

Questions & Answers 2026 Utilities Budgets



This year's utility budgets incorporated proposed modest increases to meet inflationary pressures and to take initial steps to populate much needed reserves.

The following are questions received either in-person or through written feedback regarding the 2026 Utilities budgets.

Natasha Rojas

Balancing Affordability - Explain how council weighs affordability against the needs to replace or upgrade aging systems? What tools or data help guide those choices?

Council receives detailed presentations on all proposed projects and emerging issues from staff, consultants and engaged experts in the field. Council also considers public input when weighing all potential action plans.

Rate increases and long-term planning - When the town plans rate increases, how far ahead are those projections made, and what assumptions go into them? (growth, inflation, or grant availability?)

Rate increases and long-term planning is based on 5, 10 and 20-year asset management plans. Administration considers the Town's economic health, forecasted inflation, and growth statistics as part of the budget process. In the short term, grant programs and alternative funding are reviewed and applied for whenever possible to assist in the Town's capital programs.

Budgeting process and decision-making - please walk us through the main steps of how the utilities budget is developed– from staff recommendations to council approval – so residents can better understand where decisions are made.

Administration prepares a proposed budget which is presented to Council for information. The next step in the budget process is consultation with the public where the public's question and comments are collected and presented to Council for consideration. Equipped with staff recommendations, asset management plans, technical reports from consultants and the public's comments, Council will deliberate the budgets and provide direction to administration on changes as decided by Council. The complete process and timelines are layout on the Town's website.

Transparency and Communication - How is the town communicating the reasons behind major decisions— like increases or project prioritization – to ensure residents have the full context, not just numbers.

Town staff and consultants provide detailed presentations to explain process and background of all new reports and emerging issues during Committee and Council meetings, which residents are notified of by e-news subscription, the Town's website, the Town Hall notice board and sometimes the local newspaper. All meetings are broadcast live on YouTube and available to review later from the Town's website. Residents are notified of opportunities for input or information sessions on initiatives and annual processes in a similar manner. Residents are free to contact Council with feedback or questions for their consideration prior to decision-making. Council has recently approved the development of a dedicated communications position that will focus on continuous improvement of notifying the community of Council business and inviting input into decision-making.

Collaboration and resident involvement— for residents who want to understand more about how utilities are managed, are there opportunities – like open workshops or advisory committees, to be part of the discussion earlier in the process?

Residents are notified of opportunities for input or information sessions on initiatives and annual processes in a similar manner as described above. Residents are free to contact Council with feedback or questions for their consideration prior to decision-making.

Staff and council collaboration— Residents are aware there are tough calls to make. Can you share how staff and council work together— what checks and balances exist – to make sure the final utilities budget reflects both expertise and community values?

Administration is focused on forwarding and acting on the agenda of Council. Qualified staff, and consultants provide information to Council so that Council has a complete data set available to them to not only understand the issues but to better focus and decide on a path forward for the community.

Lynn Rankin (was withdrawn, but may be helpful background information)

Whether the Town of Osoyoos completed a comprehensive investigation to determine the best source— groundwater or the lake—before moving forward with the water system plan?

Yes, a comprehensive investigation was carried out which was also recommended by the province. TRUE Engineering, Carillo Engineering as well as Colliers Consulting (which included engineers) with staff went through an exercise to determine the best and long-term cost-effective solution. Everything from water usage trending and conservation projects, population increase estimates were debated in a review that considered continuing with the ground water plan vs surface/lake water. This analysis was also reviewed by the province.

Administration continues to work with the province so that they have a thorough understanding of our situation and we follow any of their recommendations to improve the opportunity of being awarded a grant or grants!

Ron Sargeant

What percentage of the current increase will go to treatment plant reserves?

The existing reserve allocation is proposed to fund the current asset management project list which is underfunded by approx. \$800,000. Further requirements are needed to fund the construction of the water treatment plant.

How many years of increases will residents have to pay for the plant?

As indicated in the budget report presented to Council on November 12th, depending on grant funding and the permissible borrowing rate, the user fees are expected to increase by \$27/month over the period of the loan – likely 30 years.

Trevor Perry

When will the water metering invoicing start to roll out to property owners?

All meters have not been installed yet. There are about: 50 in house, 60 pit meters, 40 Intermediate 2" pipe, and 12-meter vaults remaining. It is expected that all meters will be installed by the spring, depending on the weather, equipment supply, and contractor availability. Once the meters are installed, it typically takes a year of data collection and analysis to establish rates. To arrive at a rate structure that will both motivate users to conserve water while still meeting the budgeted requirements to operate the water system requires actual data of our customers. The calculated rate structure options will be presented to Council in 2027, and a decision will be made at that time as to the implementation date. At some point in 2027, the goal is to include usage on utility bills.

Dora and Ole Sorensen:

Concerns regarding the installation of water meters.

The Town followed the installation practice of most other jurisdictions.

Concerns regarding the governance process of the domestic water system specifically related to those customers within the RDOS and how water rates are developed and approved without RDOS consent.

In the 1990's the agricultural system was handed over to the Town of Osoyoos from the Province (Irrigation District), similar to what was done in the Oliver. To ensure rural water users are treated fairly, they elect Water Councillors to oversee the governance of the water utility. Councillor Appleby and Councillor Moreira are the water Councillors that represent their interests. The concept of Water Councillors is unique as Oliver and Osoyoos are the only two municipalities with this structure in BC. The decision to have Water Councillors was mandated by the province.

On budget related issues, Council decisions must be unanimous. If any “one” of the Town Councillors or Water Councillors does not support the budget/rate structure, the issue is forwarded to the province to which then they make the decision. This in effect provides additional protection of the minority that are outside the Town limits (in the RDOS). All other Town issues are decided by the majority of Council.

The domestic water bills within the RDOS are higher than those in the town boundaries. Why?

The quarterly domestic water bill mailed to RDOS users is higher than Town user utility bills. However, property owners in Town pay an additional “water parcel tax” which is included on the property tax bill, which the RDOS property owners do not receive. When the Town utility bill and “water parcel tax” are added together the amount is equivalent to what the RDOS customers pay.

Water users in the RDOS also pay a per acre charge for irrigation.

As indicated during the budget presentation, there was an error in the 2025 water utility billing based on what was approved in the budget between those on twinned domestic water lines (mostly RDOS customers) and town domestic water customers. The inconsistency will be addressed in the 2026 rates and billing to ensure the budgeted increases will be applied appropriately between both systems.

Below is the billing for 2025 and proposed billing for 2026 to account for the underbilling as per the approved 2025 budget on Town water accounts. The twinned lines were billed the correct amount as per the approved 2025 budget.

Year	Town Bill / quarterly	Twinned Line Bill / quarterly	Difference	Town Parcel Tax on property tax bill / added to utility bills on twinned lines	Net Difference
2025	\$198	\$223	\$25	\$15	\$10
2026	\$226	\$231	\$5	\$15	(\$10)
Total	\$424	\$454	\$30	\$30	\$0