



NEWS RELEASE

Niagara-on-the-Lake Shares Update on the 2026 Proposed Budget Process

For Immediate Release

November 3, 2025

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is pleased to share an update on the 2026 proposed budget process, following Council's first Special Council Meeting on Wednesday, October 29, 2025.

This marks the first budget prepared under the Strong Mayor Budget Framework, a new legislative process established under the *Municipal Act, 2001*. The process began with the Lord Mayor's proposed budget, which serves as the foundation for Council's review and amendment period.

In support of this new framework, the Town has also established a dedicated Budget Office, a key step in strengthening financial stewardship, promoting cross-departmental collaboration, and ensuring that future budgets align with Council's Strategic Plan and long-term sustainability goals.

While changes may still be applied through the amendment process, the Lord Mayor's proposed 2026 Operating Budget totals \$44.18 million, representing an overall tax increase of just 1.81% after 1% estimated growth. For the average household (based on a \$546,000 assessment), this equates to a modest \$27.78 annual increase on the Town portion of the tax bill.

Despite inflationary pressures and increased service demands, the Budget Office's comprehensive review reduced a preliminary double-digit increase to this responsible and balanced outcome through a combination of efficiency reviews, revenue optimization, and strategic prioritization.

The 2026 Capital Budget proposes \$8.47 million in capital investments, 94% higher than 2024 levels, focusing on priority projects that support infrastructure renewal, environmental sustainability, and community spaces across all five villages.

Highlights of the proposed budget include:



- Parks and recreation enhancements guided by the draft Parks & Recreation Masterplan
- Road and storm infrastructure improvements across multiple communities
- Enhancements to the Dock Area and public spaces
- Accessibility and wayfinding projects funded through the Municipal Accommodation Tax
- Climate and environmental initiatives, including hybrid fleet integration and stormwater resilience

The proposed budget reflects all four pillars of Council's Strategic Plan: Vibrant & Complete Community, Good Governance, Enriching Community Assets & Infrastructure, and Optimizing Organizational Excellence. By leveraging sustainable revenue sources such as the Municipal Accommodation Tax and parking programs, the Town continues to deliver strong services while minimizing the impact on the tax base.

To make the budget more accessible than ever, the Town has launched [OpenBook](#), an interactive online tool that allows residents to explore the 2026 draft capital projects in a new way. Through OpenBook, users can:

- Search the community map to view projects across all villages;
- Read project descriptions and learn how each supports community priorities;
- View proposed budgeted amounts and funding sources; and
- Access all this information directly from their computer or mobile device.

OpenBook reinforces the Town's commitment to innovation in municipal budgeting by empowering residents to see exactly where and how investments are being made in their community.

Quotes:

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa shared his appreciation for the collaboration that shaped this year's proposed budget: "I'm proud to present this proposed 2026 Budget, which reflects Council's collective priorities and the community's best interests. I'm grateful for the hard work of our Staff and the thoughtful dialogue from Council throughout this process. Together, we're ensuring Niagara-on-the-Lake remains a sustainable, forward-looking community that invests wisely in its future."

Chief Administrative Officer Nick Ruller also acknowledged the dedication behind the process: "The creation of the Town's Budget Office marks a new era of accountability, transparency, and strategic alignment. This proposed budget reflects months of thorough review and collaboration across departments, ensuring each dollar contributes to meaningful outcomes for residents and businesses alike."



Next Steps

During the amendment period, Members of Council may propose changes to the Lord Mayor's Proposed Budget for discussion and consideration. All amendments will be debated and voted on at the Special Council Meeting for Budget Amendments on November 17, 2025. Following this stage, the Lord Mayor will have an opportunity to review and, if necessary, exercise veto authority as outlined in the *Municipal Act, 2001*.

The final review and potential approval of the 2026 Budget will take place at the Special Council Meeting on December 3, 2025, marking the completion of this year's collaborative budget process.

Residents can view the full presentation, supporting documents, and a recording of the October 29 meeting. [View the Report and Meeting Recording](#).

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