



Budget Questions & Answers

As part of the City of Stratford's 2022 budget process, we received a number of questions and suggestions from citizens regarding the budget in general, as well as about specific municipal programs, services and projects.

We have summarized those questions and comments below, and provided responses to each.

Q. Why were there so many capital projects put forward, especially when the City can't afford these things?

A. Capital projects are ones that involve assets like roads, bridges, buildings, sewers, vehicles and equipment, and managing those assets is a complex task. Each asset or capital project relates to and directly affects a service that the City provides, either now, or in the future.

The 2022 budget included \$5,325,000 for the Huron Street and Ontario Street reconstruction, for example. These capital projects are necessary upgrades to our road system and underlying infrastructure that will last for many years and ensure good traffic flows through the City.

Properly maintaining these capital assets by keeping them in good repair, or replacing them when necessary, helps to protect against disruptions in the service associated with those assets.

Q. What causes a road project to cost so much?

A. There are many factors that affect the cost of a road project, whether it's a basic asphalt resurfacing, or a complete reconstruction of the roadway and replacement of the sewers and watermain beneath it. Even before construction begins, design work, evaluation of that underground infrastructure and a review of things like accessibility and environmental impacts need to be completed.

And inflation continues to be a significant challenge, as substantial increases in the cost of both materials and labour directly affect the overall price tag for our road projects.

Q. Why do we need so many staff?

A. The City is divided into operational and administrative divisions. Operational divisions are the ones most visible in the community. Snowplow operators, road crews, transit drivers and parks staff are some of the familiar faces. Behind the scenes are those employees who carry out the necessary functions of scheduling, payroll, applying for grants, record-keeping, electronic /internet storage and security, health and safety and other Ministry-mandated items.

Q. Why are wages so high?

A. Wages are driven by the open labour market and reflect the skills required for many of the jobs performed at the City. Many positions require certificated qualifications, skilled training, and ongoing professional development to maintain that knowledge. Some are specialized and some have additional risks associated with them just by their nature.

Q. Times are tough. Why doesn't the City implement wage freezes for staff and Council?

A. Many of the City's employees belong to collective bargaining units or unions, which were historically established to protect worker rights and ensure fair treatment in the workplace. The City works very closely with these unions to ensure that municipal programs and services are delivered effectively, and that employees are treated fairly. Union contracts are negotiated typically to cover rising costs that workers face. When contracts are negotiated, inflationary increases are standard and deemed fair. Not all City positions are unionized. Remuneration for City Councillors and wages for non-unionized staff typically move in tandem with those of unionized staff to ensure fairness to all employees.

Q. How do the library and police services work? Aren't these run separately from the City?

A. The Province has structured Library Services and Police Services a bit differently than other municipal services. These 'departments' are required to have a separate board governance structure, despite being substantially funded from City taxpayers. The 2022 budget includes \$2,640,922 in funding for the Stratford Public Library, which represents just under 4% of the City's overall net tax levy and \$12,097,829 in funding for the Stratford Police Service, which represents about 18%.

Q. Why do we have to pay to support things in other places, like St. Marys or Perth County?

A. The City of Stratford has partnerships with its neighbouring municipalities, including Perth County, its member municipalities, and St. Marys, on some services that are shared among them. Each municipality pays proportionately for those services through a cost-sharing agreement. For example, the City of Stratford provides social services not only to Stratford, but also to Perth County and St. Marys, and receives funding from those municipalities for their share of that service. Similarly, Perth County is responsible for paramedic services, and both Stratford and St. Marys pay proportionately for their share of that service.

Some of this partnering is driven by funding models at the provincial level, and some are voluntary agreements where efficiencies and cost savings are evident.

Q. Tourism should pay for itself. Why is the City spending tax dollars to promote the City?

A. The City has a partnership with Destination Stratford to support tourism as a significant economic driver in our community. Many of the projects initiated by Destination Stratford, including the Lights On displays and Al Fresco Dining, benefit not only visitors but also local residents.

Q. Why does the City even need an airport?

A. The nearest major airport is London International Airport. Airports are intended to provide economic benefits, including enabling local small business owners, contractors, and consultants to travel into and out of the local community for work, and saving valuable time that in turn can be used to conduct business. Further, a local airport can attract large business and major corporations to build local offices, factories, and distribution centers because of the readily accessible air transportation.

Q. What is 'Goose Management' anyway, and why do we need it?

A. The City's Goose Management Plan was approved by City Council in 2016 as a way of managing the local goose population, which causes issues with droppings on pathways, parkland and sports fields, making them undesirable for public use. Geese also cause disruptions to traffic on Lakeside Drive as they occasionally cross the road. The Goose Management Plan includes:

- Curtailing reproduction of the birds through egg oiling
- Public education on why not to feed geese
- Amending the City wildlife feeding by-law to include wildfowl
- Posting signage in the area to advise public of consequences to feeding wildfowl
- Landscape modifications – increased vegetation barriers around the river area and in high priority areas to reduce the attractiveness of the habitat, and
- Creating the illusion of predators in the area

The intent is not to harm the geese, rather to force them to seek alternative locations.

Q. Why do I have to pay for (garbage) bag tags? That's what my taxes are for!

A. Waste collection is a core service provided by cities. The evolution of waste management has resulted in municipalities trying to manage the waste volumes, as well as the increasing costs. Recycling and organics (green bin) programs assist with the diversion of waste from our precious landfill space. The intent behind bag tag fees is two-fold. Those who produce more garbage pay more fees (more garbage = more tags required), similar to other utilities like water or electricity. Bag tag fees are also intended to promote waste reduction, as consumers 'think twice' about creating extra waste to minimize these extra fees.

Q. What does City Hall do with all my tax dollars? All I see are increases!

A. The City works very hard to be accountable and transparent around the use of all dollars it receives from every source. Some services have recoverable or offsetting revenue streams, like grants or user fees, while other services are completely dependent on the tax levy. The City's total budget is \$130 million annually, which is funded approximately 50% from taxation. Some of the services are very visible, such as transit or public works, but others, like financial administration or information technology, are a less visible benefit to taxpayers.

We are happy to discuss any of the City's services if there are particular questions around what we do.