Budget Meeting Day One
February 12, 2024

A meeting to discuss the 2024 Budget was held at Council Chambers in Baddeck on February 12, 2024, at 1:00pm with Deputy Warden Dauphinee in the Chair.

COUNCILLORS PRESENT

District #1- Paul MacNeil

District #2- Perla MacLeod

District #3- Bruce Morrison, Warden

District #4- Barbara Longva

District #5- Fraser Patterson

District #6 – Larry Dauphinee, Deputy Warden

District #7- Jackie Organ

District #8- Norman MacDonald

STAFF PRESENT

Leanne MacEachen, CAO

Alix Redden, CFO

Heather Ross, Financial Analyst

Stephanie MacLeod, Recorder

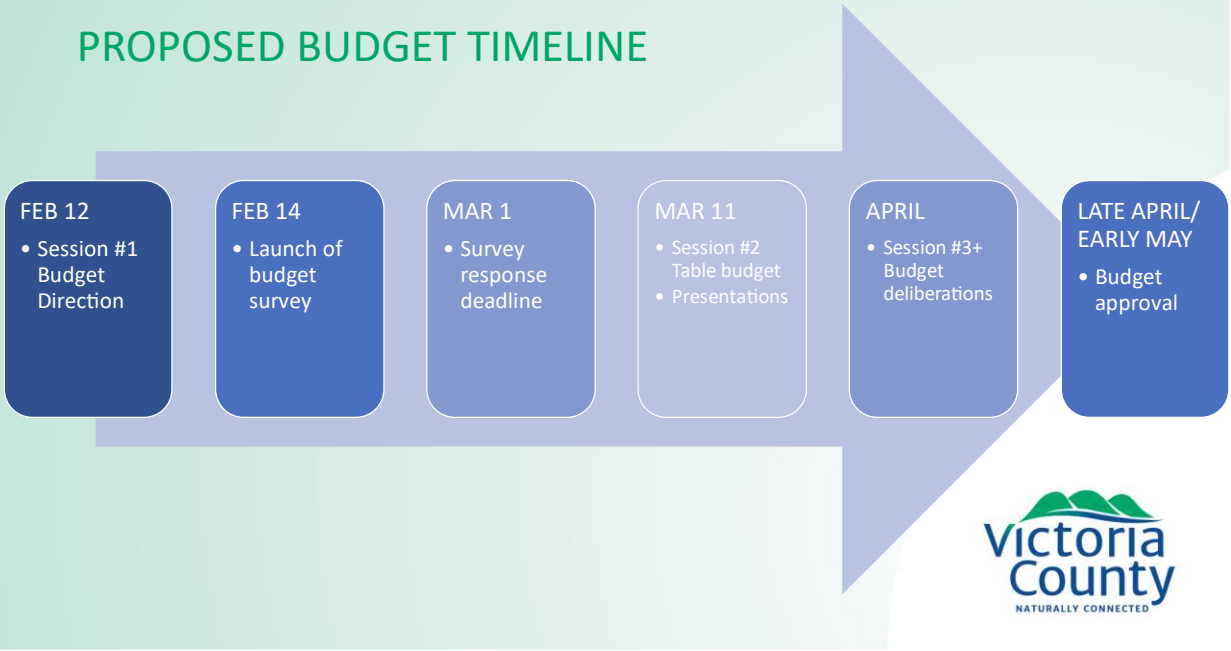
Jennifer Dagsvik, Communications

CFO Redden gave the following presentation:

AGENDA

- 2024-25 proposed budget timeline
- Budget approach
- Strategic priorities check-in
- Assessment considerations
- Service exchange agreement impacts

PROPOSED BUDGET TIMELINE



BUDGET APPROACH

- Engagement survey
- Linking to strategic priorities
- Baseline + decision areas
- Departmental focused

BUDGET APPROACH – ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

- Coordinated effort with communications team
- Paper copy via newsletter, front desk, events
- Electronic copy via website and social media
- Consider it a 'jumping off point' for increased resident engagement in budgeting

BUDGET APPROACH – ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

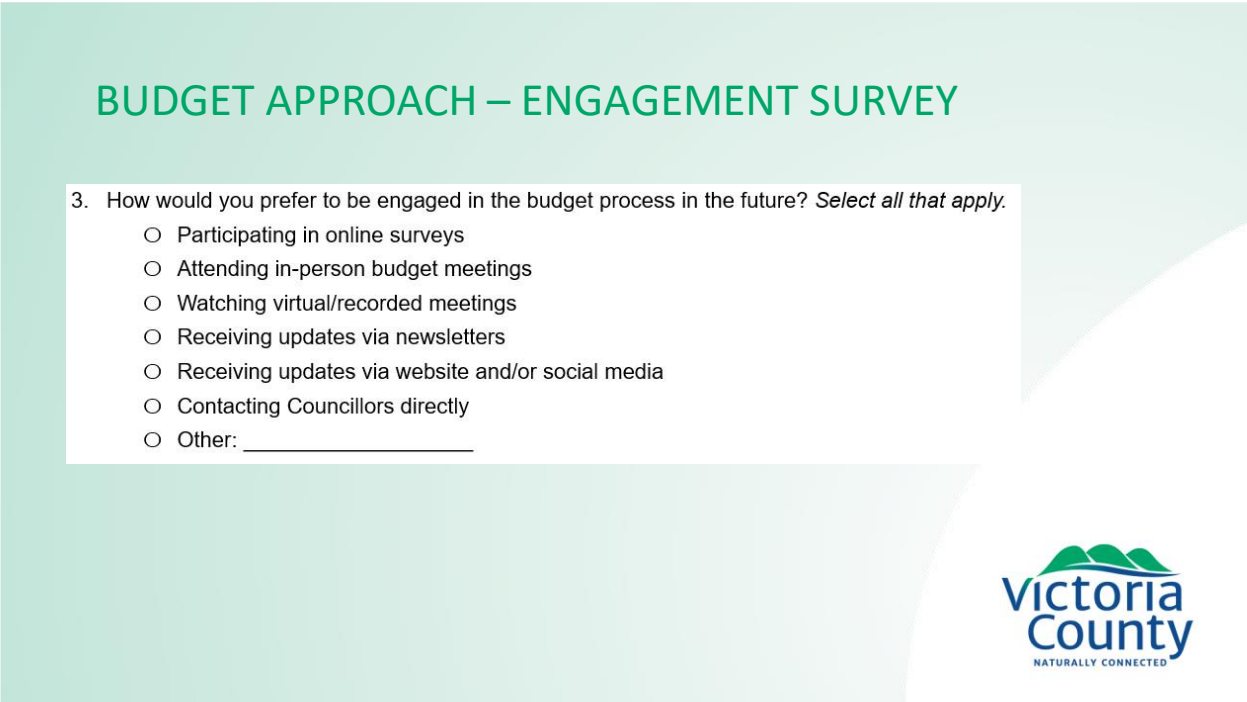
1. Which services do you think are most important in Victoria County when deciding how to allocate budget funds? Rate importance on a scale of 1 to 5, where:
   1 - Not important at all; 2 - Not so important; 3 – Neutral; 4 - Somewhat important; 5 - Very important

	1	2	3	4	5
Active living and recreation *(programming, funding, events)*					
Communication with residents *(newsletters, website, social media)*					
Community supports *(funding for community/non-profit groups)*					
Community development and placemaking					
Economic development *(attracting and keeping businesses)*					
Emergency services *(fire services, EMO)*					
Green/climate focused initiatives *(infrastructure upgrades, public education)*					
Protective services *(building permits, animal control, bylaw enforcement)*					
Public transit *(Victoria County Transit)*					
Seniors' safety *(education, outreach, advocacy)*					
Tourism *(visitor attraction, cultural and arts festivals/events)*					
Trails and green space development					
Waste management *(transfer stations, recycling depots, curbside collection)*					
Water services *(water collection, treatment and distribution)*					

BUDGET APPROACH – ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

2. What are your top five concerns you'd like Victoria County Council to know? Rank with #s 1 - 5.

	Access to healthcare services		Environmental sustainability
	Access to nutritious food and food security		Mental health services and support
	Affordable housing/homelessness		Public safety and crime prevention
	Affordability of daily living (income vs. bills)		Reconciliation efforts with First Nations
	Aging municipal infrastructure		Recreation/active living opportunities
	Availability of childcare services		Resident engagement and participation
	Climate change adaptation and resilience		Rural broadband/cellular access
	Communities' growth and vitality		Senior services and support
	Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives		Support for local businesses/ entrepreneurship
	Economic development/year-round job opportunities		Tourism promotion and development
	Education and school quality		Transportation options (i.e., transit)
	Emergency preparedness and response		Other:



Councillor MacNeil asked if there was an explanation as to where most of the revenue is going? CAO MacEachen said we have the budget online and we have a presentation next week on last years financials and all of that information is online.

CAO MacEachen gave the following update on Council's Strategic Priorities:

Operational Pillars



Responsible Infrastructure

Victoria County will maintain existing infrastructure, invest in new infrastructure for growing communities and ensure municipal assets are accessible, sustainable and fiscally responsible .

Unified Connections

Victoria County will undertake and promote projects to unify and connect our residents through improved technology, county-wide development and meaningful engagement.

Sustainable Growth

Victoria County will support growth and development opportunities that maintain our uniqueness and sense of community while making the County a preferred place to live, work and operate a business.

Strong Partnerships and Advocacy

Victoria County will collaborate and work with others to advance and improve relationships based on mutual respect and for the greater good of all residents.



Responsible Infrastructure

Areas of Focus:

- Ingonish Water/Wastewater
  - Waterline is in progress, geotechnical done week of January 15 th, 2024.
- Municipal Administration Office
  - Grandfathered for accessibility unless there are major renovations.
  - Wayfinding signage, hearing assistance, subtitles on Zoom/YouTube. Looking into A/V upgrades.
  - Considering a consultant to tell us the easiest, most cost-effective accessibility changes.
  - Roof has been repaired (major issues).
  - Purchased cubicles to create a few more working spaces.
  - Furnace has been serviced, better efficiency.
  - Applied for funding to retrofit, but unsuccessful (plan would have heat pumps, solar panels, insulation and lights changed).
  - Slowly making changes/progress to update/facelift what we have.
- Northern Waste Facility
  - Getting quotes for project management.

Council Decision Area:

- New building?
- EPR will change our workforce. Continue with new transfer site North? What is there? HHW? C&D? Shells? Re -Use?
- Wastewater in Ingonish, YES or NO?

Unified Connections

Areas of Focus:

- Cellular and Broadband
  - New funding for cellular and broadband project is progressing throughout the Province.
- Trail Development
  - Halfway through phase 2 (construction stage) of the 3 phase Trails Development Plan.
  - We have also experienced the development of strong connections with trail user groups and the volunteers who support these groups.
  - Eventually there will be a multi -use trail route from Wagmatcook to at least Ingonish.
- Communication and Engagement
  - New Communications Officer as well as a Digital Assistant.
  - Quarterly Newsletter.
  - New local paper servicing Victoria County (The Victoria County Reporter.
  - Looking at options for livestreaming, but before there is an investment in equipment, decisions need to be made.

Council Decision Area:

- Does Council want to continue to record Council sessions? Any other sessions?
- How much to invest in this?

Sustainable Growth

Areas of Focus:

- Year-Round Opportunities
  - Businesses opening North of Smokey, Ingonish businesses staying open.
  - Washrooms are staying open., and are looking at more possibilities for partnerships
  - Promoting Snow North.
  - Community Placemaking Projects – Dingwall/Iona Port/Ross Ferry/St. Anns/Baddeck/Cop's Cove
  - Winter Market Readiness assessment
- Economic Development
  - EV Charging Feasibility Study.
  - Smokey is continuing their development, looking for support from NSP and from NS PW for road changes. Czech best practise mission happened.
  - Wind turbine discussions are at a bit of a standstill until the next round of submissions for permission by the Province.
  - Trail funding grants are helping to provide opportunities to get the trail users from away.
  - Ingonish STEP Program/Beacon Baddeck/Cabot Trail 100 planning
- Natural Preservation
  - Investigating a solar farm – hoping for next round of lending from the Province to fund it.

Council Decision Area:

- Baddeck sewer upgrade to promote development?
- Sidewalks throughout the Village?

Strong Partnerships and Advocacy

Areas of Focus:

- First Nations Relations
  - On October 23, 2023, Victoria County Council and Wagmatcook Band Council engaged in a Council -to-Council discussion. The Mi'kmaq and Truth and Reconciliation flags were both raised that day, where they will permanently fly.
  - Warden/CAO/Chiefs/CEO meetings have been held and are going forward on a regular basis.
  - Rent has been paid up to March 2024.
  - A few businesses in Baddeck have adopted the "tax free" for status cards.
  - Staff/Council are attending learning opportunities
- Housing
  - Applied for HAF (Housing Accelerator Fund)
  - Still need seasonal housing as well, including Ingonish. Land has been transferred to DCB for affordable housing development.
  - Ingonish land use changes could allow smaller lots, which could alleviate some issues.
- Climate Change
  - Discussion with Province on Coastal Protection Act, its not looking like it's going forward.

Warden Morrison commented on the Baddeck sewer system and mentioned that there are some residents who are out of the Village limits who also use the Village sewer system.

Councillor MacNeil requested to add CGC under strong advocacy.

Councillor Longva suggested adding the meetings we have had with the Ecology Action Centre.

Councillor Longva also mentioned that she is a member of the NSFM climate change advisory committee.

CFO Redden went back to the budget presentation:

BUDGET APPROACH – STRATEGIC PRIORITY LINKING



BUDGET APPROACH – DEPARTMENTAL FOCUSED

Department/area focused discussions:

- Council
- Administration
- Finance
- Fire departments
- Public Works
- Tourism & Recreation
- Mandatory contributions (education, RCMP, PVSC, etc.)
- Water

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES CHECK-IN

Council decision areas from COW presentation:

- Administration building?
- New north waste facility? EPR, HHW, C&D, Shells, Re-use?
- Ingonish wastewater?
- Council meeting livestreaming/recording?
- Baddeck sewer upgrade?
- Village sidewalks?

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES CHECK-IN

Open discussion

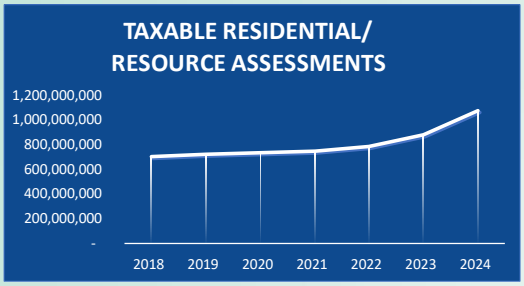
- New/changed priorities?
- Other spending?

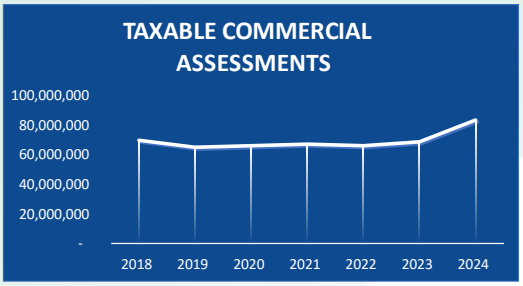
CFO Redden emphasized that the following slides pertaining to Assessments are just for consideration and are just provided to aid Council in their decisions for tax rates.

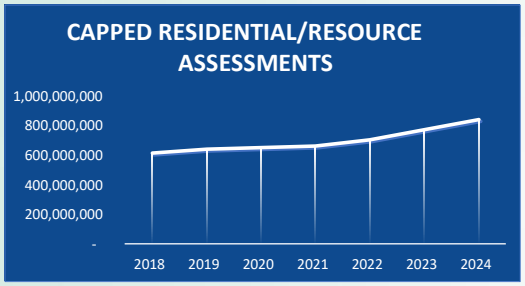
ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

	2024	2023	Difference	% Change
Residential (with cap)	740,101,300	672,411,900	63,035,700	10.07%
Commercial	83,661,400	68,445,000	2,713,900	22.23%
Less: Seasonal adjustment	-3,341,173	-5,351,775	761,764	-37.57%
Resource (with cap)	101,727,200	98,500,300	3,507,900	3.28%
Total assessment (with cap)	**922,148,728**	**834,005,425**	**70,019,264**	**10.57%**

ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS







Victoria County
NATURALLY CONNECTED

ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

**with no tax rate change*	Current Rate	Incremental Revenue
Residential	$1.22	825,811
Commercial	$2.12	322,588
Less: Seasonal adjustment		42,625
Resource	$1.22	39,367
Additional 2024-25 property tax revenue		**$1,230,391**

ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

	Current Rate	5% decrease ($1.16/ $2.01)	3% decrease ($1.18/ $2.06)	1% decrease ($1.21/ $2.10)	1% increase ($1.23/ $2.14)	2% increase ($1.24/ $2.16)	3% increase ($1.26/ $2.18)
Residential	$1.22	(451,462)	(270,877)	(90,292)	90,292	180,585	270,877
Commercial	$2.12	(88,681)	(53,209)	(17,736)	17,736	35,472	53,209
Less: Seasonal adjustment		3,542	2,125	708	(708)	(1,417)	(2,125)
Resource	$1.22	(62,054)	(37,232)	(12,411)	12,411	24,821	37,232
Revenue impact		**($598,655)**	**($359,193)**	**($119,731)**	**$119,731**	**$239,462**	**$359,193**

SERVICE EXCHANGE AGREEMENT IMPACTS

Budget impacts of renegotiated Service Exchange Agreement MOU:

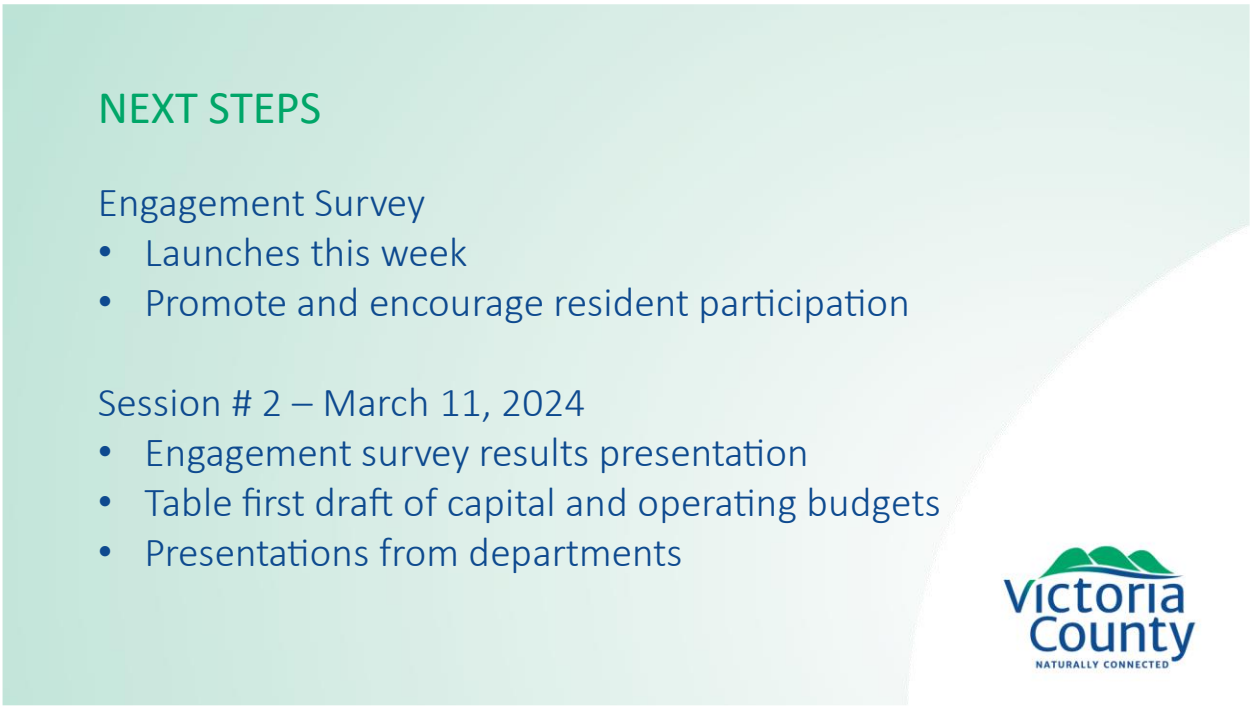
- Previously not a recipient of the Municipal Financial Capacity Grant ("equalization"); remains unchanged
- Mandatory contribution for corrections absorbed by PNS; approximately $131k annual savings
- Mandatory contribution for public housing losses absorbed by PNS; approximately $55k annual savings
- Total annual savings = approx. $186k

Victoria County
NATURALLY CONNECTED

SERVICE EXCHANGE AGREEMENT IMPACTS

	Current Rate	1.55% decrease ($1.20/$2.09)
Residential	$1.22	(139,953)
Commercial	$2.12	(27,491)
Less: Seasonal adjustment		1,098
Resource	$1.22	(19,237)
Revenue impact		**($185,583)**

Victoria County
NATURALLY CONNECTED



Councill MacDonald asked do we need to have a Local Improvement Charge (LIC) By-Law in place and CAO MacEachen said no, you don't but without an LIC, everything we are going to discuss here at Budget, it means that everyone pays for these projects, and it will drain the FCI's (Financial Condition Indicator) and have an impact on reserves. The UARB has asked if we have an LIC and if not, why not?

COUNCIL DECISION AREAS

Administration Building:

- This building is grandfathered in until 2030. There was very little clarity given as to what this means. Warden Morrison recommended that the province to be contacted to get what "grandfathered" means.
- Council recommended hiring a consultant to look into building a new municipal building at a new location.
- Council agreed to $200,000 to be put into the municipal building again this year.

New north waste facility? EPR, HHW (Household Hazardous Waste), C&D, Shells, Re-use:

- With EPR, the County will not be collecting recyclables anymore.
- Council agreed to accept HHW at the new site.
- Was recommended to have EDO have a conversation with Victoria Co-Op Fisheries but for budget purposes it was decided to not accept shells at the new north waste facility. The shells will be still accepted at the current site, if a new permit is obtained.

Ingonish wastewater:

- Council agreed to have CAO MacEachen to apply for funding for wastewater. If the funding is not granted, then the project won't be done.
- Council is still in support of Ingonish wastewater up to $8 million.
- Currently in the 5-year capital budget, there is $16 million earmarked for Ingonish wastewater, and it was asked if Council still want this amount kept in the budget and Council did not want $16 million, they agreed to keep up to $8 million in the budget for Ingonish wastewater.

Council meeting livestreaming/recording:

- Council wanted to make small improvements to Council chambers for livestreaming/recording.

Baddeck sewer upgrade:

- Recommended to have the CAO meet with the Village to get potential costs for this project and then come back to Council. It can't go in the budget, until there are numbers.

Village sidewalks:

- Council agreed to contribute up to $100,000 to assist the Village in fixing the sidewalks.
- Councillor MacNeil requested to have a joint Council and Village Commission meeting. CAO MacEachen will contact them with this request.

OPEN DISCUSSION

New/changed priorities:

- Housing complexes.
- Dog park/green space in the Baddeck area.
- More money into people (staff), accessibility position is needed.
- More funding for the Recreation Department.
- More funding for Transit.
- More funding for Trails.
- More funding in communities.
- Build up the smaller communities across the whole County.

CAO MacEachen requested Council to send their top 5 areas/priorities for each district to CFO Redden by the next Council meeting on February 20, 2024.

ADJOURN