. I cycle everywhere in town and my wife does too (literally… she doesn't have a car and we have three kids). We support any infrastructure development on our cycling paths to make them safer and long lasting.
        - Also, kind of odd to flip the photo of the intersection horizontally on page 8 - threw me off :)

- I have lived in Cochrane since 2019 and each year my property taxes, water/sewage fees have increased. The access fees for Cochrane for gas and electricity are high and you are proposing even higher. Where do you think people are going to come up with this additional money? The assessed value of my house is up substantially and hence a huge increase in taxes being paid. We are on a fixed income, there is no money tree in our backyard to pull the extra required to pay for these increases. Growth does not pay for growth. The budget does not balance itself like we were told from Ottawa it does. The debt is rising on all levels of governing and you can not keep passing this along to the taxpayer. I do not want to see any increase in your salaries this year, NONE. Same goes for one of the highest paid CAO's in Alberta. The town needs to trim the fat off of unnecessary expenses rather than expect the residents to be the cash cow. You are going to force people like us out of this community with all these tax increases. It is unstainable to keep taxing, taxing, taxing.
- I am going to try and not be too negative, but you are wishing for pie in the sky with this budget. You have salaries that are doubling in some sections. The only department that is making money is the tax department....
- You need to get your financial house in order and that starts with cutting your inhouse expenses before asking / demanding tax and fee (another word for tax) increases.
- Each department needs to put forth an as is budget and how they get there is up to them. The town is top heavy in administration.
- In this day and age AI can do many of the chores that you are paying exorbitant salaries for. I can understand hiring for front line but beyond that put your pretty colored glasses away and put on your big person pants start making cuts to unnecessary items in the budget.
- As a tax payer I resent being told you need double digit increases year over year, when I see no improvement in service to the residents.
- For example if the residents of Presidence want a play park, that was promised by the developer let them go chase the developer. The town has no business in wasting time and money on something that is an issue between the residents and the developer.
- What happened to all of the magical offsite levies all these developers were to pay for infrastructure???
- As for hiking the fees for water / waste water / gas / electricity. This is just a tax by another name, and frankly the structure should be user pay not a system where as a consumer my charge per litre / kwh / kjwl is ridiculously cheap but the fees you charge are outrageous. You all need to take a step back and rethink your priorities. How much money did you waste on creating your budget document??? A budget is $$ in and $$ out, trying to justify your waste with a bunch of fluff is highly offensive to anyone who can read.

- Why do you have such a massive in-house engineering department?? From what I have seen that work should be farmed out to Third Parties who have their own E&O CGL and E&O insurance. Just look at the mess around main street and James Walker. The mess at James Walker was created by engineers who put a road thru private property.....
- It must be nice to have a large war chest and want to grow it at an exponential rate. If the town had money to spare then sure go ahead and create a financial savings account but to increase my taxes / fees just so that you can brag about having money in the bank makes no sense.
- My specialty is commercial insurance and believe me, you have so many liability exposures hanging out there it is scary, if you hire anyone it should be a knowledgeable insurance professional who can help you find ways to mitigate your exposures.
- So my comment on your budget is that it is an epic fail.
- Roadways - planning and improvements are critical, especially adding not-at-grade railway crossings!!!!!!!!!!
- Cochrane is a wonderful place to live and we still love it, but the traffic and lack of any real improvements over the past several years is very disheartening. Does Council not drive around town and see what a disaster the road systems are?? The only progress to speak of in the past ten years or so is the upgrading of highway 1-A thru town. We can see that things such as twinning the highway 22 bridge over the bow and the associated twinning of the highway to the Trans Canada Hywy. 1 will require assistance from the Province, but I didn't see any plans to pursue their support in the Budget. Other items, such as upgrading Griffin road to add more lanes (not just bike lanes) will help, but the main concern is the lack of a railway crossing in the town, other than going thru all the roundabouts to get to No. 22, and then having to get back into the town center. TRAFFIC needs to be the most important area of change in Cochrane, we hear it from residents and visitors alike, but is anyone listening????
- That growth needs to be manageable as well as the fees. If they approved all of these developments the developers should cover the costs not the existing towns people. If you are raising the taxes and utility fees to all residents, when you did not campaign on that then you should give people more time to review and give feedback, not 4 days. This is going to make life more challenging for people in a affordability crisis.
- stop spending money
- Consider local traffic, residential parking bylaws and new big box stores.
- Why are developers not fronting the bill. You need to explain to the population why residential fees are paying for the oversights.

- Sustainability of property tax increases. At what point do the increases present financial hardship for those on a fixed income? Furthermore, prior to increasing staff, has there been an efficiency audit done to identify areas where costs could be reduced, or 'nice-to-have' work is dropped for more important priorities? Also, we can't continue to spend our way to prosperity. A deficit which is forecast to increase 2x in '28 and 3x in '29 (compared to '27) is not sustainable. Austerity measures first please!
- No tax hikes. Identifying inefficiencies and reducing the budget.
- Cutting services such as transit and ride-share. Removal of bike lanes. Increase the posted speed limit back to 50 km. Not 30 km. What's the point of having playground and school zones if eveything is 30 km.
- Just to mention a few.
- Instead of trying to get more money from lower valued properties like apartments via utilities maybe the tax rate for properties valued at over 1 million dollars should be higher. It wouldn't take much of an increase to cover these costs.
- I've owned my home in Cochrane for six years and my property tax, water fees etc has almost doubled. The constant increases without improved services is incredibly difficult to keep up with
- I completely understand why and how costs are going up especially with capital needs. I would like to see where the folks who are benefiting from the growth of the community (ex. developers) are supporting this as well, perhaps some of the rec and parks initatives could be financially supported here, as well as infrastructure.
- Utility levies for Gas & Power are excessive.
- It's one thing to increase taxes and fees, but residents have every right to expect a level of service that reflects what they're paying. Looking at the town's budget, total expenses have increased by 83% in just five years, with salaries and benefits alone rising by 72%. Contracted and general services have increased by 136%, while interest on long-term debt has skyrocketed by 444%. These figures should raise some serious questions about spending priorities, fiscal management and accountability.
- Meanwhile, there are several issues in town that need to be addressed sooner rather than later. Residents submit requests and often receive little to no response, or are left waiting unreasonable amounts of time for one. It's frustrating to continually be asked to contribute more while seeing service levels decline and concerns go unaddressed.
- Before placing an even greater financial burden on the community, the town needs to take a hard look at its spending, identify areas where adjustments can be made, and demonstrate that taxpayers' money is being managed responsibly. Residents should not continually be expected to pay more while receiving less in return.
- I agree with putting money aside for infrastructure update but let's work at keeping the annual increase Year Over Year to a number less then 9%.

- We cannot raise these costs. We can't. Families cannot afford it. Everyone I know is struggling. We need a better way. Maybe we can find investors. Propose a tax increase for the wealthiest families. The middle class cannot handle the constant increases on everything. We're stressed and everyone feels like they're drowning. Our town and our provincial government need to do better. It can't keep falling on the people who make the least.
- balancing cost of living with sustainable growth for the future. people need to have a clear and solid picture of what the future is going to hold for them, so they can prepare for the costs.
- Inflation + cost of living already increased exponentially over the last year. After the last increase in property taxes last year, another $500 per year per family is likely not feasible for most families.
- I totally understand costs are up and planning needs to be done, but during extreme cost pressures on families as is, cost cutting and other avenues of financing need to be considered more seriously. $400+ per year on property taxes on top of whatever more will be coming from the province is not sustainable or feasible for many families. We need to plan ahead for infrastructure that is needed, but also need to look at options like reducing some grants/spends or other avenues like business taxes or push harder to entice more businesses to open or move to Cochrane.
- Affordable housing
- Reasonable business leases
- more local businesses and less chains
- More activity opportunities for children bot winter and summer
- The impact of increases from multiple directions.
- Their commitments to the electorate.
- Make percentage breakdowns clearer, especially when you're talking about a percent within a percentage.
- Need to limit growth, catchup on core infrastructure, limit nice to haves (eg transit), reduce service to maintain previous tax rates.
- We're are aware the we have a lack of infrastructure. But having property taxes almost double since 2020 is a hard pill to swallow. Yes the provincial government raised the education proportion.
- On a general level the current state hurts every municipality. The provincial government has a responsibility to look into this at ie. AB Munis have to address this.
- This requires a cultural shift change on a provincial level where currently every surplus ends up with a short term tax cut, etc. In the meantime everything else crumbles. A surplus should be used to built infrastructure on all levels that benefits Albertans.
- I hope you're able to find a bit more balanced budget than an almost 10% increase.

- Minimizing residential tax hikes caused by all the development, eliminating wishes for amenities that exist in Calgary for those who want them. There are lots of seniors living on fixed income that cannot afford continued tax hikes, increased utility fees caused by new development.
- Sound/acoustics/vibrations study in Fireside (highway noise) - not on the table this year, but planting the seed for future years :)
- a focus on infrastructure and move away from social spending and supports
- Deficit budgets are unacceptable. Money does not grow on trees. It comes out of peoples' pockets.
- Transit is a huge money waster. The first year of operations were in budget. What happened? We see a lot of empty buses driving around town. Clearly more service is being provided than is needed. Service should go back to all on demand. This would eliminate empty buses and plans to make fancy bus stops. Expanding the hours that empty buses drive around is ridiculous. Fancy bus stops are not required. Cochrane is not Calgary. We do not really require a large transit system. This change could be implemented immediately.
- Reducing the transit system would get rid of the overall deficit.
- Consider the expected future growth of the town and base the long term projections for community needs and essential priorities that will maintain our quality of life here.
- Our town already feels incredibly congested, with traffic becoming a constant challenge throughout the day. With continued residential expansion, this will only worsen unless meaningful solutions are prioritized. Current infrastructure and essential services are already struggling to keep pace with growth, including school capacity, Urgent Care access, and recreational opportunities for our children.
- Our family has genuinely begun considering moving because of these ongoing issues, and we've been living here for almost 15 years. Please consider the quality of life of current residents before approving further expansion. Growth must be supported by adequate infrastructure and services, and addressing the town's existing capacity concerns should be a priority before adding further strain to an already overwhelmed community.
- Keep in mind that: Just over half of respondents (53%) preferred to maintain or lower current property taxes, even if this meant adjusting or reducing service levels:
- Focus on teenagers, there's nothing in this town for them

- This budget is outrageous, the increases proposed do not represent the wishes expressed by the public, given current economic conditions these proposals should not go through! You should be following what the people stated and reduced services to allow a reduction in taxes. For us personally as pensioners on a fixed income the proposed increases will hit very hard, our taxes are currently almost $700 per month based on an assessed amount that was clearly incorrect and that your team would not reconsider I am quite frankly alarmed and appalled at this suggested budget!
- Growth strategy
- Cochrane is a community with a high level of seniors and it is becoming too expensive for many seniors. I believe the level of income to get property tax subsidy should be lowered.
- I'd like council to be realistic about the costs of maintaining what we have before committing to new projects.
- Transportation Improvement. Bus to and from the Tuscany train station for work and student commuters. Lets reduce some of the daily traffic.
- No tax increases. No sewer,water and garbage increases. Look at ways to make cuts and use more contractors to provide services. Roads,grass cutting ,water and out outside services.Town staff are not doing a good job.
- Please go back and review the proposed tax increases vs the actual tax increases because the numbers you propose are always lower than the actual because you increase the value of my home every year!
- The increases are unsustainable and you need to manage the money more effectively - why are the offsite levy fee's collected not covering all the incremental costs that come along with that development. How can we add so many houses in the last years and not manage the costs - time to reduce costs not continually increase them . When does this stop!!
- Many efficiency measure are without quantified savings or unit-cost targets. Council to consider: For each major efficiency initiative, what are the implementation costs, annual net savings or avoided costs, staff capacity released, and expected effect on operating cost per resident while maintaining service levels?
- Continue to consider (because I know they already are) the current effect of many previous LOW budgets/taxes. Clearly communicate to the public the need to make up for previous underfunding and move ahead in a stronger position. Rather than moving back to an underfunded position, show the public what they are getting/will get for their taxes. Give comparison rates in similar communities and what they are getting for their taxes. Cochrane is WELL served. When people complain, they don't actually have comparisons. They don't know what they are talking about. So be strong! Don't fold to complainers. Educate them.

- Focus on necessities and not wishes or luxuries. For example all the pathway paving was not necessary. Yes, it's nice, but we could have made do. My property taxes have gone up almost 1000.00 in 5 years. While the province owns much of that responsibility, it does not change the financial burden on households.
- Accountability from both administration and council on where cost savings are taking place. What efficiencies are being used by the town to save taxpayers money?
- I feel the tax increase is exorbitant and I would like to see where there has been cutbacks on unnecessary costs. One item I would like to see abolished is the COLT transit system. It is a complete waste of money and I never see anyone riding it. End it already.
- NO increase in property taxes!
- Taxes for forcing seniors like us to consider relocating to communities that are more affordable. This Town Council, as previous Council's, doesn't think of seniors, low income households, and need to find to lower costs so people can afford to live here or they should be replaced.
- The town's population growth and limited facilities. Baseball diamonds are scarce and all the leagues from teeball to adult Slopitch are in dire need of more diamonds.
- I would like the council to seriously consider the library facilities available to the residents of Cochrane. I believe this is a very valuable resource to all in our community as it does not cater to a select demographic.
- Inflation is circa 3%. You want 9.68% PLUS increase in municipal fees for gas and electricity? Yeah NO!
- Cut your budget, be realistic. You’re just taking the absolute * here!
- When I get 9.68% plus municipal fees wage increases then come back.
- Otherwise, cut your budget and if you can’t do that, do the only decent thing left, QUIT!
- The proposed increase of property taxes. A 10% increase is a significant amount and expense for a single year increase.
- Why is the fire budget not being consider yet again?!
- No increases at all
- Pedestrian and cyclist connectivity and safety
- Increasing cost but no as such things are happening for public. This is insane. Wasting our money on *
- The overall state of the Canadian economy. It is super expensive to live right now. Most people, myself included, work two full-time jobs just to live paycheck to paycheck. Raising the cost on town people will push people out of the town. We can barely afford to live here as it stands
- No increases at all

- Community input on the draft budget.
- A holistic view of what makes a community healthy, i.e. housing, parks, rec, gathering places, sport, health and welfare supports, library and cultural events, and a balance of being business and developer friendly but with the broader goals of the community in mind - not being bullied into making decisions based solely on corporate interests.
- The proposed tax increase of nearly 10% is completely unacceptable. At this time when the majority of tax payers are seeing increases in food and other prices that are making a home budget very difficult to sustain, the Cochrane property taxes must focus on the absolutely necessary items and delay the nice to have proposals. Future development should bear the financial burden without dropping it on existing taxpayers.
    - Enforced payment of fines given to builders and reduce loop holes (e.g., changing names to avoid fines) they use to avoid payment. It is my understanding that there are thousands of dollars not yet paid. 2. For the education portion of the property tax, add an option for private/independent schools instead of just public and Catholic--I'm greatly opposed to paying taxes to support private schools and should be given a choice (this may be a provincial thing, but the municipality could ask). 3. For roads, do the large trucks using them on a daily basis (e.g., gravel pit trucks) pay a premium to use the town and residential roads? Most of these roads would not be built to withstand the extreme weight of such trucks on a regular basis so road deteriorate much faster. They should be taxed or made to pay for using these roads, if they are not already.
- The Town seems to have some financial challenges. Over $40 million is dedicated to municipal salaries. Is that reasonable for a town of this size? It represents a notable area in the budget for cost savings. Contracted and other services should be critically reviewed and assessed as to the value and quality of the service provided since it represents a greater than 21 million expenditure.

- A 10% increase in taxes and service fees is not reasonable. Town administration may believe it to be necessary based on the plan they have presented to Council, but Council has to recognize that people face other escalating costs; and without the concurrent increases in wages to cover these costs.

- Need to review how much money is being spent on the Horse Creek Sports Park and if capital spending ongoing through 2031 is necessary/responsible? Is this critical infrastructure, it is not, so Council needs to consider how much can be deferred to the future or recovered via user fees. This park should be funded by fees and donations and not primarily via municipal tax dollars, not all citizens want or use soccer fields/baseball diamonds. Other funding mechanisms should be pursued for this park because it is not critical infrastructure like water, roads, fire and wastewater treatment.

- Time to make some difficult decisions so that tax and fee increases are well below 5%. More user pay revenue streams should be implemented. For example, Fixed fees for water provide planning certainty, but do not account for use. The Town should increase costs associated with use, the more you use the more you pay, backstopped by reasonable fixed fees.
- Before approving major projects, Council should confirm that the project scope, costs, funding, and procurement plan are ready. Projects should continue to use grants, off-site levies, and other non-tax funding where possible.
- Council should be clear about the service and tax trade-offs it chooses. Resident feedback shows mixed views on whether to reduce services to limit taxes or increase taxes to maintain services.
- I have heard the mayor speak on the affordability crisis the town is facing. It seems he doesn't understand that if the town is facing that crisis so are home owners within Cochrane. It seemed over whelming that the feedback was to cut service to keep increases low. The new plan continues the cost increases and introduces new taxes which seems a bit tone deaf given previous community feedback. Everyone needs to start learning how to live within their means. The TOC included. Horsing consultants and researchers to prepare these documents included. My suggestion is it's times for slowed growth which was a campaign promise and push developers to pay for critical infrastructure. If there are minuscule assets that can be sold and not just put to general revue they should be allocated to benefit cochranitea from increased taxes and fees.
- Please plan to approve the much-needed improvements in active transportation that are budgeted. This town NEEDS a multi-year pathway investment to 'catch-up' just like it did with roads and it's finally coming.
- Note the typo on page 207 where the Ranche bridge project is listed, but the text in the capital budget calls out the Water Main Cathodic Protection Program.

- Also - what happens with the capital budget projects that don't get built? For example in 2024, there was a Sunset East pathway project, in 2025 there was a Charlesworth sidewalk project, and in 2026, the Ranche Bridge project was supposed to be completed in 1 year, and now it's slated for 2027-2028.
- No tax increase
- Quality control on major projects, your major projects department is incompetent.
- An almost 10% hike in property taxes is quite severe - that's between 2-3 times the average rate of inflation! Families are already struggling with the current cost of groceries, gas, home utilities etc.
- Zero percent tax increase. Lower the property tax. Cut services like the bus. Get rid of the dog parks.
- Growth vs infrastructure
- I am writing to express my profound disdain and absolute rejection of the proposed nearly 10% property tax increase for 2027. This staggering figure is an insulting demand on Cochrane's homeowners, who are already stretched to their financial limits under the weight of historic inflation and a challenging provincial economy. A double-digit hike is not a sign of a well-managed municipality; it is a glaring admission of a failure in fiscal responsibility, oversight, and operational efficiency.
- What makes this tax hike particularly egregious is that it cannot be blamed on the convenient scapegoat of previous administrations. The Mayor and several sitting councillors have occupied their seats for multiple consecutive terms. You ARE the previous administrations. You have overseen the direction of this town for years, and the structural deficit we are currently facing is a direct consequence of your long-term legislative choices. Failing to plan for the lifecycle costs of our ballooning infrastructure while continuously approving sprawling developments is a failure that lands squarely on your shoulders. You have sat in council chambers while these problems compounded, and it is unacceptable to now ask taxpayers to bail out years of poor foresight.
- For years, Cochrane residents have watched in horror as acre after acre of natural land has been mowed down to put up high-density, cookie-cutter neighborhoods. Our current infrastructure is straining under the weight of this rapid growth, yet developers have been invited to build cheaply, pocket their profits, and pass the long-term compounding maintenance costs onto local taxpayers. We cannot continue footing the bill for cheap development that creates an endless cycle of infrastructure deficits. If the Town cannot legally force developers to pay for the true, lifetime operational costs of the density they create, then Council needs to halt this aggressive expansion until our existing taxpayers are protected from bearing the burden.

- Furthermore, we must look critically at the wasteful spending embedded in our current operating budget. Our local transit service is an absolute joke, underutilized, and visibly inefficient. Why are we continuing to fund a system that does not serve the community economically? If COLT transit cannot be run in a self-sustaining, efficient manner, it is time to eliminate it altogether and stop throwing good taxpayer money after bad. The same strict standard must apply to the Spray Lake Sawmills Centre. It is time to end the town subsidies for this facility and transition it to a strict, full user-pay model. Families who do not use the facility should not see their property taxes hiked to subsidize those who do.
- We must also address the glaring disparity in compensation between public sector town employees and the average citizen. While working-class Albertans have faced near-zero wage increases that fail to combat inflation, unionized town staff and fire department personnel have enjoyed significant annual wage increases. It is unsustainable for a public bureaucracy to thrive at the direct expense of a struggling private sector. It is time to hold the line on labor costs, freeze wages, and find efficiencies within the administration just like any household is forced to do.
- Finally, if the Town is looking to generate revenue, it should look to those breaking the law rather than law-abiding property owners. The driving standard in this town has become atrocious and unsafe. Instead of bleeding taxpayers dry, the Town should initiate aggressive traffic enforcement blitzes. Targeting terrible, unsafe drivers with significant fines would serve a dual purpose: it would immediately clean up our dangerous roads and funnel much-needed revenue into the town coffers to ease the financial burden on the average citizen.
- I expect Council to aggressively trim the fat from this budget, reject this 10% increase, and start making the difficult, responsible choices that we elected you to make.
- Capital budget is close to 40 % of the regular budget. Perhaps we could dial back a few projects. Not many people can afford a 10% increase to taxes given the cost of everything to live is very expensive and our wages are not going up enough to meet the demand for these expenses
- Reconsider residential tax increases. While businesses are making record profits (ie banks , energy companies, tech companies and grocery stores) residents are struggling. With the current UCP govt reducing supports low income earners and seniors are facing critical financial restraints amidst rising demands. Give us a break please.
- No increase in taxes or services.
- (Water,garbage etc)

- There is an affordability crisis. Although a $40 monthly increase may seem reasonable, understand that groceries have increased 30%, mortgages are renewing at higher rates, fuel has gone up, etc. People are already struggling to pay their bills so that extra $40 may be more than household budgets can handle. I'm not getting a 10% increase so where does Council expect citizens to find an extra $40 every month? Let's not forget, we haven't seen the provincial increase to property taxes yet. I expect to see value for my taxes and James Walker Trail still isn't open even though more development in South Cochrane is being approved and traffic continues to increase. How about finishing some legacy projects that were promised almost 10 years ago before taking on anything new?
- I just moved to Cochrane and while no one wants a tax increase, I feel it is needed to keep the town going forward.
- Budget increases must be 4% or less
- Town needs to hold the Developers accountable and provide more$$$ as they make millions selling new homes
- Also did the Town ever get back the many Millions of Dollars from two years ago when a Contractor punched a hole in our main fresh water line.
- Keep top priority on providing citizens with municipal utilities and infrastructure.
- Make cuts to the Budget and stop spending money you don't have.
- Need all town staff to review ways to make cuts in all departments.
- Budget decisions should prioritize the needs of the public over personal agendas. Council could review senior management staffing levels, organizational structure, and administrative overhead to identify potential cost savings and ensure taxpayer dollars are directed towards the greatest benefit to residents
- How to get things moving quicker on more ice surfaces, indoor soccer field etc
- I'd like know why the budget % increase is so high, and what can be removed from the reserve fund as this percentage is more than what most residents in Cochrane can afford.
- The cost of providing all services needs to be reflected in Cochrane's tax rate, why is out rate so low in comparison to other communities?

- Since 2022, population growth has been approximately 18%, yet the operating budget has increased 83%, staffing 36%, salaries 65%, and contracted services 78%. What specific decisions account for this gap, and which of those decisions could be deferred, reduced, or eliminated to lower the proposed 9.68% tax increase? Why are expenditures increasing at a rate significantly above population growth and inflation? Can administration identify which service level improvements require additional spending in 2027 and quantify their cost? What proportion of the proposed tax increase is attributable to new positions added since 2022 (82.08 FTEs), and what would the tax increase be if proposed 2027 staffing additions (20.62 FTEs) were deferred for one year?
- The importance of creating additional non regressive revenue sources to reduce resident tax burden.
- Please consider that in times like these, a greater than 3 percent increase will cause many people to leave further causing the budget to spiral into uncharted territory. Please have the teams do the work find cuts in places where theres minimal impact to quality of life in cochrane. Even if some of it is affected. Everyone will understand that instead of an increase council decided to save our money and still direct those savings to the future of the towns infrastructure. Please reconsider as many people selling to leave will decrease the house values and demand to live here when you can get way more services for less in calgary.
- Critically examine the outrageous salaries of the fire fighters. It's out of hand and can't continue.
- The budget proposes 20 new positions, increasing staffing from 291.5 full-time equivalents (FTEs) to 312.1. That is an increase of approximately 7.1% in the staffing complement.
- What I would ask Council to do:
- Publish the fully loaded annual cost of each position, including benefits and related operating costs.
- Identify positions legally required or essential for public safety, utilities and existing service delivery.
- Defer non-essential positions for 6–12 months, with a service-impact assessment.
- Require a business case showing measurable workload, service or revenue benefits before adding positions.
    - Reduce or scale back discretionary events and programming such as Cochrane light up (16,000 increase)
- 3.I would ask for a Town-wide review of:
- Consulting and external project management.
- Strategy development and studies that can be deferred.

- Professional services that duplicate existing internal expertise.
- Software subscriptions, licences and overlapping systems.
- Contract renewals and procurement opportunities to consolidate purchases.

- The objective should be to reduce the total external-services bill, rather than simply moving costs between departments or relabeling consulting as project funding.
    - Slow the growth of administrative overhead
- I would review management layers, vacancies, administrative support, communications, training, travel and corporate projects.
- For example, the Legislative & Administrative Services Section shows an increase in expenses of approximately $806,000, from $5.76 million in the 2026 budget to $6.57 million in 2027. Its budget includes increased salary and benefit costs and other operating changes.
- The review should distinguish required compliance and technology spending from work that could be delayed, simplified or delivered with existing staff.
    - Increase cost recovery where it is fair
- Review rental rates, facility bookings, permits, event fees and commercial services to determine whether users are paying an appropriate share of the costs.
- I would prioritize these three actions:
- Require a detailed justification and full annual cost for every proposed new position.
- Set department-level reduction targets for consulting, contracting and discretionary spending, while protecting essential services.
- Ask for a zero-increase tax scenario with a transparent list of service impacts, rather than accepting the proposed increase as the only option.
- The budget does not provide enough evidence to conclude that $4.18 million can be removed without consequences. But it also does not establish that every proposed expenditure is unavoidable. Council should be shown the alternatives, their costs and their effects on residents before deciding.
- One final point: the budget survey found that 53% of respondents preferred maintaining or lowering taxes through service adjustments, while 38% preferred tax increases to maintain or expand services. That gives Council a clear reason to examine a genuine no-increase alternative, while being honest about what residents might have to give up.
- Cochrane continues to grow but it looks like it constantly on the backs of existing residents. Builders come here, slap together a bunch of houses but, from a lot of citizens perspective, have zero responsibilities when it comes to helping develop infrastructure or address traffic issues they end up causing (i.e. the single entrance to Sunset Ridge). It's either that or poor planning by the town.

- Secondly, why are we prioritizing playgrounds and walking paths when we have a substantial amount already and people are suffering financially? Maintenance is one thing, but NEW parks should be an easy cut when you are asking for a 9+% tax hike.
- Do what's truly best for Cochrane. Do not base the decisions on what 1,000 people submitted in an online survey
- Listen to the experts and the people who know. A municipality can't run or grow without increasing taxes.
- The creation of future industrial lands. The town is maxed in its ability to facilitate the creation of high paying long term stable jobs. There is a little bit of open commercial area available, but no industrial. Absolutely zero. You need to diversify the tax base or residential will always feel the brunt of any tax increases. There are companies who want to move to or expand in Cochrane, but there is no place for them. You are turning away tax dollars on one hand, and asking for more on the other.

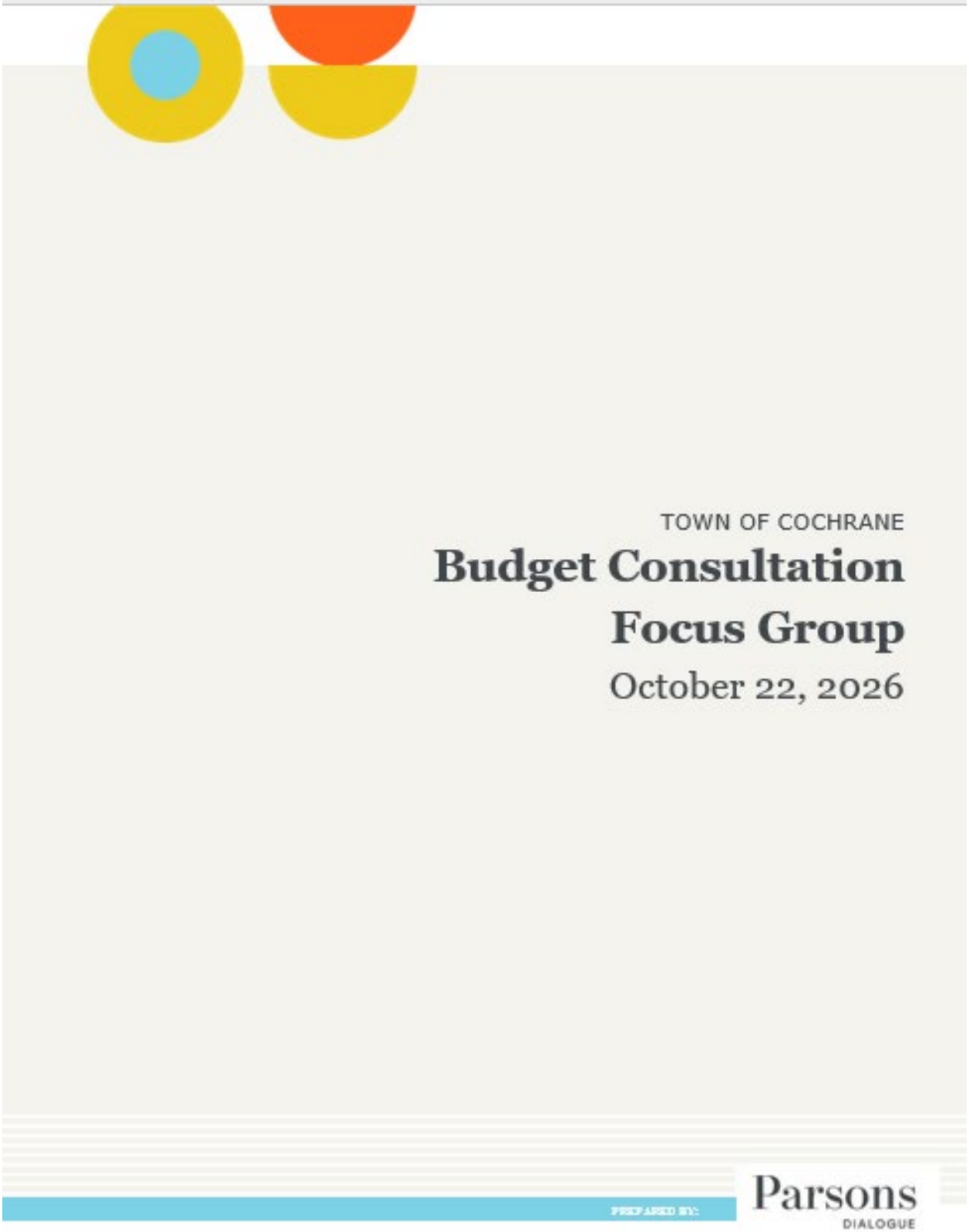

TOWN OF COCHRANE
Budget Consultation
Focus Group
October 22, 2026
PREPARED BY:
Parsons
DIALOGUE

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 38

Introduction 39

Preparing for the Focus Group 41

Summary of Findings 42

Conclusion 45

Appendix 1: Verbatim Notes 47

- Working Assumptions 47
- Agenda 47
- What do you remember from the Spring Meeting? 48
- What have you heard about the Budget? 48
- Presentation: What did we hear in April? How did we use the feedback? 49
- What suggestions would you offer to improve the 2028 Citizen's Budget Book? 53
- What do you like about this version of the budget book? 53
- What can we do to improve the budget engagement process? 54
- What advice would you offer the town? 56

Executive Summary

The Town of Cochrane hosted a pre-budget consultation focus group on Thursday, October 22, 2026, building on an earlier consultation held in April 2026.

Thirteen residents took part in the focus group. Of these, five had participated in the April 2026 focus group and seven in the 2025 focus groups, while the remaining participants were recruited from respondents to the Advanis 2026 Budget Survey who had expressed interest in joining a focus group. The group included a mix of ages, genders, and lengths of time living in Cochrane, bringing a variety of viewpoints informed by participants' different life experiences and community connections.

The discussion focused on understanding what the Town heard during the April engagement and how that feedback shaped the proposed budget; gathering feedback on the latest iteration of the Citizen's Budget Book; and gathering input on the approach to public engagement for the 2028 budget.

Chief Administrative Officer Drew Hyndman welcome the group and set the context. Executive Director People & Strategy, Kevin Blanchette opened the main discussion with an overview of the spring engagement results and how they were reflected in the budget, revisiting three themes that residents raised in April:

- Investing in and prioritizing critical infrastructure
- Maintaining existing amenities
- Stable taxes, with clarity about what residents are paying for

Participants then reviewed the latest Citizen's Budget Book and closed the evening by offering suggestions to strengthen the 2028 budget engagement process.

Major themes that emerged from the discussions about budget include:

- *Residents recognized that their spring input was reflected in the draft budget.*

- *Water and core infrastructure were viewed as top priorities.* Residents supported asset management and maintaining reserves and asked the Town to communicate more clearly how it has been investing in infrastructure and building a financial buffer.

- *The proposed tax increase drew attention.* Residents expect the 9.68% figure will be the first and possibly only thing many people notice in the budget

book. Participants noted a disconnect between residents' desire for new initiatives and their reluctance to pay for them, and they want to see a clear explanation of why taxes are rising.

- *Other topics* included connecting trails between subdivisions, communicating the value of the SLS facility, road safety, and housing affordability. Transit divided the group, with some residents wanting expanded service and others questioning whether it is needed.

- *Participants want the Budget Book to tell the story behind the numbers.* Suggestions included emphasizing that the budget is a proposal and a starting point, clarifying that the Town only collects the provincial education portion of taxes, rethinking a homepage graphic that appears dominated by water, providing year-over-year comparisons and comparisons with other municipalities, and bringing back the type of graphs used in last year's book. The group agreed they would share the Budget Book with friends and family.
- *Participants felt the Town's budget process and communication are improving*. Returning participants remembered the spring session as thorough and appreciated seeing focus group comments reflected in the budget documents.

- *To improve future engagement, participants suggested the Town consider broadening their reach by adapting delivery methods. R*esidents suggested reaching younger residents, including high school students, using a wider range of platforms beyond Facebook (including the new Town app), offering print options such as a one-page information sheet or coverage in The Eagle, using plain, senior-friendly language, stating how long surveys will take, and investing in civic literacy over the long term.

- *Residents encouraged the Town to stay the course,* make difficult decisions when they are in the community's best interest, highlight milestones it has achieved, and avoid framing budget challenges as criticism of past administrations.

In closing, participants said the session gave them a better understanding of the budget and described the Town's engagement efforts as effective.

Introduction

In 2025, the Town of Cochrane conducted two focus groups, one before and one after the 2025 budget. The first, held in April, welcomed 15 residents who shared

their budget preferences and priorities. The second, held in November, invited residents back to learn how their input had been used in the budget and to offer feedback and suggestions on budget communication processes.

The Town continued this practice in the 2026 budget cycle. In April 2026, the Town hosted a pre-budget consultation focus group where residents shared their perspectives on infrastructure priorities, taxes, service levels and growth.

On Thursday, October 22, 2026, a follow-up focus group was held at The Station to close the loop on the Spring conversation.

The purpose was to help residents understand what the Town heard in April and how it used that feedback, gather feedback on the latest iteration of the Citizen's Budget Book, and gather input on the approach to public engagement for the 2028 budget.

Recruitment began with participants from the April 2026 focus group and was augmented with invitations to survey respondents expressing interest in focus group involvement.

Of the 13 participants, five had participated in the April 2026 conversation [and seven in the 2025 conversations]. The group included seven men and six women who have lived in Cochrane for three or more years. Participants were in their 40s and beyond.

While the Spring conversation focused on budget dilemmas and tensions facing Council, the Fall conversation focused on reporting back to residents and refining how the Town communicates about and engages on the budget. The evening was organized around three topics:

- Share what the Town heard in April and how that feedback was used
- Gather feedback on the latest Citizen's Budget Book
- Obtain input on the 2028 budget engagement approach

Chief Administrative Officer Drew Hyndman opened the session by welcoming participants and sharing the discussion goals, and Kevin Blanchette provided an overview of the spring engagement results and how they were reflected in the budget. The meeting closed with final words from the Town of Cochrane.

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
- Kristin Pella, Public Engagement Advisor
- Robin Parsons, Facilitator

The following objectives for the focus groups were established:

- Understand what the Town of Cochrane heard and did with citizen feedback
- Provide feedback on the latest iteration of the Citizen's Budget Book
- Obtain input into the 2028 approach to public engagement about the budget

The session was designed to feel relaxed and inviting, giving residents a chance to settle in and meet each other. Just as important, the aim was for participants to leave knowing their input was valued and would make a difference.

Step 2: Developing Discussion Questions

Discussion questions were jointly developed by the Town and Parsons Dialogue.

All verbatim results can be found in Appendix A.

Step 3: Preparing Residents

Residents were provided with the Citizens' Draft Budget Book for the 2027 fiscal year and the evening's agenda.

Step 4: Facilitate The Meeting

Chief Administrative Officer Drew Hyndman opened the session by welcoming participants and outlining the discussion goals; then everyone took a moment to introduce themselves. Parsons Dialogue then facilitated the conversation and documented what was shared during the meeting. Residents arrived with energy

and enthusiasm, were glad to have been invited to take part, and thanked the Town for the opportunity to contribute.

Step 5: Prepare the Report

Verbatim notes were captured in-meeting and can be found in Appendix A of this report. Results have been themed and preserve the language and terminology used by residents wherever possible

All responses are qualitative and directional in nature, representing individual opinions.

These findings are not statistically representative.

Summary of Findings

Following a welcome from CAO Drew Hyndman, who shared the goals of the discussion, participants introduced themselves to one another. The conversation then focused on three meeting objectives:
reporting on what the Town heard during the Spring engagement and how it used that input, gathering feedback on the latest iteration of the Citizen's Budget Book, and getting input on the approach to public engagement for the 2028 budget.

1. **What Town Heard and How the Feedback Was Used**

   Context: Kevin Blanchette provided an overview of the Town's annual budget engagement cycle. He summarized what residents shared in April and how the proposed budget reflects that feedback, including priorities to invest in critical infrastructure, maintain existing amenities, keep taxes stable with clarity on what residents are paying for, manage growth while protecting town character, and continue supporting arts and culture.

   Participants who attended the spring session described it as thorough and information-rich, recognized that the Town considered their input when developing the draft budget, and noted that the budget documents reflected comments from the focus groups.

   a. *Confidence in the process:* Participants felt the Town's budget process is becoming clearer and improving over time, and that the Town is doing a

good job as a municipality. The recent town hall was described as focused, with brief remarks and clear strategic points.

b. *Tax increase concerns:* The proposed property tax increase was the most significant concern. Participants worried about the cost of living, particularly for retirees, and noted that they were also speaking for residents who could not attend.

c. *A disconnect between wants and costs:* Participants observed that many residents support new initiatives but do not want to pay more for them, and that people often do not consider where funding comes from. They acknowledged this puts the Town in a difficult position.

d. *Growth and infrastructure:* Residents asked why taxes rise even as hundreds of new homes are added. Discussion clarified that developer levies cover new infrastructure but not the replacement of aging infrastructure in established neighbourhoods. Participants viewed asset management and maintaining reserves positively and asked the Town to communicate more clearly how it has been investing and building a financial buffer.

e. *Water:* Water was identified as the main infrastructure priority. Discussion touched on modernizing the system and how Cochrane's topography affects water costs.

f. *Community spaces:* Participants asked how gathering spaces are defined and noted that trail connections between some subdivisions could be improved. Views on the SLS facility varied, with some impressed by it and others suggesting the Town better communicate its benefits and costs.

g. *Housing and transportation:* Transit divided the group, with some wanting expanded service and others questioning the need. Participants asked about fixed-route versus on-demand service, what "partnerships" with developers means, and where road safety is addressed in the budget. Some noted a disconnect between affordability and what residents want in Cochrane, and that seniors are the fastest-growing demographic.

2. Feedback on the Latest Citizen's Budget Book

Context: The Town shared its latest approach to the Citizen's Budget Book and asked participants what was working well and where it could improve.

Participants agreed they would share the Budget Book with friends and family. At the same time, they felt it does not yet tell the story of why taxes are increasing.

a. *The headline number:* Participants expect that the 9.68% proposed increase will be the first thing residents notice, and that many will react without looking further. They suggested emphasizing that the budget is proposed and is a starting point and explaining the reasons for the increase before presenting the figure.

b. *Provincial education portion:* The provincial education portion of taxes was unclear. Participants suggested clarifying that the Town collects this portion on behalf of the Province, adding year-over-year trends, and explaining what residents receive in return. Some asked whether the Town is advocating with the Province, as other municipalities are.

c. *Homepage graphic:* The homepage graphic appeared dominated by water, making it difficult to quickly understand other spending areas. Participants suggested that something more balanced would be better.

d. *Context and comparison:* Participants asked for an easy-to-grasp visual showing where the budget increase goes, year-over-year comparisons, and comparisons with other municipalities. Some noted that last year's book had particularly helpful graphs.

e. *Going deeper:* Participants suggested attaching the Water Management Plan and explaining practices such as water recycling. They noted that the digital version's links will allow residents to explore further.

3. Input on the 2028 Budget Engagement Approach

Context: Participants were asked for suggestions to improve how the Town engages residents regarding the 2028 budget.

Participants described the Town's engagement as effective and well received and offered suggestions to broaden reach and build understanding.

a. *Reaching more residents:* Participants asked how younger residents' input is captured and suggested including high school students in future sessions. They noted that interest in civic engagement varies and that creating a sense of urgency may help.

b. *More channels:* Participants encouraged the Town to share its message across as many platforms as possible rather than relying on Facebook, where readers tend to focus on headlines. They noted that the session was not listed on the new Town of Cochrane app.

c. *Print and accessible options:* Participants pointed out that many older residents are not comfortable online. Suggestions included physical materials that direct people to digital content, a one-page information sheet, coverage in The Eagle, and plain, senior-friendly language.

d. *Survey design:* Participants suggested keeping survey choices simple, using priority lists, and stating how long the survey will take.

e. *Civic literacy:* Participants suggested a multi-year effort to build civic literacy, so young people and residents better understand what the Town needs to deliver services.

f. *Advice to the Town:* Participants encouraged the Town to stay the course, make difficult decisions when they are in the community's best interest, highlight milestones it has achieved, and avoid framing current challenges as criticism of past administrations.

In closing, participants said the session provided understanding and clarity. They emphasized that residents would respond best when they see the reasons behind the numbers and where the money goes.

Conclusion

The October 22, 2026, focus group marked another step in the Town of Cochrane's ongoing commitment to involving residents throughout the budget cycle. By inviting residents back to hear how the Town applied their Spring input, the Town closed the loop on the April conversation and reinforced their engagement process. Participants recognized their priorities in the proposed budget and saw the Town's budget engagement and communication as improving.

The proposed tax increase was the evening's clearest concern. Participants were mindful of rising costs of living, particularly for retirees, and understood the difficult position the Town faces in balancing residents' expectations for services and amenities with their reluctance to pay more. Above all, they wanted a clear explanation of why taxes are rising and what residents will receive in return, including why growth does not offset the cost of maintaining aging infrastructure.

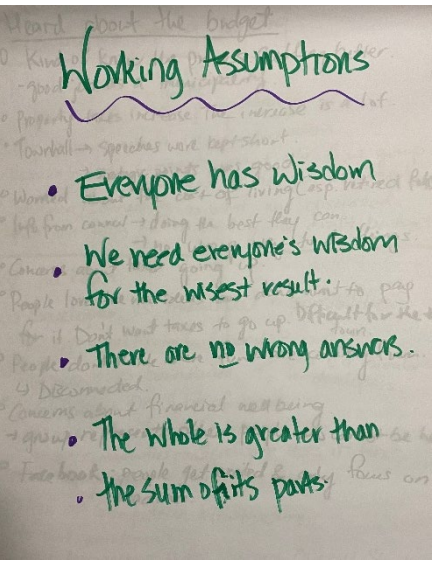
Participants saw the Citizen's Budget Book as a useful resource and agreed they would share it with friends and family. Their suggestions focused on telling the story behind the numbers: justify the increase before presenting the figure, clarify the provincial education portion, simplify key graphics, and add year-over-year and municipal comparisons. These refinements would help residents move past the headline number to a fuller understanding of the budget.

Looking ahead to 2028, participants encouraged the Town to broaden its reach by engaging younger residents, using a wider range of channels, and offering print and senior-friendly options alongside digital content. They also saw long-term value in building civic literacy so residents better understand what it takes to deliver the services they rely on. They advised the Town to stay the course, make difficult decisions in the community's best interest, and clearly communicate what has been achieved.

Taken together, the conversation suggests residents are willing to engage thoughtfully on difficult budget questions when they have clear information and a sincere opportunity to contribute.

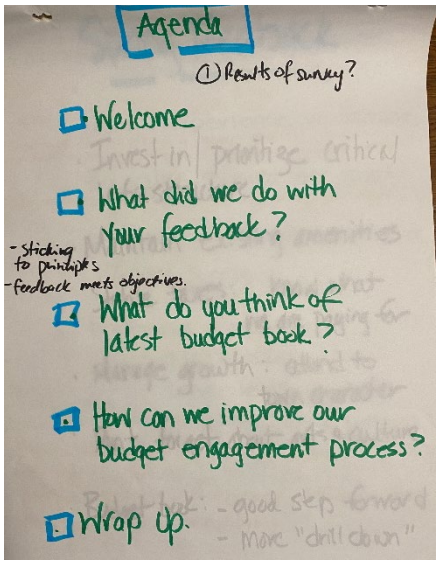
Appendix 1: Verbatim Notes

Working Assumptions



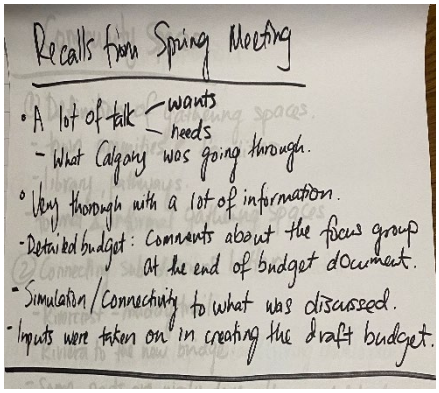
- Everyone has wisdom.
- We need everyone's wisdom for the wisest result
- There are no wrong answers.
- The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Agenda



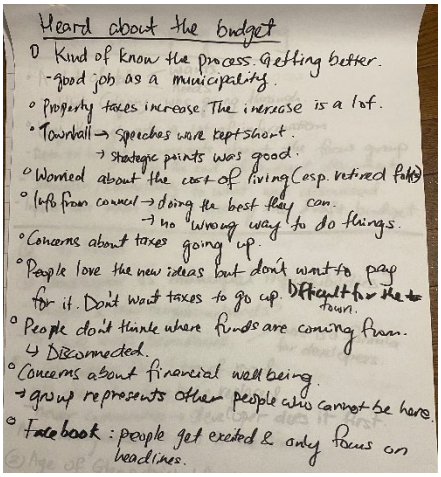
- Welcome
- What did we do with your feedback?
  - Results of the Survey
  - Sticking to principles
  - Feedback meets objectives
- What do you think of the latest Budget Book?
- How can we improve our budget engagement process?
- Wrap Up

What do you remember from the Spring Meeting?

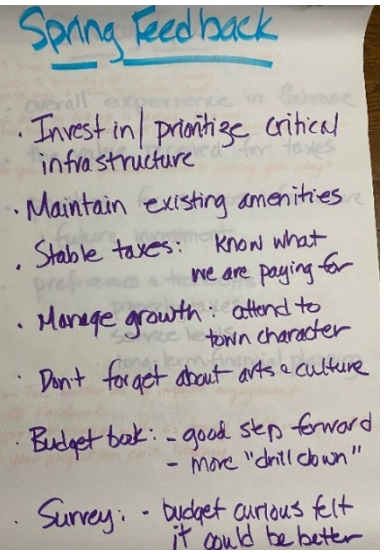


- A lot of talk
  - Wants and needs
  - What Calgary was going through
- Very thorough with a lot of information
- Detailed budget:
  - Comments about the focus groups at the end of the budget documents
- Simulation/connectivity to what was discussed
- Inputs were taken on in creating the draft budget

What have you heard about the Budget?



- Kind of know the process. Getting better.
  - Good job as a municipality.
- Property taxes increase. The increase is a lot.
- Townhall
  - Speeches were kept short
  - Strategic points was good
- Worried about the cost of living (especially retired folks)
- Information from Council
  - Doing the best they can
  - No wrong way to do things
- Concerns about taxes going up
- People love the new ideas but don't want to pay for it. Don't want taxes to go up. Difficult for the Town.
- People don't think where funds are coming from.
  - Disconnected.
- Concerns about financial well-being
  - Group represents other people who cannot be here
- Facebook: People get excited and only focus on headlines



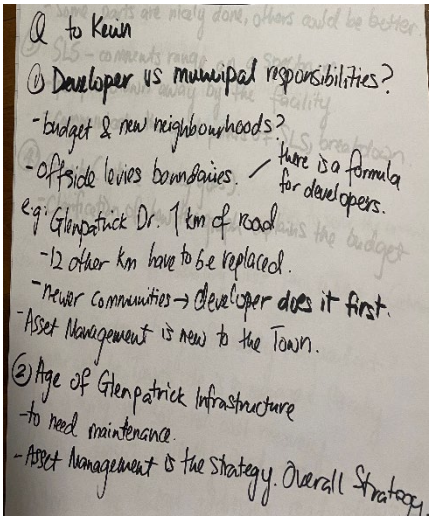
What feedback did we give the Town in the Spring Meeting?

- Invest in/prioritize critical infrastructure
- Maintain existing amenities
- Stable taxes: Know what we are paying for
- Manage growth: Attend to town character
- Don't forget about arts and culture
- Budget Book: Good step forward; more "drilldown"
- Survey: Budget curious felt it could be better

Presentation: What did we hear in April? How did we use the feedback?

Kevin Blanchette provided an overview of what was heard from the engagement process in April and how the budget reflects that feedback.

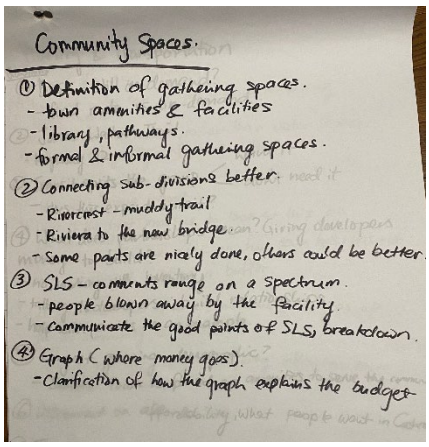
Questions to Kevin



1. Developer versus municipal responsibilities?
- Budget and new neighbourhoods?
- Offside levies boundaries
  - There is a formula for developers
- E.g. Glenpatrick DR 7 km of road
  - 12 other km have to be replaced
  - Newer communities -> developer does it first
- Asset management is new to the Town

2. Age of Glenpatrick Infrastructure
- To need maintenance
- Asset management is the strategy. Overall strategy

Community Spaces



1. Definition of gathering spaces
   - Town amenities and facilities
   - Library, pathways
   - Formal and informal gathering spaces

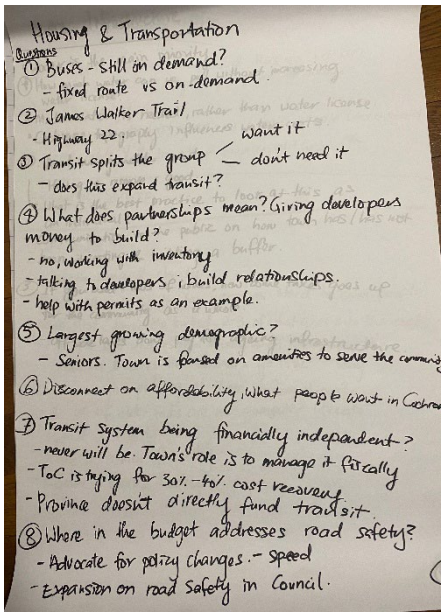
2. Connecting subdivisions better
   - Rivercrest – muddy trail
   - Riviera to the new bridge
   - Some parts are nicely done, others could be better

3. SLS
   - Comments range on a spectrum
   - People blown away by the facility
   - Communicate the good parts of SLS, breakdown

4. Graph (where money goes)
   - Clarification of how the graph explains the budget

Housing and Transportation

1. Buses



   - Still on demand?
   - Fixed route versus on demand

2. James Walker Trail
   - Highway 22

3. Participants noted that Transit splits the group
   - Some want it
   - Some don't need it
   - Does this expand transit?

4. What does "partnerships" mean? Giving developers money to build?
   - No, working with inventory
   - Talking to developers; build relationships
   - Help with permits as an example

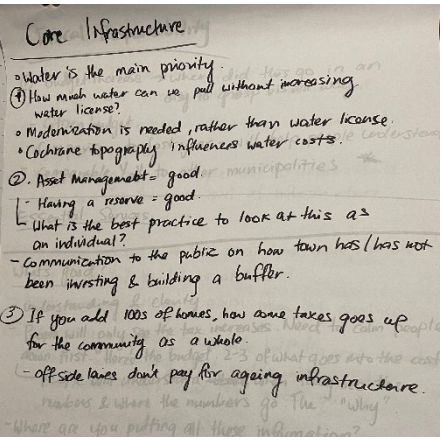
5. Largest growing demographic?

- Seniors.
- Town is focused on amenities to serve the Community

6. Disconnect on affordability, what people want in Cochrane

7. Transit system being financially independent?
   - Never will be. Town's role is to manage it fiscally.
   - Town of Cochrane is trying for 30-40% cost recovery
   - Province doesn't directly fund transit
8. Where in the budget addresses road safety?
   - Advocate for policy changes – speed
   - Expansion on road safety in Council

Core Infrastructure

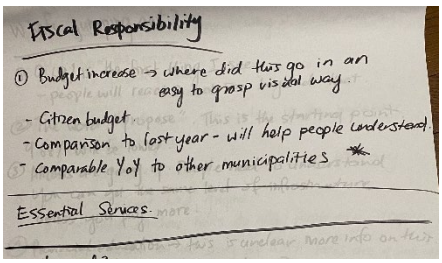


1. How much water can we pull without increasing the water license?
   - Water is the main priority
   - Modernization is needed, rather than water license
   - Cochrane topography influences water costs

2. What is the best practice to look at this as an individual?
   - Asset Management = good
   - Having a reserve = good
   - Communication to the public on how Town has/has not been investing and building a buffer

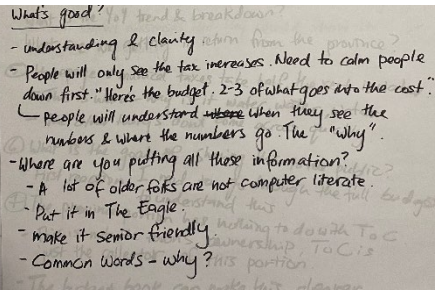
3. If you add 100s of homes, how come taxes goes up for the community as a whole?
   - Offside levies don't pay for ageing infrastructure

Fiscal Responsibility



1. Budget increase -> where did this go in an easy-to-grasp visual way?
   - Citizen budget
   - Comparison to last year – will help people understand
   - Comparable year-over-year to other municipalities

What suggestions would you offer to improve the 2028 Citizen's Budget Book?

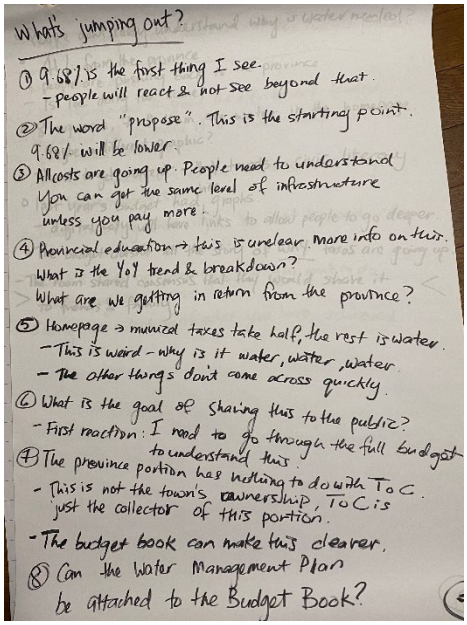


What do you like about this version of the budget book?

- Understanding and clarity
- People will only see the tax increases. Need to calm people down first. "Here's the budget. 2-3 of what goes into the cost." People will understand when they see the numbers and where the numbers go. The "why."
- Where are you putting all this information?
  - A lot of older folks are not computer literate.
  - Put it in The Eagle.
  - Make it senior-friendly.
  - Common words – why?

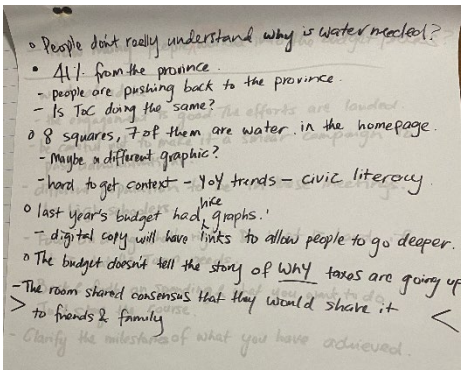
What are some observations or suggestions?

1. 9.68% is the first thing I see. People will react and not see beyond that.



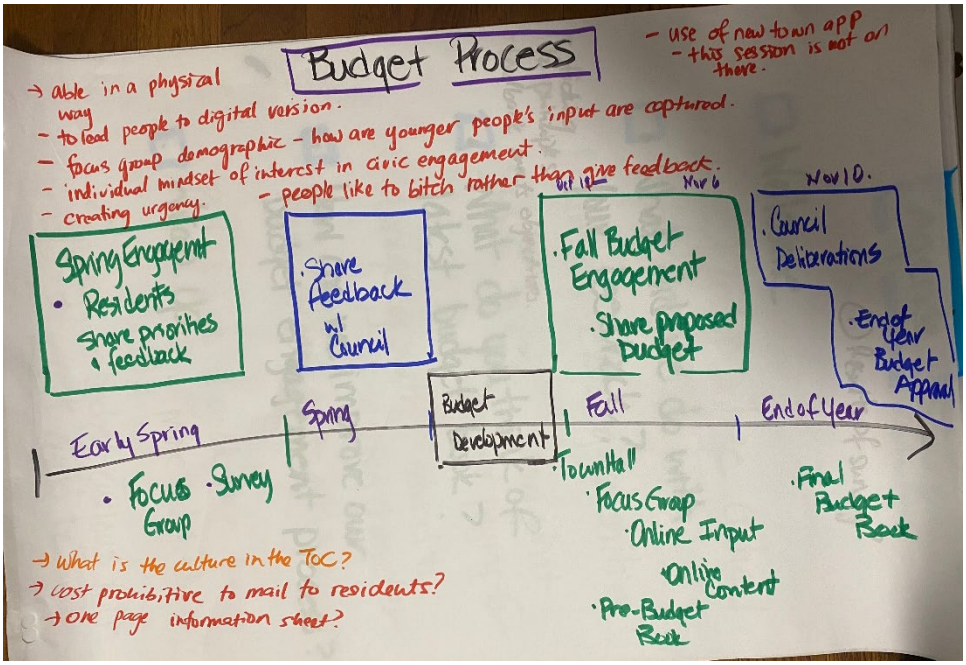
2. The word, "propose." This is the starting point. 9.68% will be lower.
3. All costs are going up. People need to understand that you can get the same level of infrastructure unless you pay more.
4. Provincial education -> this is unclear. More info about this. What is the year-over-year trend and breakdown? What are we getting in return from the Province?
5. Homepage -> Municipal taxes take half; the rest is water. This is weird. Why is it water, water, water? The other things don't come across quickly.
6. What is the goal of sharing this with the public? First reaction: I need to go through the full budget to understand this.

7. The Provincial portion has nothing to do with the Town of Cochrane. This is not the Town's ownership; the Town of Cochrane is just the collector of this portion. The Budget Book can make this clear.



8. Can the Water Management Plan be attached to the Budget Book?
9. People don't really understand why water is recycled?
10. 41% from the province
    a. People are pushing back to the Province
    b. Is Town of Cochrane doing the same?
11. Page 6: Eight squares, seven of them are water.
    a. Maybe a different graphic?
    b. Hard to get context – year-over-year trends – civic literacy
12. Last year's budget book had nice graphs!
    a. Digital copy will have links to allow people to go deeper
13. The budget doesn't tell the story of why taxers are going up
14. The room shared consensus that they would share it to friends and family

What can we do to improve the budget engagement process?



Budget Timeline

Early Spring

- Spring Engagement
- Residents share priorities and feedback
- Focus group
- Survey

Spring

- Share feedback with Council

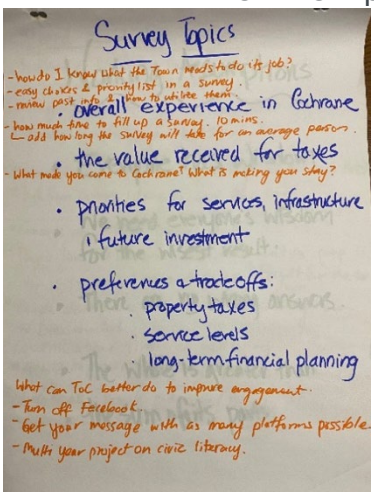
Spring – Summer

- Budget development

Fall

- Fall budget engagement

    - Share proposed budget
- Townhall
- Focus group
- Online input



- Online content
- Pre-Budget Book

End of year

- Council deliberations
- End of year budget approval
- Final Budget Book

What else could the Town do to improve budget engagement?

- Able in a physical way
- To lead people to a digital version
- Focus group demographic
    - How are younger people's input are captured? [sic]
- Individual mindset of interest in civic engagement
- Creating urgency
- People like to bitch rather than give feedback
- Use of new town app
    - This session is not on there
- What is the culture in the Town of Cochrane?
- Cost prohibitive to mail to residents?
    - One page information sheet?

Survey: What questions would you like to be asked?

Spring Survey Topics included:

- Overall experience in Cochrane
- The value received for taxes
- Priorities for services, infrastructure, future investment
- Preferences and tradeoffs:
    - Property taxes
    - Service levels
    - Long-term financial planning

In the Spring meeting, participants expressed dissatisfaction with survey questions. What would be better questions?

- How do I know what the Town needs to do its job?
- Easy choices and priority list in a survey
- Review past info and how to utilize them
- How much time to fill up a survey? 10 minutes
    - Add how long the survey will take for an average person
- What made you come to Cochrane? What is making you stay?
- What can Town of Cochrane better do to improve engagement?
    - Turn off Facebook
    - Get your message with as many platforms as possible
    - Multi-year project on civic literacy

What advice would you offer the town?

- The engagement is good. The efforts are lauded.
- Be careful not to make it a smear campaign to past administrators
- Need different population to be in these meetings
    - E.g. High schoolers
- Focus on doing what's right. Do what is hard, if it is what the Town needs
- Back and forth on spending and what you want to do. Just stay the course.
- Clarify the milestones of what you have achieved.

Appendix B

Appendix C – Email feedback

- To start, I'd just like to say that Cochrane has a good trail network and that, in the two years we've lived here, we've really come to enjoy it. I was also pleased to see in the Key Capital Investments a line item entitled Pathways and Active Transportation Connectivity Improvements. It was an excellent decision to put it in as a line item so that active transportation - for pedestrians and cyclists - is part of planning and not just a reactive afterthought.
- Reading that the *Pathways and Trails Strategy* is soon to be complete is very good news, as it contributes so much to resident and visitor mental and physical health, safety and recreation. Well done. I have seen many children and seniors (on scooters) crossing busy roads like Highway 22 with almost no infrastructure to ensure their safety. Children should be able to get school, adults to work and seniors to appointments and shopping areas safely and relatively easily. The active transportation network is key to that.
- I'm very supportive of the Bow River Pathway Engineering and Construction project, especially if it can alleviate some of the user conflicts close to the SLS Centre. The Critical Pathway Connect Big Hill Creek project is also a key project for people in the Heartland and Heritage Hills areas to be able to get into the downtown area by walking or cycling. I do have a question about why it is $4 M given it's a short stretch of trail and a short bridge.
- The Horse Creek Sports Park project is an important one and I hope that it involves connecting trails to the adjacent neighbourhoods. I'm not sure what the Cochrane Ranche Bridge Replacement is as the text didn't match the rest of the summary.
- I saw there is a project down River Avenue to Griffin Road. I question if River Avenue is the best place to develop active transportation infrastructure as it is quite busy compared to Charlesworth Avenue. Please consider the Charlesworth option.
- I am not an accountant. Here are a couple of points for consideration:
- 1.I am absolutely disgusted that the town is imposing an average increase in cost of $100 per month/$1200 per year/per household. This is unacceptable.
  2. The draft Statement of Operations 2027 includes:
  Revenue: Transfer from Reserves $9,766,229
  Expense: Transfer to Reserves $22,731,900
  Net Expense: $12,965,671.
  I view the reserve fund as a pre-tax. At the very least I would expect what is withdrawn should be returned to the reserve fund. How large is the town's reserve fund? Is it 5% or 8%. These funds are going into the town's "savings account" at a time when people can least afford it.
  3. The actual 2025 financial statement showed a $25,070,031 surplus. What has happened since then to cause such an increase in taxes and expenses? Some hard questions need to be asked.
  4. With advancements in AI, it is expected you should be able to do more, with less

people. Particularly in administration services. Just stating the town needs 20 FTE staff is not acceptable without full explanation of where this staff is required and how they will improve services. Where is the justification for every increase? Where is the accountability?

- I miss-stated the figures in my first point. The average increase appears to be $40/month, $480/year. That's still a major increase for people who are already struggling. Anyone on a fixed income will be impacted.
- My math is not wrong when it comes to putting $12+ million in the reserve fund at the expense of taxpayers.
- There needs to full disclosure and accountability built into the budget process.