

2023 Budget Information Meeting (in-person)
Tuesday, January 24, 2022, 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
Cedar Room, West Vancouver Community Centre (3rd floor)
11 members of the public in attendance
9 District of West Vancouver staff in attendance
1 Councillor in attendance

Q: On the “money-in” do we have leasing where someone is paying the District? Is that under “other revenue?”

A: Yes, “other revenue” includes lease agreements, for example, the District of West Vancouver (“District”) has lease agreements with The Beach House Restaurant and The Boat Shed Group (The Boat Shed, The Orchard and The Shed). Also, in the “other revenue” category, a large portion comes from investment income. We take our operating cash and invest in different instruments.

Q: Does Park Royal fall under the 3% business tax base? We don’t get taxes from the south side, right?

A: The south side of Park Royal is owned by the Squamish Nation. It is taxed at a class 6 rate. Some is taxed through our taxation process and some is taxed and collected through the service agreement. The District reconciles the expected collection with Squamish Nation and then invoices them for the property taxes.

Q: Did you say tree work on private property? Why?

A: There is educational work that the District does in regards to tree permits. Sometimes residents want to do things to their trees which are not allowed. A permit is required and it is a processing issue and an educational issue. The District is not sending crews onto private property to do work on trees. Currently the District does not have a planting program whereas the District of North Vancouver does and they are becoming quite common.

Q: I had a question about revenue, such as building and development permit fees, you said there is going to be a reduction. Is that based on a projection from last year? Or is that an overall average from year to year? It seems there is a backlog.

A: Each year Finance sits down with Planning Department staff to forecast the numbers. It varies from year to year. In 2022 we had high revenue as a large number of residents applied for permits before the “step code requirement” came into effect. Then almost simultaneously the interest rates started to climb and the housing market started to flatten, so what we anticipate this year is that those with building permits will probably take a while to proceed with their permits. We do not expect there to be many new permits either unless the housing market picks up. Our revenue projection is not an average of prior years, rather it is based on our best forecast of what is going to happen.

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The interest rates will continue to climb to cool off the housing market. Over the past five years, West Vancouver has been mostly reactive. When prices go up, West Vancouver prices and activity tend to go up, and when the prices drop, West Vancouver tends to go down. We do a budget revision in the middle of each year, so we will look at permit revenue performance again.

Q: Over COVID, did you actually lose any employees? I am just wondering as you are going to be hiring more, are they over and above normal complement? Or did you lose some?

A: Different categories of employees had different things happen during COVID. The people in the public safety area and those maintaining the roads and assets were needed, whereas staff working at the Community Centre and the arts facilities were not working as the centres were closed. We did not have a lot of permit activity but we did not want to lose any of our planners. In the IT area, we did not have anyone leave because of COVID. But there is a general phenomenon of people changing jobs and looking for new career paths. There is a staffing summary which is in the budget materials which gives you all of the figures behind what I'm saying (page 11, of the Preliminary Financial Plan 2023 (proposed budget) which is on the 2023 budget page: <https://www.westvancouverite.ca/budget>.

<https://westvancouver.ca/sites/default/files/dwv/westvancouverite/budget/2023%20budget/230117-proposed-budget-book-2023-final-draft.pdf>

Q: How often does the municipality go through labour contracts?

A: It depends on the contract. Sometimes a contract is only for one year, sometimes it is a three-year contract, in general the contracts run for three years. We have six bargaining units on different contracts. One just settled; some are still under negotiation.

Q: If the building development and permit fees go down by \$528K, do the FTEs then go down? Do you lay staff off?

A: Generally, we do not lose staff. There is a backlog of permits and we need to keep our permits staff to focus on the backlog. We are working on improving the permit procedures. In terms of planning, there are a number of significant planning exercises that council would like to see move forward particularly the Ambleside Local Area Plan.

Q: Is there a voluntary program in place where we have residents of West Van coming to give their services, and would these labour costs then decrease?

A: The District does not have programs where volunteers come and do work. We have volunteers, but they cannot do the same type of work that municipal staff are doing. We cannot have a volunteer life-guard for example because it requires certification and credentials. We cannot have a volunteer member of the police force. Most of the finance staff are certified CPAs. There is a level of expertise required. There are many amazing volunteer groups doing great work in the community but they aren't doing the same type of work as our staff.

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Q: For the “New Program Requests,” it is obviously concerning when the private sector is letting people go. Now what you have under dollar cost, is that the salary? Or is that including the pension and benefits? Are those in line with the private sector?

A: The costs include the salary and all the benefits, taxes and training, memberships, and professional designations. The salaries are benchmarked against the private sector. We also benchmark across the other municipalities and look at comparable jobs. We are at 60% between the highest and the lowest.

Q: For the Fire Tower truck staffing, is there one person right now? Why aren't the existing staff getting certified?

A: There is a team of certified staff and they rotate, but they need a certain number of qualified staff, and currently there are not enough staff to operate the equipment. They need four at a time to operate the Fire Tower Truck. If the rescue truck is out, the remaining two staff cannot take the tower truck out until two staff return to the Fire Hall.

Q: For the “Aging in Place Program Coordinator,” is this a duplication of what the provincial government does? And do other municipalities have such a position?

A: For the past year, the District of West Vancouver has piloted a temporary Aging in Place Coordinator that supports older adults and their families as they navigate the ageing process. The coordinator provides support in many ways, such as providing access and referrals to services and resources in the community, information on health and wellness, housing choices, and government options. In addition, the coordinator can assist in filling out government forms. This position has played a critical role in helping older adults in our community find and access the information and services they need to be able to remain independent and in creating an age-friendly community.

The Cities of Delta and Maple Ridge and the Municipality of Ridge Meadows have similar full-time roles. The services and support provided by an Aging in Place Coordinator is not a duplication of what the province does. For people who would prefer to stay in their home as long as they can, the coordinator can help them access the appropriate support.

Q: For the fuel management program, it seems like provincial funding is going to cover the shortfall of \$200K so where is the money coming from? Parks?

A: With municipal budgeting, it is not always possible to determine which revenue is funding which expense. Sometimes there are mandates where the province for example gave us a COVID-19 Restart Grant but was specific as to how we could spend it. We have a list as to how we spent that money.

Q: There is a concern that money is coming out of Parks to pay for this.

A: It would not be money coming from the Parks budget. It is established and the Seniors' budget is established. They must balance on the revenue side. It is not reasonable to say that we had reduced something on the Parks side to fund this.

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Q: Could we use the new parking fees (if we are going to be having this) from the parks to fund this?

A: That is something that council is considering and it has been discussed that it would be useful if those funds were dedicated to the parks. If the District is given a mandate, then that would direct where those funds would be used. We have areas like the cemetery which has a stand-alone fund, all the funding from sales there must be dedicated to the maintenance of the cemetery. It is provincial regulations that say that all the funding earned from sales of the cemetery must stay and be devoted to the maintenance of the cemetery. A similar kind of thing could be set up so that all the net parking revenues went to parks maintenance.

Q: Is it possible that our Squamish neighbours help with any of the fees, in this case 13% of the budget for the proposed Indigenous Relations Manager position?

A: This is a proposed investment on the District's side to reach out and engage with our First Nations partners in a more meaningful way than has been done in the past. It is about how the District invests in the relationship.

Q: What is the ratio of District staff to number of residents of West Van versus Greater Vancouver municipalities?

A: I have done some comparisons to the City of North Vancouver. But there are issues with making these types of comparisons. For example, the District of North Vancouver (DNV) and the City of North Vancouver (CNV) have some shared services such as a shared police department and they also have a shared recreation department. Recreation employees are not counted as city employees, they are counted as recreation position employees. It is hard to compare this. Once I did my analysis, the District came out well. The Blue Bus employees had to be taken out of the analysis as everyone else is getting TransLink. It is very comparable. There are fewer people in the District versus the City. But the CNV is up over 55,000. The District is around 42,000 to 45,000. It is not about the number of people who live here. We would still have to provide the same level of services such as plowing the roads, providing safety, and covering the large area of West Vancouver. If we were to cut costs in the municipality, it would have effects on the services provided for the community such as by the West Vancouver Community Centre. It would help if we could increase the population.

Q: When you are converting from a gas power to electric, is it done "just because" or at the end of life of the gas car?

A: It is end of life, so when a car cannot be repaired, then an electric vehicle is replacing it. We are going through a "refresh program" so as it comes up, we replace the gas vehicle with an electrical vehicle.

Q: What is the environmental community outreach program? What would that be, please give me an example. Do they apply for funding?

A: This is to provide support to the many environmental interest groups, such as the West Vancouver Streamkeeper Society and the Howe Sound Biosphere Group, which

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are doing good work in the community. Those are some of the groups that we would look at funding through the Environmental Levy. If we would get a formal tree-planting program, people could apply for that. The main thing that we are doing is an environmental strategy based on lowering greenhouse gas (GHG), looking at where they come from and what kinds of things, we have to do our GHG emissions. We are moving towards a carbon budget. Some other municipalities are doing this in Canada, like Edmonton. There will be all sorts of programs that come out of this.

Q: Will this be on the website?

A: Yes, this will be on the website, but its about getting others to act as agents of change, to be a climate leader. How do we make this change? We are all learning together.

Q: A few years ago, there was damage to the Ambleside Seawall area and I think it was part of the 2022 budget. How does the city handle storm damages in general?

A: The District was fortunate that most of that damage was insured through our MIABC (Municipal Insurance Association of British Columbia) insurance policy and through the province there was disaster funding. We worked with the City of Vancouver as well as working with our own insurers. It is not easy to repair a pier, there had to be structural work and engineering reports. We hope to open the pier this summer. We also have a self-insurance plan; I call it a “weather-related incident reserve;” we know that there will be other storms. As well as heat domes, atmospheric rivers, windstorms, and other environmental issues. This is not added into the base budget. It is a contingency account, like a savings account. When these events happen again, it will help us be ready.

Q: Last year council put a hold on the e-bike program and what happened to that money?

A: It was originally funded from the Environmental Levy and so the money has gone back into the Environmental Reserve. Council made suggestions about other things that could be done such as log removal.

Q: What about the repair of the Capilano Pacific Trail?

A: That is an engineering challenge with seismic issues and the trail is very unstable. The District is aware that it is an extremely popular trail and we are looking at what measures we can take to make it safe. There are reports on the website: <https://westvancouver.ca/parks-recreation/recreation-facilities/capilano-pacific-trail>

Q: If the budget is increased by 4.75% then our taxes will go up by 4.75%?

A: That is correct overall. However, if your property assessment goes up more than the average, that also affects your taxes, because assessment shifts cause taxes to shift.

Q: At last night’s council meeting (January 23, 2023), the Mayor said council will start looking at the budget in detail. Councillor Thompson is here to confirm. Do you perceive

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much of this changing based on the fact that council has not had the time to delve into this?

A: It is up to council. This is staff's presentation and compilation of our best estimates of the requirements that we need to move forward. It is council's decision to decide what they want to move forward with and whether they wish to support this. Discussions on the asset levy, the environmental levy and the department requests will be discussed. We have provided council with the background for each one of these requests, what services are affected if the proposed 2023 budget is supported, what services are affected if it is not.

Q: So, at the February 27 council meeting we will see the result of what council has decided?

A: They will hopefully have had an opportunity to resolve any budget questions.

A: Typically, council comes back with a further process (Councillor Thompson's response).

Q: What about the First Nations? Where does that fit into here? Are they paying for the services from the District? How does that work? Is that in here?

A: The District provides various services to the Squamish Nation including police; fire and rescue; garbage collection; business licensing; and permits and inspection services. Each year the District receives payment from Squamish Nation for the provision of services, amounting to \$2.6M in 2022.

Q: Does the policing services include Park Royal?

A: It includes the Capilano reserve, almost to Norgate in North Vancouver where Staples is located and covers Park Royal.

Q: And the Fire & Rescue department? Is there a service agreement?

A: Yes, they have a similar service agreement. There are discussions that the service agreement will be updated and that will be part of the work by the proposed Indigenous Relations Manager position.

Q: In the past you made some sort of assessments on whether or not adding an FTE position would either pay for itself or add to District revenues. Does that come at a later process?

A: The FTEs we are asking for in this budget are not cost recoverable; if they were, we would have indicated that. In past budgets there have been cases where some of the proposed FTEs were cost recoverable. On the staffing chart in the budget book, we indicate which positions are cost recovered and which are not.

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