

Budget Speech 2023

As your councillor and member of the Administration and Finance Committee, it is my pleasure to present the 2023 Budget on behalf of Council. This is the second budget for this Council and we aim to deliver a fair and responsible approach to the year ahead.

As a municipality, we have not been immune to the significant inflation-based cost increases seen over the course of the past year in our province and country, and the price to deliver Town services across the board has been impacted by these rising costs. As such, in 2023 the mill rate for property tax will increase from 6.5 and 7.0. This is the first mill rate increase for the Town of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's since 2015. The early payment discount has been removed, a practice which almost all other municipalities in the region had previously eliminated. Water and sewer fees are increasing for both residential and commercial users. These water and sewer cost increases reflect the true cost for providing these services and produce a user-pay model, where only those who have access to town water and sewer will pay for the cost to provide it, and a subsidy budget allotment divided amongst all taxpayers will not be required. These changes are some of the many reasons we have been able to keep the mill rate increase to just 0.5 mills and throughout the year ahead, our team of dedicated staff will continue to work to find savings and leverage grant funding to ensure the best possible use of all our taxpayers' dollars.

While engaging residents for input on this year's town budget, concurrently we also sought input from residents, stakeholders, businesses, and community groups for our Strategic Plan outlining the next five years in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's. This Strategic Plan has been developed to assist Town Council and staff in our decision making and budgeting, as we endeavor to meet the needs of residents within the limits of available fiscal and human resources. In order to discover the priorities outlined within the plan, we wanted to hear from as many residents as possible. Our vigorous public consultations this fall included in-person meetings, presentations from local groups, key stakeholder sessions, online feedback forums, and a community-wide survey with over 400 responses. We were very pleased to see such a high level of public engagement and this valuable information helps council in our goal to work collaboratively and deliver the programming and services that best reflect our residents' desires. On behalf of council, I want to thank all those who took the time to help shape the future of our community by contributing to the budget consultation and strategic planning process this year.

Earlier in tonight's meeting, we heard a high-level overview from the project consultants for our Strategic Plan. As you can see, this year's budget was designed by listening to the community's priorities and it implements strategic investments in those areas that the community prioritized. Enhancing our recreation assets was a key priority that residents requested through the Strategic Plan, and as such our 2023 budget will include financial support for the early stages of developing of our new Town Recreation Lifestyle Centre, installing solar lighting in Voisey's Brook Park to enhance evening walkability, developing community trails based on our new Trails Master Plan, and construction of a splash pad at Rainbow Gully Park.

In addition to recreation, the community expressed a desire for continued and enhanced public safety and public works infrastructure. As such, the 2023 budget includes significant investments in road upgrades, a focus on new public safety measures, water and wastewater infrastructure, and continued support for our fire and emergency services. Some of our other key areas for investment next year include the implementation of a community composting initiative, announcing a new town scholarship for a local graduating high school student entering post-secondary studies, delivering a range of environmental projects, local heritage preservation, inclusion and accessibility, and support for our business and arts community. Following the public presentation and consultations regarding the draft budget in late November, we heard feedback from our local Partner for the Arts – PCSP Arts Association and their supporters. To better align with their request for further support for the arts community in our town, council has allotted an additional \$5000 for arts in the 2023 budget and we hope this increase will allow the Partners for the Arts to realize their goals for the year ahead.

Despite the ongoing challenges we face, council is proposing this budget that we believe will position the town positively for the year ahead and for the future, while being fair to residents and reflecting the community's vision. This budget marks the beginning of strategic and fiscally responsible investments in our five-year plan. We thank all those who played a role in shaping this year's budget. I look forward to seeing many exciting projects come to fruition throughout the course of the next year and the years ahead too as we work to implement the priorities we heard from the people of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's. Thank you.