

# Grand River Conservation Authority

**Report number:** GM-10-24-87

**Date:** October 25, 2024

**To:** Members of the Grand River Conservation Authority

**Subject:** Budget 2025 – Draft #1

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## Recommendation:

THAT Report Number 10-24-87 – Budget 2025 - Draft #1 be approved for consultation purposes, circulated to all participating municipalities, and posted to the GRCA website.

THAT staff be directed to forward correspondence regarding the Minister's direction to freeze planning and regulations user fees to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

## Summary:

This report summarizes the first draft of the 2025 Budget. The final budget for 2025 will be presented for approval at the February 28, 2025 Annual General Meeting. See Budget 2025 Timetable (Appendix A ) for additional details on budget timelines.

Budget 2025-Draft #1 reflects the continuation of programs and services delivered in 2024 and maintains breakeven results. Total draft expenditures for 2025 are \$37,907,688 (2024: \$36,902,214). Preliminary budget financial figures are outlined in Appendix G which includes the Statement of Operations and detailed Program and Services statements. The individual programs and services budgets have been categorized as Operating, Major Maintenance and Equipment, and Special projects.

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

- Municipal Apportionment
- 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 3.5% (or \$465,000) to \$13,757,000 in 2025. For a breakdown of municipal funding by Category 1, 2, and general operating expenses see Appendix C "Budget 2025 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.

Appendix 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 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) funding requests by participating municipalities.

**TABLE A -BUDGET 2025 EXPENDITURES**

	<b>2025</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>Increase/(decrease)</b>
<b><u>EXPENDITURES</u></b>			
Operating Expenses	\$30,904,688	\$30,098,214	\$806,474
Capital Expenses	\$6,053,000	\$4,674,000	\$1,379,000
Special Projects	\$950,000	\$2,130,000	(\$1,180,000)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$37,907,688</b>	<b>\$36,902,214</b>	<b>\$1,005,474</b>

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 Jan 1, 2024**

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* 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 Appendix A – Budget 2025 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 2025 budget assumes the same level of program and service delivery as provided in 2024. Any exceptions to specific program areas are included in the commentary below as applicable.

(a) Resource Planning

- Resource Planning fee revenue declined in 2024 and therefore this draft of the budget reduced revenue by \$70,000.
- Compensation and benefits costs reduced by \$70,000 to recognize vacancy, rate savings which have occurred historically.

(b) Residential Property Rental Program

- The Residential Property Rental Program is in the process of winding down. The budgeted 2025 revenue of \$115,000 assumes no decrease in occupancy during 2025.
- The budgeted net result for this program is a \$28,000 surplus.

(c) Outdoor Environmental Education

- Negotiations with school boards for 2024/25 contracts have been completed. The first draft of the budget assumes that 2024/25 school contracts will be extended for the 2025/26 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 2025 budgeted revenue of \$11,200,000 is approximately \$1,000,000 less than projected revenue of \$12,200,000 for 2024.
- Operating expenses have been increased by \$500,000.
- 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. These expenses have been increased by \$34,000 (from \$510,000 to \$544,000)
- 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 2024 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 \$100,000 due to higher interest being earned on cash balances.

(f) Section 39 Funding

- It is assumed that there will no cutbacks in the provincial Section 39 grant for the period April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026 and therefore the Section 39 grant amount is anticipated to remain at \$449,688.

(g) Municipal Apportionment Funding

- The 2025 Budget includes \$12,705,000 of funding for Category 1 Mandatory Programs and General Operating Expenses along with \$1,052,000 for Category 2 MOU Programs for a total of \$13,757,000 which is a \$465,000 (or 3.5%) increase over the 2024 Apportionment of \$13,292,000.

(h) Surplus Assumption

- The draft budget assumes a \$100,000 surplus carry forward from 2024. If additional surplus is applicable, staff will recommend that it be incorporated in the final budget and primarily 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, 2023, the reserve balance is approximately \$2.6 million.
- The strategy for Budget 2025 draft #1 is to utilize the transition reserve to fund one staff position (\$100,000) and to fund the Outdoor Environmental Education program deficit (\$353,000).

(j) Compensation and Benefits and Staffing:

- The 2025 draft budget includes a 5% increase for compensation and benefits which allows for a general wage increase, grid steps within wage scales, market adjustments, and benefit cost increases. One finance position has been eliminated from the budget. One administrative position is being added to the budget.

(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. The GRCA has a contract for the period April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2027 (3 years). The 2025 budget reflects spending requirements in accordance with the contract.

## C. CAPITAL & MAJOR MAINTENANCE BUDGET

(a) Major Maintenance Spending Water Control Structures

- The budget is set at \$3,000,000. Any increases in spending required can be funded with the Water Control Structures reserve and/or the Land Sale Proceeds reserve. Government funding included in budget 2025 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 \$1,500,000 of fee revenue and \$500,000 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 \$429,000 for Information Systems and \$324,000 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 Appendix 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 \$950,000 in spending. By the time the 2025 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 \$950,000 in special projects included in this draft budget are:

- \$800,000 Rural Water Quality Capital Grants
- \$45,000 Brant/Brantford Children's Water Festival
- \$35,000 Mill Creek Rangers Project
- \$70,000 Species at Risk

(d) New Guelph Lake Nature Centre Building

This project is anticipated to be completed by end of 2024. The final budget draft may incorporate costs if the project is not completed. Funding will be provided by donations and may potentially require the use of GRCA reserves.

## **E. RESERVES**

For 2025, reserves are budgeted to decrease by \$826,500. Significant budgeted drawdowns to reserves include: \$750,000 for Water Control Major Maintenance projects, \$500,000 for Conservation Area capital projects, \$353,000 to fund the Environmental Education deficit, \$270,000 to fund two staff positions, \$429,000 for Information Systems, and \$324,000 for Motor Pool. See Appendix E 'Summary of Reserves' for details of reserve movements budgeted for 2025. Interest income of \$2,050,000 is expected to be transferred into reserves. 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. The Programs & Services Inventory expenditures includes \$66,500 in transfer of Hydro revenue to the capital reserve (Appendix B).

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 22, 2024 meeting.

## **F. CATEGORY 2 – WATERSHED SERVICES**

The programs and services included under watershed services are:

- Subwatershed Studies
- Conservation Services
- Water Quality
- Water Quality - Wastewater Optimization Program
- Water Quality - Groundwater Resources
- Watershed Sciences and Collaborative Planning

See Appendix F 'Budget 2025 Category 2 - Watershed Services Program Breakdown'

All participating municipalities entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the GRCA to provide the above listed services.

## **G. MUNICIPAL APPORTIONMENT**

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 Appendix D 'Budget 2025 Summary of Municipal Apportionment' for details.

The methodology for calculating the MCVA and distributing apportionment is outlined *in O. Reg. 402/22 Section (7)*. Five-year agreements with participating municipalities for Category

2 programs and services outline that net costs be allocated same as Category 1, namely, the MCVA method.

### **OTHER MAJOR ASSUMPTIONS**

- (a) Cottage Lot Rental Program revenue increased by 2.0%.
- (b) Total Insurance expense increased by 5% or \$35,000 to reflect 2024 rate increases and projected 2025 rate increases.
- (c) Total Property Tax expense increased 3% or \$15,000.
- (d) Administrative expense related to computer charge-out rates increased 7% or \$100,000
- (e) Other Operating expenses increased between 0% and 3% as applicable.
- (f) Motor Pool charge-out rates held constant.

### **H. SIGNIFICANT OUTSTANDING BUDGET ITEMS**

- (a) Year 2024 Carry forward Adjustments  
2024 Surplus carry forward - this draft of the 2025 Budget assumes a \$100,000 surplus carryover from year 2024. The actual "2024 Net Surplus" will be incorporated into the 2025 budget.
- (b) 2024 Special Projects carry forward  
Any projects commenced in year 2024 and not completed by December 31, 2024 will be carried forward and added to Budget 2025 (i.e. both the funding and the expense will be added to Budget 2025 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 2025 (i.e. unspent amounts from 2024, new projects) will be made, including use of reserves for 2025 projects. Any decisions to increase spending should not impact the general municipal apportionment request but would be funded with reserves, WECl 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) Outdoor Environmental Education  
Final revenue and operating expense figures are to be determined following further information on program delivery developments.

The following are attached:

- Appendix A: Budget 2025 Timetable
- Appendix B: Budget 2025 Program and Services Inventory
- Appendix C: Budget 2025 Municipal Funding Breakdown
- Appendix D: Budget 2025 Summary of Municipal Apportionment
- Appendix E: Budget 2025 Summary of Reserves
- Appendix F: Budget 2025 Category 2 - Watershed Services Program breakdown
- Appendix G: Statement of Operations & Detailed Programs and Services Statements

## **Financial Implications:**

Budgeted spending for 2025 is \$37,857,688 (2024: \$36,902,214) before transfer of \$66,500 to reserves. This first draft of the budget includes a municipal apportionment (levy) increase of \$465,000 (or 3.5%).

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.
- Aging infrastructure in the Conservation Areas and 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.

## **Other Department Considerations:**

None

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