

Full Authority
21 September 2023
Agenda Item: 10

2024 Draft Budget Deliberations

Staff will focus on developing a draft budget for 2024 based primarily on 1) inflation, 2) addressing capacity, 3) reflecting changes as per Ontario Regulation 686/23 and 3) capital issues. Staff have identified the following primary items affecting the budget for the Board's consideration and review.

Operational Considerations

Staffing

In 2023, permits, property inquiries, planning (severances, by-law amendments, minor variances), general inquiries, violations and planning hearings have stabilized at approximately the same level as the 2022 peak. With no further increase in the overall numbers coupled with the changes implemented by staff this year, there was a positive impact on the regulations and planning service's turnaround times.

One of the changes included adding Liam Bailey-McDade to the regulations department. His contributions were immediately noticed as his role grew to include processing property inquiry submissions, becoming a first point of contact for applications, conducts site inspections and backfills for Lou Young's position. His other roles and responsibilities also includes assisting Andrew McIntyre with Source Water Protection, conducts dam operations as required and completes occasional administrative tasks as assigned. Liam was originally hired as an additional field technician.

Although changes were made this year to alleviate the backlog from prior years, there are key items which will still need to be addressed. These include, but are not limited to the broader supporting resources to make the regulation and planning program as efficient as possible. For example, there are deficiencies with our mapping "tools" which can only be supported by a GIS technician. As well, a dedicated staff member to address the growing number of violations would free up staff time to devote to the permitting process.

Staff grid level changes will also need to be considered during the In Camera session.

Administration

There are a number of administrative deliverables for the CVCA as a result of updates to the Conservation Authorities Act and the new Ontario Regulation, 686/21 which came into effect on the 1st of January 2023. This will strain CVCA staffing resources as we do not dedicated staff for these

tasks. Many other conservation authorities larger than the CVCA are either hiring staff or outsourcing the work to complete the list of deliverables identified in the General Manager's Report.

Like all conservation authorities, the CVCA must now slot our services and programs into three categories as defined by the Ontario government. By doing so, this will identify which programs and services are mandatory or non-mandatory and how they will be funded.

From the CVCA perspective, there are virtually no changes since our programs and services are very limited and fall into Category 1 which must be funded by the municipalities (or other sources of income). This includes primarily the water and land management activities such as our dams, flood forecasting and warning, and our regulation program. Also included is the conservation and management of CVCA owned property and the CVCA's Source Water Protection duties and responsibilities as per the Clean Water Act.

This categorization of the services and programs will mean a slight adjustment of how it is presented on our budget since the Category 2 and 3 items will need to be separated from Category 1 items. The intent is to ensure the member municipalities and the public know and understand how these programs and services are funded. Essentially, it supports transparency in the budgeting process.

In addition to the foregoing, staff recommend beginning the process of digitization office records and investigate the possibility of moving toward a digital filing system.

Cost of Living

The CVCA Board has recognized including the cost of living each year is as an important aspect of the CVCA budgetary process. By addressing COLA in each budget for the past number of years, this has virtually eliminated the need for a significant increase to occur in any one given year. This year, the monthly Consumer Price Index (CPI) average to the end of July is 4.18%.

Capital Considerations

During the 2022 budget deliberations, staff brought forward a request to purchase a new vehicle to replace the 2009 Versa. In order to keep the overall levy increase within an acceptable range, the purchase was deferred.

The Versa is essentially our "utility" vehicle which enables staff to perform a number of different tasks. It is primarily used for site inspections for permits, planning and property inquiries. As well, staff use it as a secondary vehicle for stop log adjustments, monitoring programs, Source Water Protection meetings, administrative functions, students and as a backup when either of the other two vehicles are being repaired or maintained.

As noted in the General Manager's report, the CVCA's gator was stolen. An insurance claim has been submitted to the CVCA's insurer, Marsh Canada. Staff will provide additional details regarding insurance coverage after the meeting with the insurance adjuster on the 18th of September.

The gator is an integral part of our operations as well. Staff use it for trail clearing and jobs around our properties (McGeachie Conservation Area in particular). The gator provides staff the ability to access our dam at Wollaston especially at times when conditions are poor in late winter/early spring, which corresponds to the time of year when stop log operations are critical during the spring freshet.

Replacing the gator with a similar utility vehicle is vital.

For the regulations department, accessing properties that are more remote or violation issues, a small boat and motor would prove beneficial. There have been a number of people who have submitted complaints regarding violations in the watershed.

CVCA staff have limited options to access properties if it is a violation and the property owner refuses access onto their property. Therefore, the CVCA staff often try to determine if there is a violation from the road. However, this is very limited as to what can be viewed, especially if it is a shoreline violation. Therefore, a viewing "platform" from the waterside is and may 1) save harmful impacts on the environment if the violation process can be initiated sooner rather than later, 2) reduce potential remediation expenses for the landowner and 3) enable CVCA staff to assess and process the violation expeditiously.

Water and Erosion Control Infrastructure projects could include the purchase of booms and dam safety assessment updates for CVCA owned dams, which would provide the foundation for the dam infrastructure component of the Asset Management Plan requirements identified by the Province.

Board Discussion

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