

Grand River Conservation Authority

Report number: GM-10-23-80

Date: October 27, 2023

To: Members of the Grand River Conservation Authority

Subject: Budget 2024 – Draft #1

Recommendation:

THAT Report Number GM-10-23-80 - Budget 2024 - Draft #1 be approved for consultation purposes, circulated to all participating municipalities, and posted to the GRCA website.

Summary:

This report summarizes the first draft of the 2024 Budget. The final budget for 2024 will be presented for approval at the February 24, 2024 Annual General Meeting. See Attachment A “Budget 2024 Timetable” for additional details on budget timelines.

Budget 2024- Draft #1 reflects the continuation of programs and services delivered in 2023 and maintains breakeven results. Total draft expenditures for 2024 are \$34,442,188. For context, the October 2022 draft budget for 2023 included expenditures of \$33,279,188. Preliminary budget financial figures are outlined in Attachment G which includes the Statement of Operations and detailed Program and Services statements. The individual programs and services budgets have been categorized as Operating, Capital Maintenance, and Special projects.

Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) programs and services are funded by:

- Municipal Apportionment (in prior years referred to as Municipal General Levy)
- Municipal Funding as per Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs)
- Other Municipal Funding (by special agreements)
- Provincial and Federal Grants
- Self-Generated Revenue
- Funding from Reserves

Overall, the municipal funding request has been increased by 2.5% (or \$324,000) to \$13,292,000 in 2024. For a breakdown of municipal funding by Category 1, 2, and general operating expenses see Attachment C “Budget 2024 Municipal funding breakdown”.

As required under *O.Reg.687/21 Transition Plans and Agreements for Programs and Services Under Section 21.2.2 of the Act*, the GRCA has developed an Inventory of Programs and Services based on the categories identified in the Regulation. These categories include: (1) Mandatory, (2) Municipally requested, (3) Other (Authority determines are advisable), and General Operating Expenses.

Attachment B “Programs & Services Inventory” outlines the expenditures and funding sources applicable to each category, along with the reallocation of program surplus between programs and services.

Appendix D “Summary of Municipal Apportionment” details the municipal apportionment and MOU funding requests by participating municipalities.

TABLE A -BUDGET 2024 EXPENDITURES

	2024	2023 (Oct draft)	Increase/(decrease)
<u>EXPENDITURES</u>			
Operating Expenses	\$29,066,688	\$28,148,688	\$918,000
Capital Expenses	\$4,419,000	\$4,104,000	\$315,000
Special Projects	\$840,000	\$840,000	\$0
Funding to Reserve (hydro)	\$116,500	\$116,500	\$0
TOTAL	\$34,442,188	\$33,209,188	\$1,233,000

Note: Use of the term capital expenses for spending that is funded with municipal apportionment refers to major maintenance, water control structure studies, or water management equipment.

Report:

A. CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES ACT - NEW REGULATIONS

The Conservation Authorities Act (CA Act) outlines three categories of programs and services: (1) Mandatory, (2) Municipally requested, and (3) Other (Authority determines are advisable).

O. Reg. 402/22 - Budget and Apportionment also defines “general operating expense or capital cost” as an operating expense or capital cost that is not related to the provision of a program or service that an authority provides. The regulations require that these costs be identified separately, and municipal funding be apportioned using Modified Current Value Assessment (MCVA).

O. Reg. 402/22 requirements came into force for the 2024 budget process. See Attachment A – Budget 2024 Timetable for timeline details. This regulation outlines Four Phases to the budget process

- Phase 1: Categorizing revenue and expenses as per the categories listed above, and amounts of municipal apportionment
- Phase 2: Board approval of draft budget for consultation (vote required), distribution to participating municipalities, and posting on the GRCA’s Governance section on the website. Consultation with municipalities will occur as required.
- Phase 3: Board apportionment approval process (weighted vote required)
- Phase 4: Final budget approval process (vote required)

B. OPERATING BUDGET

In general, the 2024 budget assumes the same level of program and service delivery as provided in 2023. Any exceptions to specific program areas are included in the commentary below as applicable.

(a) Resource Planning

- Resource Planning fee revenue declined in 2023 and therefore this draft of the budget reduced revenue by \$100,000.
- Compensation and benefits costs reduced by \$50,000 to recognize vacancy and/or rate savings which have resulted historically (budget assumes no change in staffing complement).

(b) Residential Property Rental Program

- The Residential Property Rental Program is in the process of winding down. The budgeted 2023 revenue of \$110,000 assumes no decrease in occupancy during 2024.
- The budgeted net result for this program is a \$25,000 deficit.

(c) Outdoor Environmental Education

- Negotiations with school boards for 2023/24 contracts have been completed. The first draft of the budget assumes that 2023/24 school contracts will be extended for the 2024/25 school year. This draft does not include any community or day camp program delivery. Decisions regarding the future format and scope of the Outdoor Environmental Education program will be incorporated into future budget drafts as applicable.

(d) Conservation Areas

- Conservation Area 2024 budgeted revenue of \$10,500,000 is approximately \$1,000,000 less than projected revenue of \$11,500,000 for 2023.
- Operating expenses are being increased by \$350,000.
- Conservation Area program and services expenses have been expanded to include 100% of Manager of Conservation Area Operations, 50% of Luther Marsh operations, and 100% of hazard tree management in the Conservation Areas. The funding for these three additional components is being funded with surplus from other Category 3 programs.
- The Conservation Areas budget excludes any allocation for corporate services overhead expenses.
- The revenue and cost assumptions will be revisited once actuals for the full 2023 season are available. Any adjustments to operating revenue or expenses will be the transfer to/from the Conservation Areas Reserve.

(e) Investment Income

- Income increased \$50,000 due to higher interest being earned on cash balances.

(f) Section 39 Funding

- It is assumed that there will no further cutbacks in the provincial Section 39 grant for the period April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024 and therefore the Section 39 grant amount is anticipated to remain at \$449,688.

(g) Municipal Funding

- The 2024 Budget includes \$12,275,000 of funding for Category 1 Mandatory Programs and General Operating Expenses along with \$1,017,000 for Category 2 MOU Programs for a total of \$13,292,000 which is a \$324,000 (or 2.5%) increase over the 2023 General Municipal Levy of \$12,968,000.

(h) Surplus Assumption

- The draft budget assumes a \$100,000 surplus carry forward from 2023. If additional surplus is applicable, staff will recommend that it be incorporated in the final budget and used for non-recurring expense demands (i.e. consulting, professional development, and other administrative costs).

(i) Transition Reserve (created in 2021)

- The purpose of the reserve is to fund expenditures related to the transitioning of the GRCA to new provincial regulations requirements and/or fund costs related to managing expenses impacted by COVID-19 or revenue losses due to COVID-19. As at December 31, 2022, the reserve balance is approximately \$2.0 million.
- The strategy for Budget 2024 draft #1 is to utilize the transition reserve to fund one staff position (\$100,000) to assist with some of the deliverables required by the new regulations and to fund the Outdoor Environmental Education program deficit (\$312,000).

(j) Compensation and Benefits and Staffing Comments:

- The 2024 draft budget includes a 3% increase for compensation and benefits which allows for a general wage increase, grid steps within wage scales, and benefit cost increases. In addition, one administrative position is being added to the budget.
- Non-union salary adjustments are required to be approved by the General Membership which is typically presented in November or December for the subsequent year.
- Union wage adjustments have been incorporated into the budget in accordance with the Collective Agreement which is effective until December 31, 2025.

(k) Source Protection Program

- The province has identified that this program is considered a Category 1 mandatory program that is required to be delivered by Conservation Authorities. Funding until March 2024 was secured. The province, which currently fully funds this program, has not guaranteed funding for future years, nor has it announced an end to program funding.

C. CAPITAL & MAJOR MAINTENANCE BUDGET

(a) Major Maintenance Spending Water Control Structures

- The budget is set at \$1,500,000. Any demands that arise more than that amount can be funded with the Water Control Structures reserve and/or the Land Sale Proceeds reserve. Staff continue to seek funding to repair and update the water control infrastructure from provincial and federal government. Government funding included in budget 2024 relates to provincial Water and Erosion Control Infrastructure (WECI) funding which is subject to provincial approval of projects. Changes to this budget line will not impact the request for municipal funding. Any additional spending will be funded with WECI funding or reserves.

(b) Capital Spending Conservation Areas

- The budget is set at \$2,000,000. This spending is budgeted to be funded with \$1,650,000 of fee revenue and \$350,000 from the conservation area reserve. Future budget drafts will be revised as capital projects are prioritized. Any increases in budgeted spending will be facilitated by either increased revenue or use of the conservation area reserve. Any decrease in budgeted expenses would be offset by a transfer to the conservation reserve.

(c) Water Monitoring Equipment and Flood Forecasting and Warning Expenses

- The budget is being held constant at \$300,000. The gauge reserve will be used to fund \$100,000 of total costs and the remaining costs will be funded with Category 1 Municipal Apportionment funding.

(d) Information Systems and Motor Pool

- Costs of \$379,000 for Information Systems and \$240,000 for Motor Pool represent the costs not funded through internal cost allocations to programs and services and are funded through the IS reserve and MP reserve respectively. See Attachment G 'P&S #16 - Supplemental Information – IS and MP' for detailed expense information.

D. SPECIAL PROJECTS

(a) Special projects do not rely on Municipal Apportionment funding.

(b) This draft of the budget only includes items that are known or highly likely to be undertaken and a cost can be estimated. At present, the budget includes \$840,000 in spending. By the time the 2024 budget is finalized, special project spending, along with

matching revenue, is expected to increase as projects are approved and carryover amounts are confirmed.

(c) The \$840,000 in special projects included in this draft budget are:

- \$800,000 Rural Water Quality Capital Grants
- \$40,000 Species at Risk Program

(d) New Guelph Lake Nature Centre Building

To date, the purchasing process for this project has not commenced, therefore, a reliable cost estimate is not available. The final budget draft will incorporate this project as applicable with funding to be provided via donations and potentially using GRCA reserves.

E. RESERVES

For 2024, reserves are budgeted to decrease by \$331,500. Significant budgeted drawdowns to reserves include \$350,000 for Conservation Area capital projects, \$315,000 to fund the Environmental Education deficit, \$100,000 to fund one staff position, \$379,000 for Information Systems, and \$240,000 for Motor Pool. See Attachment E 'Summary of Reserves' for details of reserve movements budgeted for 2024. The use of reserves is integral to GRCA operations. The GRCA sets aside certain funds to reserves (i.e. Land Sale Proceeds, Hydro Revenue, Interest Earned on Reserves) in order to be able to draw upon these reserves at a later date in accordance with either legislative mandates and/or board-approved use

Reserves can be viewed as:

- Planned savings set aside for future capital projects (facilitates smoothing of funding requests)
- Surpluses set aside for future operating or capital needs (i.e. Conservation Area revenue in excess of budget)
- Contingency funds for unplanned expenditures
- Legislated amounts to be used in accordance with regulations (i.e. land sale proceeds)

A detailed report on reserves will be presented at the November 24, 2023 meeting.

F. CATEGORY 2 – WATERSHED SERVICES

The programs and services included under watershed services are:

- Subwatershed Studies
- Conservation Services
- Water Quality
- Wastewater Optimization Program
- Groundwater Resources
- Watershed Services

See Attachment F 'Budget 2024 Category 2 - Watershed Services Program Breakdown'

This budget assumes that all participating municipalities will enter into a Memorandum of Agreement with the GRCA and agree to apportioning the funding requirements using MCVA, the same as Category 1 apportionment and the same method that was used in prior years.

G. MUNICIPAL APPORTIONMENT (referred to as General Municipal Levy in prior years)

Where municipal funding is applicable, namely, Category 1, 2, and General Operating Expenses, the methodology of apportionment used is Modified Current Value Assessment (MCVA) on the basis that there is a watershed benefit for all participating municipalities from the programs and services. See Attachment D 'Budget 2024 Summary of Municipal Apportionment' for details.

The methodology for calculating the MCVA and distributing apportionment is outlined *in O. Reg. 402/22 Section (7)*. Agreements with participating municipalities for Category 2 programs and services have not been finalized therefore the funding allocation is subject to change and would be communicated and agreed to accordingly if applicable.

OTHER MAJOR ASSUMPTIONS

- (a) Cottage Lot Rental Program revenue increased by 2.5% or \$57,000 in accordance with the Residential Tenancy Act.
- (b) Total Insurance expense increased by 5% or \$24,000 to reflect 2023 rate increases and projected 2024 rate increases.
- (c) Total Property Tax expense increased \$20,000.
- (d) Admin Operating expense held constant.
- (e) Other Operating expenses increased between 0% and 5% as applicable.
- (f) Motor Pool charge-out rates held constant.
- (g) Computer charge-out rates held constant.

H. SIGNIFICANT OUTSTANDING BUDGET ITEMS

- (a) Year 2023 Carry forward Adjustments
2023 Surplus carry forward - this draft of the 2024 Budget assumes a \$100,000 surplus carryover from year 2023. The actual "2023 Net Surplus" will be incorporated into the 2024 budget.
- (b) 2023 Special Projects carry forward
Any projects commenced in year 2023 and not completed by December 31, 2023 will be carried forward and added to Budget 2023 (i.e. both the funding and the expense will be added to Budget 2023 and therefore these adjustments will have no impact on the breakeven net result).
- (c) Water Control Structures Major Maintenance Expenditures
A final determination of the amount of spending to be added to the Budget 2024 (i.e. unspent amounts from 2023, new projects) will be made, including use of reserves for 2024 projects. Any decisions to increase spending should not impact the general municipal apportionment request but would be funded with reserves, WECI funding, and/or new funding sources, as applicable.
- (d) Conservation Area Revenue and Expenses
Final revenue, operating, and capital expense figures are to be determined following the year-end actuals review.
- (e) Environmental Education
Final revenue and operating expense figures are to be determined following further information on program delivery developments.

The following are attached:

- Attachment A: Budget 2024 Timetable
- Attachment B: Budget 2024 Program and Services Inventory
- Attachment C: Budget 2024 Municipal Funding Breakdown
- Attachment D: Budget 2024 Summary of Municipal Apportionment
- Attachment E: Budget 2024 Summary of Reserves
- Attachment F: Budget 2024 Category 2 - Watershed Services Program breakdown
- Attachment G: Statement of Operations & Detailed Program and Services Statements

Financial Implications:

Budgeted spending for 2024 is \$34,442,188 (2023: \$33,279,188) which includes transfers of \$116,500 to reserves. This first draft of the budget includes a municipal general levy increase of \$324,000 (or 2.5%).

The main budgetary challenges faced by the GRCA are:

- Cost pressures created by the economic environment including inflation, supply chain issues, and labour force shortages.
- Conservation Area operating revenue is impacted by fluctuations in consumer demand and weather conditions which are difficult to predict.
- An aging infrastructure in the Conservation Areas and aging Nature Centre facilities.
- Increased demands on managing passive lands (i.e. land use decisions, hazard tree management, trespassing, infrastructure).
- Keeping pace with digital innovation and technological advancements.
- Meeting new regulation reporting requirements (Conservation Area Strategy, etc.)

Other Department Considerations:

None

Prepared by:

Sonja Radoja
Manager of Corporate Services

Approved by:

Samantha Lawson
Chief Administrative Officer

Karen Armstrong
Deputy CAO/Secretary-Treasurer