



NEWS RELEASE

Council Approves 2026 Budget

For Immediate Release

December 2, 2025

At a Special Council Meeting on December 2, Niagara-on-the-Lake Town Council confirmed the adoption of the 2026 Budget, its first adopted budget under Ontario's new Strong Mayor Budget Framework. This year's process emphasized collaboration, transparency, and community-first planning, resulting in a responsible budget that continues to invest in infrastructure and services across every village in Town.

Residents will see a **2.19%** net tax levy increase in 2026, which translates to:

- **\$33.55 annually** for a home assessed at \$546,000
- **\$46.08 annually** at \$750,000
- **\$61.44 annually** at \$1,000,000
- **\$92.16 annually** at \$1,500,000

"This budget reflects a thoughtful and responsible approach to meeting the needs of our community while planning for long-term sustainability," said Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa. "Council carefully considered amendments and worked closely with Staff to ensure continued investment across all of our villages. I'm proud of the progress we are making in infrastructure, public spaces, and community wellbeing."

The Strong Mayor Framework introduced a new structure for municipal budgeting this year. Under the legislation, the Lord Mayor presented the proposed budget to Council on October 29, followed by an amendment period where Councillors submitted proposed changes. Council voted on all amendments at the November 17 meeting, after which a veto window was provided to the Lord Mayor, who chose not to veto any items.

To support this new process, the Town also launched a Budget Office comprising the Lord Mayor, Deputy Lord Mayor, CAO, and Town Staff, strengthening long-term financial oversight and ensuring alignment with Council's Strategic Plan.

"Our first year under the Strong Mayor Framework demonstrated strong collaboration between Council and Staff," said CAO Nick Ruller. "This process allowed for thoughtful



discussion and refinement, and the result is a budget that advances key community priorities.”

2026 Tax Levy and Operating Overview

Total 2026 Operating Budget (excluding Water & Wastewater):	\$44,238,953
Final Tax Levy Requirement:	\$18,163,077 (up from \$17,601,443 in 2025)
Tax Levy Increase:	3.19% before growth; 2.19% net after an estimated 1% in assessment growth
Storm Levy:	\$961,600 (no change from 2025)
Capital Program:	\$8,371,110 (excluding Water & Wastewater) <i>Water and Wastewater rate-supported budgets will be presented separately in early 2026.</i>

“Our focus this year was balancing inflationary pressures with the need to keep service levels strong,” said Director of Corporate Services/Treasurer, Kyle Freeborn. “Through careful review, revenue optimization, and targeted capital planning, we achieved a responsible tax impact while continuing to invest in essential infrastructure.”

Investing Across All Villages

A key theme of the 2026 Budget is continued investment in infrastructure, recreation, and community amenities across the entire municipality. Highlights include:

- **Road, stormwater, and infrastructure upgrades** in multiple communities
- **Parks & Recreation improvements** aligned with the draft Parks & Recreation Master Plan
- **Public space and Dock Area enhancements** to support resident and visitor experience
- **Environmental initiatives**, including stormwater system resilience

By strategically leveraging sustainable funding, such as the Municipal Accommodation Tax and revenue from parking programs, the Town continues to enhance services without adding unnecessary pressure to the tax base.

To make the budget more accessible, the Town has launched [OpenBook](#), an interactive digital platform that allows residents to explore 2026 capital projects in a map-based interface.



Residents can:

- Browse projects by village
- View budget amounts and funding sources
- Read project descriptions
- Access the tool from any device

“Launching OpenBook is an important milestone in making municipal budgeting clearer and more engaging for residents,” added CAO Ruller. “We look forward to building on this foundation throughout 2026.”

In the coming months, the Town will continue releasing materials to help support residents' understanding of the Town's financial priorities and the investments shaping the community's future.

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