



## Revenue, Tax, Budget and Financial Sustainability Policies & Objectives

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### 1. PROPERTY TAX REVENUE and TAX RATIOS

#### Background

Property taxes account for approximately 49% of the Township of Esquimalt's (Township's) revenue (excluding unconditional or non-reoccurring grants and transfers from own sources) and provide a stable and consistent source of funding for many services that are either difficult or undesirable to fund on a user-pay basis. Property taxes are more predictable than other revenue sources, resulting in less likelihood of a shortfall relative to other budgeted revenue.

Payments In Lieu of taxes provided by CFB Esquimalt accounts for the Township's second largest revenue source, at approximately 36%.

The Township's distribution of taxes among the property classes is typical, where the residential class is proportionately the largest of the total tax base at approximately 78%. Properties in the business class provide the second largest portion of the tax base at approximately 16%. The major industry, light industry, and recreation/non-profit classes provide the remaining 6% of the tax base.

The Township's tax rates appear high in comparison to other municipalities in the Capital Regional District, primarily because the Township provides its own police, fire, recreation and library services, while these services are either cost-shared or provided on a volunteer basis by other municipalities. Additionally, the Township has a limited retail base and comparably lower assessed values than other municipalities. Consequently, the Township must fund higher costs through fewer sources than other municipalities which results in higher tax rates.

Reducing taxes can be performed by (i) lowering overall costs, (ii) increasing revenue from sources other than property taxes, (iii) increasing the number of tax payers or (iv) from a combination of these measures. Council is constrained in its ability to shift the tax burden as a means of driving change in the community. Shifting the burden of one property tax class to drive new initiatives will result in higher tax rates applied against the other classes.

Consequently, the tax burden may only be shifted over time by looking to new initiatives that increase non-tax revenues and the tax base.

#### Objectives

- 1.1 Distribute property tax increases equitably among the classes of property.
- 1.2 Increase the percentage of revenue from sources other than property value taxes over time by considering:
  - (a) new initiatives that increase the tax base and facilitate shifting tax ratios without increasing the residential tax burden; and
  - (b) the impact of a 'Downtown Revitalization' bylaw to stimulate development in the downtown core and adjust the tax base provided by Class 6
- 1.3 Consider implementing property tax strategies or incentives that promote economic development within the community.

**Policies**

- 1.4 Consider the annual property tax increase required to cover the projected cost of the existing service levels as well as any new or enhanced services.
- 1.5 Adjust the tax rate ratios each year to maintain stability while ensuring the tax rate is reflective of both market and non-market changes.
- 1.6 Set annual property tax rates after considering significant new growth or loss of assessment in each property class.
- 1.7 Use the property tax levy and payments in lieu of taxes to balance the budget each year after reviewing the potential for sustainable revenue from all other sources.
- 1.8 Mitigate the impact on property taxes by researching non-property tax revenue sources whenever possible, applying for government grants, charging appropriate user fees and developing strategic alliances, partnerships and shared project funding to reduce costs of service delivery.

**2. PERMISSIVE TAX EXEMPTIONS****Background**

The Township will continue to support local not-for-profit organizations who qualify for permissive tax exemptions on their merits and under Section 224 of the Community Charter.

**Objectives**

- 2.1 Continue to consider granting permissive tax exemptions which promote social benefit to the community; and
- 2.2 Consider implementing permissive tax exemptions that promote economic development within the community.

**Policies**

- 2.3 Continue to grant permissive tax exemptions to agencies and organizations that:
  - 2.3.1 provide benefits to the Township and its residents;
  - 2.3.2 qualify under the legislation and any formal policy adopted by Council.
- 2.4 Review permissive tax exemptions in conjunction with other financial support provided by the Township to ensure funding is reasonable and appropriate.
- 2.5 Continue to review and update the existing evaluation criteria to ensure the Township is receiving benefits from organizations that receive tax exemptions.

**3. GROWTH AND REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES****Background**

Growth, improvement and forward thinking are necessary to maintain a desirable and healthy community. A desirable environment will also attract new and retain existing business and thus add to the tax base and achieve the goal of reducing property taxes. The Township will continue to explore opportunities and seek to employ strategies which will assist in furthering this goal.

**Objectives**

- 3.1 To stimulate and reinforce development initiatives in locations where such uses are permitted.

**Policies**

- 3.2 Review and consider the provision of permissive exemptions for revitalization, beautification and heritage tax exemptions that are consistent with the social, economic and environmental objectives of the community.
- 3.3 Revise or coordinate economic development, revitalization and heritage plans to determine where opportunities for permissive tax exemptions may exist.

**4. PARCEL TAX REVENUE**

There are no parcel tax levies in use by the Township of Esquimalt.

**5. FEES AND CHARGES****Background**

Fees and charges account for 13% of the Township's revenue. While this revenue source includes revenue generated from licences and permits, the largest component of user fee revenue is generated from recreation programs.

**Objectives**

- 5.1 User fees may be charged for services that are identifiable to specific users, versus levying a general tax to all property owners.
- 5.2 User fees charged for recreation programs are appropriate; and
- 5.3 Other fees, such as fees for licences and permits are:
  - (a) reviewed regularly;
  - (b) comparable within the region; and
  - (c) consistent with the social and economic objectives of the Township.

**Policies**

- 5.4 Review recreation user fees at least annually to ensure that they remain affordable and competitive within the regional market.
- 5.5 Review other fees and charges to ensure the Township is working towards full recovery for the cost of services provided, and the charges are consistent with similar fees within the region.
- 5.6 Fees required to recover the cost of services may be reduced by government grants or transfers allocated to specific programs.

**6. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Long term financial sustainability is important if the Township is to deliver the services and programs expected by the community. It is also important that community assets are maintained as a means to retain and attract vibrant businesses and to ensure that the costs do not become a burden for future rate payers.

With long term financial management as the overall principle, the Township places an emphasis on sustainability through the following objectives:

- ensuring adequate funding for services and infrastructure
- efficient management of expenditures
- operating prudently
- maintaining future reserves
- using debt strategically

## **6.1 INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL ASSET SUSTAINABILITY**

### **Background**

Capital projects are funded through a number of sources including grants, reserves and property tax levies. Once acquired or completed, the costs of maintaining the capital assets are included within the annual operating budget while replacement or improvement costs are requested as part of the capital plan.

### **Objectives**

- 6.1.1 Capital funding provided through the annual budget process will be adequate to maintain the Township's infrastructure and provide for the replenishment of capital assets.
- 6.1.2 Approved capital projects will be monitored to ensure they are completed in a timely manner and they remain within budgetary allocations.
- 6.1.3 A plan will be developed to adequately maintain the capital assets and infrastructure in order to avoid costly failures and, where possible, to economically and effectively extend the asset's life.

### **Policies**

- 6.1.4 To ensure capital funding is adequate:
  - (a) an amount equal to the value of matured debt charges is transferred annually to the Capital Projects Reserve Fund;
  - (b) an amount approximating the sales tax rebates received by the Township is transferred annually to the Capital Projects Reserve Fund;
  - (c) donations and bequests for capital purposes are transferred to the Capital Projects Reserve Fund unless otherwise specified by the donor;
  - (d) the Capital Projects Reserve Fund, and all interest earned upon it, is only used to acquire capital assets.
- 6.1.5 Capital projects and programs not acquired or fully completed during the year they were budgeted may be eligible for carry forward to the next fiscal year. During the creation of the annual capital plan:
  - (a) previously approved capital projects may be carried forward if a project has commenced but has not yet been completed;
  - (b) new capital project requests will be scaled back to accommodate any carry forward requests; and
  - (c) capital projects that have not commenced by the end of the fiscal year will not automatically be carried forward to the following year. These projects must be submitted with all newly proposed projects for assessment during budget discussions.

6.1.6 Capital projects are expected to be completed or acquired within the budgeted allocation however, unforeseen cost overruns do occur. In these instances, formal approval from Council is required except when all of the following conditions have been met:

- (a) The total capital budget for the item or project is less than \$100,000;
- (b) Total expenditures do not exceed 110% of the total approved capital budget for the item or project; and
- (c) The amount, in excess of the budget, can be offset within the same fund by capital assets that were acquired/completed for less than their approved budget allocation; and

6.1.7 Each instance must be reviewed and approved by the CFO

## **6.2 RESERVES**

### **Background**

The Township has various reserve funds which have been established for specific purposes. These funds are developed and maintained to ensure financial obligations with respect to infrastructure, equipment and fiscal requirements are met.

### **Objectives**

6.2.1 Establish and maintain reserves to provide stability to municipal operations and ensure the Township can meet both current fiscal requirements and future obligations.

6.2.2 The budget process and ongoing operations must strive to establish and maintain sufficient funding to achieve the reserve balances set out.

### **Policies**

6.2.3 Strive to ensure the sum of the following balances represents a minimum of 25% of the total revenue required each year (excluding unconditional or non-reoccurring grants and transfers from own sources) by the year 2020:

- Reserve Funds;
- Appropriated for Uncollected Taxes Account;
- Appropriated for Working Capital Account; and
- Unappropriated Surplus Account

## **6.3 DEBT MANAGEMENT**

### **Background**

The maximum amount that can be borrowed by the Township is established through a formula set out within the Community Charter. Debt funding is provided by the Municipal Finance Authority and is to be used for capital projects rather than operational programs.

In comparison to the allowable debt levels, the Township's debt has been maintained at a fairly low level in recent years.

**Objectives**

6.3.1 Maintain the long term debt servicing liability at a manageable level.

**Policies**

6.3.2 Limit the creation of long term debt to the financing of large infrastructure and economic development projects.

6.3.3 Minimize debt costs by seeking out and applying for provincial and federal government grants whenever possible.

**7. RESTRICTED ACCOUNTS****Background**

Funds may be set aside for specified or restricted purposes. Minimum balances may be established to ensure availability of funds.

**Objectives**

7.1 These funds are used primarily to finance capital projects, one time operating costs or specific projects for which the funds were advanced. Internally restricted funds may also be used from time to time to strategically offset specific operating costs

**Policies**

7.2 A minimum balance of \$100,000 will be maintained in the Casino Revenue Sharing Account

7.3 A minimum balance of \$250,000 will be maintained in the Community Works Fund Account

7.4 A minimum balance of \$500,000 will be maintained in the Machinery and Equipment Depreciation Reserve Fund Account

7.5 A minimum balance of \$1,000,000 will be maintained in the Capital Projects Reserve Fund Account

7.6 The funds set out in S7.2 and S7.3 may be used for specific one time capital and operating project costs

7.7 The balances set out in S7.2, S7.3, S7.4 and S7.5 may temporarily drop below the established minimum balances, provided a plan is in place to re-establish the minimum balance