



Staff Report

Corporate & Financial Services

Report To: COW- Admin, Corp and Finance, SI, Comm. Services
Meeting Date: May 26, 2025
Report Number: CFS.25.020
Title: Budget Working Group Terms of Reference and 2026 Budget Timeline
Prepared by: Monica Quinlan, Director of Corporate & Financial Services;
Mike Switzer, Deputy Treasurer/Manager of Budgets & Accounting

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report CFS.25.020, entitled "Budget Working Group Terms of Reference and 2026 Budget Timeline";

AND THAT Council endorse the timeline for the 2026 Budget;

AND THAT Council endorse the Terms of Reference for the Budget Working Group;

AND FINALLY THAT Council provide direction on the structure of the 2026 Budget Book that will include at a minimum the items listed in Staff Report CFS.25.020.

B. Overview

The purpose of this report is to present the updated Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Budget Working Group and to outline the proposed timeline for the development and adoption of the 2026 Budget. In addition, staff are seeking Council's input on the preferred content, format, and presentation elements to be included in the 2026 Budget Book.

C. Background

The Town's annual budget is a key instrument for allocating resources, delivering municipal services, and advancing Council's strategic objectives. In recent years, there has been growing interest in improving the way financial information is communicated—both to Council and to the public—through clearer layouts and enhanced visuals.

In 2023, a Budget Working Group was established to support the development of the 2024 Budget Book, with a focus on format, content, and presentation improvements. Feedback from that group contributed to a more accessible and informative document. As the previous TOR spoke specifically to the 2024 Budget, Staff have prepared an updated TOR for Council's consideration should the working group continue for the 2026 Budget process.

The 2026 Budget cycle also marks a significant change for the Town, as it will be the first year the budget is targeted for approval prior to the end of the calendar year. To support this revised timeline and enhance Council engagement, staff are also seeking direction on the desired structure of the 2026 Budget Book.

D. Analysis

Budget Timeline

The 2026 Budget process represents a significant milestone for the Town, as it will be the first time a budget is targeted for approval prior to the end of the calendar year. This shift aligns with best practices in long-term financial planning and enables earlier implementation of Council's strategic priorities, operational planning, and capital project delivery. To support this accelerated schedule, the proposed timeline includes earlier internal review, departmental submissions, and opportunities for Council engagement. While this timeline provides a structured framework to support early planning and engagement, it is understood that some flexibility may be required to accommodate emerging priorities.

DATE	DESCRIPTION
May 27 th , 2025	Finance to release all Operating and Capital Working Papers to Divisional Managers and Directors to begin working on including the Fees and Charges working papers.
Weeks of June 9 th & 16 th , 2025	Touching base meetings with Finance Budget Team (FBT) to see how budget building is progressing.
July 1 st , 2025	All working papers to be completed and submitted to FBT.
July 14 th to August 4 th , 2025	CAO/Director/Manager/FBT Meetings to commence. We will go over operating and capital budgets which include reviewing fees and charges that were submitted. As well as reviewing any business cases for additions to the budget.
August 25 th , 2025	FBT to submit documents to the Communications Team for the formalized budget book to be created.
September 15 th , 2025	Communications to submit Draft Budget Book to FBT for review. FBT to distribute to SMT/SAM for review.
September 19 th , 2025	SMT/SAM review to be completed. Any notes or changes to be submitted to FBT for changes.
September 26 th , 2025	Draft Budget Book released to Council.
October 3 rd , 2025	Draft Budget Book published to the Public.
October 14 th to 17 th , 2025	Special COW Budget Meetings to consider Draft Budget.
October 20 th , 2025	Council reviews recommendations from Special COW Budget Meetings and provides direction to proceed to the Public Meeting.
November 10 th , 2025	Public Meeting to receive comments on the Draft Budget.
November 17 th , 2025	COW - Report to COW summarizing comments received at Public Meeting and provide recommendations to Council.
December 1 st , 2025	Formal passing of the 2026 Budget/Rates & Fees.

Budget Working Group

The Budget Working Group will play a key role in refining how budget information is presented—helping to ensure that the budget document is accessible, informative, and aligned with Council’s expectations.

The updated TOR frames the Working Group as a collaborative forum focused on reviewing and enhancing the presentation of financial data, including layout of the budget workbook, visuals, and trend analysis. Additionally, it notes that the Working Group will only make recommendations with respect to the format and presentation of the budget book and not vote on matters related to the budget itself.

At the December 6th, 2024 Special Meeting of Council the group is to meet bi-monthly, however staff have proposed that those meetings be included at appropriate timing to align with the 2026 budget development schedule. It is included in the terms of reference as follows:

“The Working Group will meet up to six (6) times between March and September 2025, or at the call of the Chair, to align with the 2026 budget development schedule.”

Noting that the number of meetings still aligns with the resolution and only the timing has been suggested differently. The updated Terms of Reference are included as Attachment 1.

The 2026 Budget Book

Staff are also seeking direction from Council on the type of information and presentation improvements they would like to see incorporated in the 2026 Budget Book. This feedback will directly inform the work of the Budget Working Group and support the development of a more engaging and transparent budget document.

To support Council’s review of the 2026 Budget, staff will be preparing a revised Budget Book that includes at a minimum the following:

- Executive Summary;
- A clear explanation of changes from the 2025 to 2026 tax year, and an overview of the resulting tax impacts;
- Highlights of major accomplishments from the prior year, including gained efficiencies or improvements by division;
- An outline of planned initiatives for 2026;
- Staff will continue to include the language surrounding the KPMG report with a look at Core vs Non-core in the context of the Must-do; Should-do and Nice-to-do services; and
- Capital Projects Listing with approved dates.

The presentation will continue to be structured around key changes and strategic themes, rather than detailed departmental breakdowns. While high-level information on each service area will be provided, staff respectfully request that where possible detailed questions are provided in advance. This will help ensure that staff can provide complete and well-prepared

responses. Of course, staff will remain available to address additional questions that may arise during the meeting.

E. Strategic Priorities

1. Communication and Engagement

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders

2. Organizational Excellence

We will continually seek out ways to improve the internal organization of Town Staff and the management of Town assets.

3. Community

We will protect and enhance the community feel and the character of the Town, while ensuring the responsible use of resources and restoration of nature.

4. Quality of Life

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

F. Environmental Impacts

N/A

G. Financial Impacts

N/A

H. In Consultation With

Vicky Bouwman, Asset Management Specialist

I. Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has not been the subject of a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre as neither a Public Meeting nor a Public Information Centre are required. However, any comments regarding this report should be submitted to Monica Quinlan, Director of Corporate & Financial Services directorcfs@thebluemountains.ca.

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J. Attached

1. 2026 Proposed Budget Internal Working Group – Terms of Reference

Respectfully submitted,

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Michael Switzer,
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For more information, please contact:
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