

BUDGET COMMITTEE

Thursday, October 13, 2022

Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Boardroom
Morrison Dam Conservation Area

HYBRID IN-PERSON/VIDEO CONFERENCE

DIRECTORS PRESENT

Ray Chartrand, Doug Cook, Adrian Cornelissen, Bob Harvey, George Irvin, Dave Jewitt, Marissa Vaughan

DIRECTORS ABSENT

Mike Tam, Alex Westman

STAFF PRESENT

Geoff Cade, Donna Clarkson, Tina Crown, Abbie Gutteridge, Brian Horner, Denise Iszczuk, Tracey McPherson, Kate Monk, Nathan Schoelier, Mari Veliz

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Dave Jewitt called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m., welcomed everyone in attendance and read out the Land Acknowledgement Statement.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

MOTION #BD 89/21

Moved by Doug Cook

Seconded by Ray Chartrand

“RESOLVED, THAT the agenda for the October 13, 2022 Board of Directors Budget Committee meeting be approved,”

Carried.

DISCLOSURE OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no disclosures of pecuniary interest at this meeting or from the previous meeting.

DISCLOSURE OF INTENTION TO RECORD PROCEEDINGS

None.

PROPOSED 2022 BUDGET

General Manager Brian Horner provided an overview of the 2023 budget preparation by staff, as well as the format for the information session. Each department will present the budget for their program and a summary of the individual projects that are proposed for 2023. He noted the proposed 2023 budget is less than what was originally presented in the five-year forecast. Staff prepared the budget with a 2% wage increase on the pay grid.

Vehicles and Equipment

Nathan Schoelier presented the vehicle and equipment motor pool budget. There is no project or general levy required for the vehicle and equipment budget as the revenue received when charging mileage and equipment rates to the users' programs offsets expenses. In 2023, the 2011 John Deere utility vehicle at Rock Glen Conservation Area, which staff use for conservation area operations and maintenance, is scheduled to be replaced.

Private Land Stewardship

Nathan Schoelier reviewed the private land stewardship budget wherein staff provide one-on-one technical advice, site visits, and assistance with paperwork in connecting landowners with cost-share funding to maximize grants for their stewardship projects. ABCA staff aim to help complete at least 100 projects each year. Expenses in the stewardship program are offset with tree sales, providing tree planting plans, phragmites management spraying and forest management plans for clients. Only 10 percent of the department budget is from the municipal levy. The County of Huron continues to provide grants to landowners for stewardship projects through the very successful Huron Clean Water Project. This project, along with the Middlesex County Clean Water Project, will continue until 2023. There are no municipally funded grants available in Lambton or Perth Counties for landowners to access a similar cost-share program to improve rural water quality. Other projects that will take place in 2023, pending funding, include Canada Nature Fund, Ontario Community Environment Fund, Forests Ontario Foundation and Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Recreation Services

Nathan Schoelier explained that the ABCA provides essential recreation areas for municipal residents and tourists. Interest continues to remain high, although has returned to pre-pandemic levels. The routine maintenance of facilities at conservation areas is carried out by ABCA employees. Revenue is generated by gate fees at Rock Glen Conservation Area, hunting passes and community donations. Proposed new projects for 2023 include the replacement of the Bannockburn Conservation Area wooden bridge, as recommended in the bridge inspection report, as well as general parking lot maintenance at several conservation areas, which will include the purchase and installation of new granular material.

Property Management

Nathan Schoelier, Stewardship and Conservation Lands Manager, summarized the goals of managing the ABCA properties and water bodies, which includes conservation areas, wildlife areas, management areas, conservation forests and agricultural land. Property management revenue is generated from timber harvests, farm land rental and the Parkhill CA campground lease and offsets the cost of property taxes, insurance, risk management inspections and property maintenance. Most ABCA land is taxed at a 25% tax rate under the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program, and a small portion of land is qualifies for the Conservation Land Tax incentive Program (CLTIP), meaning there are no taxes paid. Property assessments for applications for the CLTIP have increased significantly, but staff will continue to look for opportunities to reduce the property taxes on individual properties. The ongoing invasive species management project will continue in 2023, with the continued control of phragmites and developing strategies for other species control such as Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed.

Drinking Water Source Protection

Donna Clarkson, DWSP Co-Program Supervisor presented the Drinking Water Source Protection budget. There are no levy dollars allocated to the Drinking Water Source Protection budget. The Province funds ongoing mandatory implementation responsibilities for Source Protection Authorities. The implementation body for each source protection policy coordinates implementation costs. In fall 2021, the province allowed submission of a 2-year workplan, and the current approved budget, until March 2024, maintains the same levels of staffing. Also, in the December 2021 the province release the Phase II Directors Technical Rules, which required updating a number of policies in the Source Protection Plans. Pre-consultation on the Draft Amendment to the plans began on August 12, 2022 and public consultation is anticipated in early 2023.

By agreement, ABCA delivers Risk Management Services for eight municipalities. These agreements are in place until December 2023. Staff have been happy to be able to resume in-person visits with property owners and lease holders, after two years of phone and zoom meetings.

Environmental Monitoring

Mari Veliz, Healthy Watersheds Manager and Tracey McPherson, GIS/IT Coordinator assisted Geoff Cade in presenting the Planning and Regulations program and Environmental Monitoring project factsheets and budgets. In some cases, funds are deferred to meet the funder's year end. Mari Veliz explained that some projects are fully funded through other partners, but that the project levy contribution often leverages other sources of funding, some substantial, to undertake environmental and monitoring projects, one example of which is the Ausable River Recovery project. There are no new projects proposed for 2023; however, there are a number of phased or ongoing projects. The Natural Heritage Systems Plan will build on the outcomes of the analysis of the Nairn Creek subwatershed to better integrate permitting site visits with awareness about the importance of small, natural features on the landscape. Tracey McPherson noted that in 2023 updates will be made to the core datasets, which will assist in the migration of the internal internet mapping site (GeoPortal) to ArcGIS Enterprise. In addition, staff will be exploring platforms to make more data open and available to our partners and the public.

Floodplain Management

Geoff Cade, Water & Planning Manager presented the four main components of the floodplain management program. They include the maintenance of 16 erosion control projects, 7 flood control projects, the flood forecasting and warning system and the Port Franks ice management project. Since 1996 the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) has provided a 50% grant toward three of the projects; however, for 2023 only an 18.3% funding grant is expected. In 2023, ongoing projects include the annual monitoring of channel configuration in the Ausable River Cut, as well as the Armstrong West Erosion Control project.

Education

Denise Iszczuk, Conservation Educator, presented the Conservation Education budget. Revenue for providing effective and meaningful outdoor education experiences comes from the municipal levy, program fees, donations, foundations, and fundraising. Staff promote environmental awareness through classroom programs, field trips, day camps, the water safety awareness program, community presentations and special events. In 2022, user fees and formal programs increased overall from 2021, and nature summer day camps proved to be popular with a total of 21 days of programming. This fall, two owl prowls will provide a fundraising opportunity. The 2023 education program and budget is based on the premise that school programs can be delivered in schoolyards or in classrooms, as well as field trips to conservation areas. In 2023, some highlighted events will include field trips, programs in classrooms and schoolyards, two week-long summer day camp programs at Morrison Dam Conservation Area, and delivering the river safety program, which will be available throughout the year and can be delivered in the classroom or virtually.

Corporate Services

Brian Horner presented the consolidated Corporate Services budget, and provided an overview of the services provided by this department. In 2023, it is proposed that a wage market check study be done, as the last time this was completed was in 2014 (and 2007 prior to that). This would help to ensure past and current wage increases are consistent with entities similar to the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority. In addition, the Conservation Authorities Act update includes a watershed-based resource management strategy as a Category 1 program. This strategy can be completed by ABCA staff. The Conservation Authorities Act update implementation over the next year will also require staff time. Phase two is expected to be complete by January 31, 2024.

Project Levy

Brian Horner presented the proposed project levy summary for 2023 at \$266,590 as compared to \$249,594 in 2022. This includes ongoing, phased and new projects proposed for 2023. The project levy dollars will be leveraged with other sources of funding to undertake projects totaling \$1,115,031.

General Levy

The general levy proposed for 2023 total \$1,153,832 in comparison to \$1,119,184 in 2022.

Proposed 2023 Budget

The proposed fee schedule and pay grid were presented for review as these figures were used in preparing the consolidated budget. The combined project and general levies total \$1,420,422 (3.77 per cent increase) as compared to \$1,368,778 in 2022. Brian Horner reminded the directors that not every program area is sustained by levy dollars, and that levy dollars leverage further funding from other sources.

The Board indicated that they would like to see a further breakdown of the reserve funds to gain further understanding of what is available for future project support. This could come as a report at an upcoming Board of Directors meetings. The Board also provided some direction that the Fee Schedule should note the difference between the 2022 and 2023 fees as a comparison point.

In general, the Board would like staff to come back to the Board meeting with some reductions and are aiming for a 2.5 per cent increase instead of the proposed 3.77 per cent. Further direction and discussion will be held at the next Board meeting on October 20, 2022.

NEW BUSINESS

None

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 12:27 p.m.

Dave Jewitt
Chair

Abigail Gutteridge
Corporate Services Coordinator