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Oct 27, 2023 · 83 tweets · [adamadonaldson/status/1717895553768398855](https://twitter.com/adamadonaldson/status/1717895553768398855)

Coming up at 9:30, it's this month's meeting to the Grand River Conservation Authority Board. This is the Politico preview of the meeting:



Chair White calls the meeting to order.

White pays tribute to two staff members of Guelph Lake staff who came to the aid of a colleague in a medical emergency; welcomes new manager of flood operations; board watershed tour on Sept 28 was a success.

Agenda approved.

No Declarations of Pecuniary Interest.

Minutes from last meeting approved.

It looks like we have an "unregistered delegate". If the board approves, they get three minutes.

The board approves, so we'll hear from Peter Bowler (sp?) a former GRCA employee and Cambridge resident. He used to work in the nature centres. He says environmental literacy is important for students. He's worried about moving the nature centres to GRCA properties...

Correspondence? Only one piece of mail this month, and it's incoming. The letter is from Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Paul Calandra about the return of land that was removed from Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine last year. Received as info.

Next, Budget 2024 Draft #1. Sonja Radoja. Manager of Corporate Services, presents. This is the first budget under the new regulations, but she says that the GRCA is delivering the same programs it always has.

Project revenue is challenging; some areas are exceeding budget but others aren't. Also, inflation and supply chain a problem, so is axing infrastructure. Increased demand on doing stuff with passive land, and big changes in tech too.

Radoja notes that the capital spending is soft and if there needs to be an increase for some reason then they will be leaning on reserves.

## 2024 Budget Challenges



**CHALLENGE: Conservation Areas – managing growth & infrastructure**

Conservation Area Operations - ASSUMPTIONS

- BREAKEVEN achievable (excluding allocation of corporate overhead costs)
- Revenue Assumption - \$10.5 million (Budget 2023: \$10.0M, Forecast 2023:\$11.7M)
- Operating Expenses – increased to reflect increased activity
- NIL revenue set aside to reserve
- \$1,650,000 revenue used to fund capital expenses
- Capital Spending - \$2.0 million – funded with revenue (\$1.65M) and conservation area reserve (\$350K)


CHALLENGES

- Revenue uncertainty
- Infrastructure costs



Assumptions and challenges:

## 2024 Budget Challenges




**CHALLENGE: Environmental Education Program – impacted by New Regulations**

Outdoor Education Program – “DRAFT #1” ASSUMPTIONS

- Assumes school contracts will be renewed in September 2024 - \$600,000
- Assumes status quo operating expenses
- Use of Transition Reserve to achieve break even - \$312,000

CHALLENGES

- Municipal Levy funding (approx. \$300K) eliminated in 2024
- At what pace will proposed action plan for program delivery be implemented.
- Proposed program changes that are implemented will be reflected through forecast adjustments.
- Major maintenance expenses have NIL budget. As the need arises, expenses are funded with nature centre reserves or donations from GRCF.



That last slide was just for the nature centres, this one is for the operating budget overall.

# GRCA Budget 2024



## Major Assumptions – Operating Budget

- Compensation & Benefits (rate increases, grid movements, benefits) 3% increase, plus 1.0 increase in staffing (admin position).
- Property tax expense increased 3%
- Insurance expense decreased \$75,000 (large provisional increase in 2023 budget not required)
- Administrative expenses held constant
- Operating expenses held constant with the exception of Conservation Areas and Nature Centre program.
- Increased Conservation Area Activity - \$350,000 expense increase
- Increased Nature Centre Activity - \$120,000 expense increase (\$50K wages/\$70K cleaning)
- One time 2023 budget expense items not included in draft #1 Budget 2024 - \$417,000

**OUTCOME: Operating Expenses increased \$918,000 (3.3%)**

zoom

Category 3 programs generated a surplus last year. If memory serves these are the programs that optional for CAs to undertake.

## 2024 Budget



### Programs & Services Inventory - Surplus allocation

- Category 3 programs are generating a **NET surplus of \$204,300**

#### Breakdown:

(\$312,900) Tree Planting deficit

(\$ 52,200) Conservation Services deficit

(\$510,000) Conservation Areas deficit (Luther, Hazard Trees, Staff support)

(\$1,217,600) Administrative Support (overhead) deficit

\$1,928,800 Property Rentals surplus

\$ 510,000 Hydro Generation surplus

- NET Surplus of \$204,300 allocated to General Operating Expenses

zoom

Change between 2023 and 2024 overall:

# GRCA Budget 2024 – BUDGET 2023 vs Budget 2024

## EXPENDITURES



	2023 (Oct draft)	2024	Incr/(Decr)	%age change
<b>Total OPERATING</b>	<b>28,148,688</b>	<b>29,066,688</b>	<b>918,000</b>	<b>3.3%</b>
	84.8%	84.4%		
<b>Total CAPITAL</b>	<b>4,104,000</b>	<b>4,419,000</b>	<b>315,000</b>	<b>7.7%</b>
	12.4%	12.8%		
<b>Total Special Projects</b>	<b>840,000</b>	<b>840,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>0.0%</b>
	2.5%	2.4%		
<b>Funding to Reserves</b>	<b>116,500</b>	<b>116,500</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>0.0%</b>
	0.4%	0.3%		
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>33,209,188</b>	<b>34,442,188</b>	<b>1,233,000</b>	<b>3.7%</b>

Breakdown by category:

## 2024 Draft Budget

### EXPENDITURES

#### Operating Budget (\$29.1 Million)

- **Category 1 - \$10.5M**
  - Watershed Management Dams, Flood Forecasting, Resource Planning, Conservation Land Management, Source Protection
- **General Operating Expenses - \$3.8M**
- **Category 2 - \$1.0M**
  - Subwatershed Planning, Conservation Services
- **Category 3 - \$13.8M**
  - Tree Planting, Conservation Services, Environmental Education, Property Rentals, Hydro Production, Conservation Areas, Administrative Support



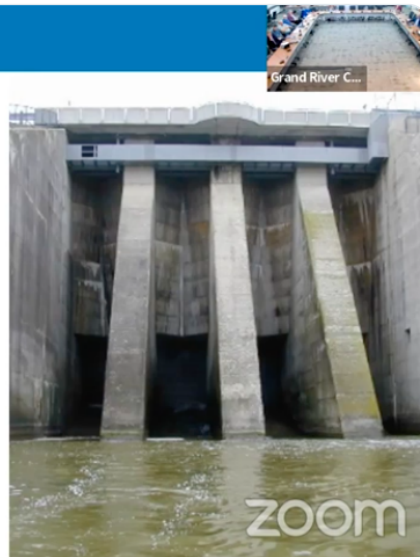
Capital expenditures by category:

## 2024 Draft Budget

### EXPENDITURES

#### Capital Budget (\$4.4 Million)

- **Category 1 - \$1.8M**
  - **Water Management Capital (\$1.5 million)** - (Maintenance and repairs to dikes and dams)
  - **Gauges and Hardware (\$300,000)**
- **General Operating Expenses - \$600,000**
  - **Motor Pool** expenses funded with reserve (\$240,000)
  - **Information Systems** funded with reserve (\$360,000)
- **Category 3 - \$2.0M**
  - **Conservation Areas**

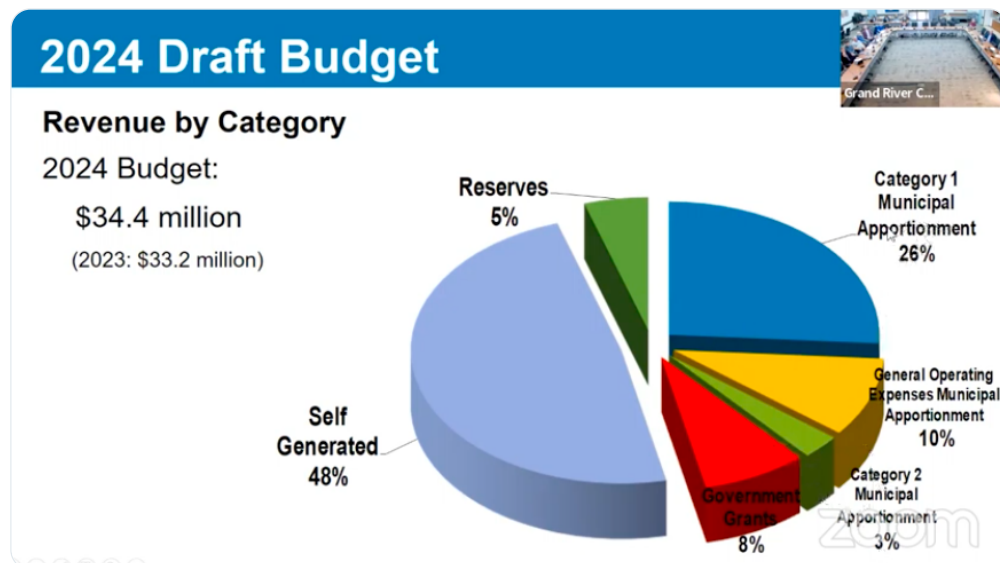




Special projects budget, which doesn't use a portion of the municipal apportionment.



Breakdown by pie graph:



This budget makes an assumption that all municipalities will be taking part in cat. 2, which still have to be confirmed when approved through the MOUs. Those will be finalised in Nov and Dec. The Municipal Apportionment Vote will take place in Jan.

Challinor says that this is not a normal budget thanks to the changes and gives credit to staff for doing good work. Asks about building reserves. Radoja says they have a principle of building reserves by trying to commit any surpluses to reinvestment.

Davis asks about moving to multiyear budgeting at municipalities, has GRCA considered the same? Radoja says they have been doing five year forecasts in the past, but now that they've made transition to new regs, they will try and get back to that.

Shantz asks for confirmation that cat. 3 programs have to be self-funded? Radoja says that they can't apply the municipal apportionment unless they've already got that approval through the MOU in advanced.

Shantz asks if there's a reserve for Cat. 3 programs. Radoja says not yet, they have to figure out what's appropriate and then decide how best to proceed as they start to live in the new regs.

Shantz asks where a deficit in cat. 3 will be recovered. Radoja says "reserves". Which reserves? Radoja says that it would depend on the deficit because they have a number of reserves to cover different contingencies.

White says that he thinks there's going to be a lot of anomalies like this as GRCA transitions out.

Motion:

THAT Report Number GM-10-23-80 - Budget 2024 - Draft #1 be approved for consultation purposes, circulated to all participating municipalities, and posted to the GRCA website  
APPROVED.

Next four reports all approved:

- b. GM-10-23-81 - Budget Draft #1 - Municipal Apportionment**  
THAT Report Number GM-10-23-81 - Budget 2024 - Draft #1 - Municipal Apportionment be received as information.
- c. GM-10-23-75 - Cash and Investment Status**  
THAT Report Number GM-10-23-75 - Cash and Investment Status – September 2023 be received as information.
- d. GM-10-23-82 - Financial Summary**  
THAT the Financial Summary for the period ending September 30, 2023 be approved.
- e. GM-10-23-73 - 2024 Board Meeting Schedule**  
THAT the 2024 Grand River Conservation Authority Board Meeting Schedule be approved.

On the municipal apportionment: This is basically the increased cost per municipality, and how much more each municipality pays depends on the number and types of services that the GRCA offers in that area.

For all partner municipalities, the increase in apportionment for 2024 is just over \$13 million with each municipality seeing an increase of between 1.3 and 7.4 per cent. Guelph's increase will be on the low side at around 1.8 per cent.

Next, New Guelph Lake Nature Centre Update – Working with +VG Architects (the same group behind the redevelopment of 65 Delhi into supportive housing), the space will be smaller than original intended, but it will still offer accessible outdoor spaces with the latest tech.

White notes that this has been on the books for 10 years so the sooner they get it done the better.

Motion:

WHEREAS the GRCA remains committed to supporting the construction of a new Guelph Lake Nature Centre;T HEREOFRE BE IT RESOLVED THAT staff proceed with tendering the

construction of the new Nature Centre and report back to the members for construction award approval.

That motion is approved.

Next, Outdoor Environmental Education Program Review. GRCA has been providing education programs since the 70s, notes Lisa Stocco Manager of Strategic Communications and Environmental Education. Outdoor ed. is considered vital to well round education according to the Min of Ed.

Having said that, this is now a category 3 program which means that it's no longer funded by the municipal apportionment and will need to run on a cost-recovery model.

Another reason for the review is the pandemic. Nature centres were closed, and while some boards took part in virtual programs, not all did, and since re-opening they have not yet gone back to the full pre-pandemic slate of programming.

Pandemic did make an important point about spending more time outdoors though.

## Impact of Pandemic

- Program paused in March 2020 and slowly resumed in January 2021
- Program delivery altered: virtual, some at-school programming
- Non-school programming (e.g., day camps, community groups, etc.) continues to be very limited or has not resumed



## Current Program Delivery



- School classes are core component of the GRCA's Outdoor Environmental Education Program
- During the pandemic, other (non-school) programs were paused, and are still very limited
- A hybrid program delivery model has been developed that now includes field trips to nature centres, at-school visits, as well as some virtual programming



There are five facilities in the watershed including Guelph Lake. There's never been much in the way of capital investment and most maintenance has been done with fundraising and grants. Current assessment for the other 4 centres:

Nature Centres		
Nature Centre	Estimated Cost to Replace in 2022 Dollars	20-year Cost Estimate for Maintenance (2022-2042) in 2022 Dollars
Apps' Mill Nature Centre	\$3,071,600	\$2,024,100
Laurel Creek Nature Centre	\$3,776,000	\$2,416,500
Shade's Mills Nature Centre	\$1,599,000*	\$303,500
Taquanyah Nature Centre	\$1,737,900	\$802,400
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$10,184,500</b>	<b>\$5,546,500</b>
<b>Average Annual Cost:</b>		<b>\$275,000</b>

Currently 4/5 nature centres (soon 3/5 with new Guelph Lake nature centre) operate outside GRCA property. There are some challenges with this model:

Nature Centres	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Currently, 4 located outside of the GRCA's Conservation Areas – i.e., separate properties, dedicated buildings</li> <li>Challenges with this operating/business model include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased costs to maintain properties to support the program</li> <li>increased work and competing demands on staff resources</li> <li>more isolated locations pose challenges to security of property, safety and enforcement concerns related to unauthorized uses</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	 

Challenges include the uncertainty of school board funding and increased costs, but the GRCA does have strong relationships and is a recognised environmental education leader.

🔥🔥🔥🔥Action plan!!!!



## Proposed Action Plan

Based on the program review, staff have identified key recommendations to help achieve the objectives and address the risks and considerations:

1. Transition the program to operate from within the GRCA's Conservation Areas.
2. Expand the hybrid program delivery model.
3. Maintain a staff model that primarily supports the school program, while providing enhanced support for day-to-day operations.



A phase-in plan will be developed with timelines and infrastructure needs (as noted during pandemic, a large indoor facility is not need necessarily to run programs). Will also work with school boards to expand hybrid delivery of programs.

The financials:

## Financial Implications

- **Budget 2023 Program Funding:**
  - \$310,100 Municipal General Levy funding
  - \$500,000 School Program Fees (forecast 2023 - \$600K)
- Effective January 1, 2024, municipal funding will cease.
- Capital maintenance expenses are not included in the operating budget. Costs are funded with nature centre reserves or GRCA donations.
- **Budget 2024 (draft) Program Funding:**
  - \$312,000 Transition reserve
  - \$600,000 School Program Fees
  - Draft 2024 Budget does include savings from proposed action plan



These recommendations are expected to transition the program to a breakeven business model over 3-5 years. Costs will be reduced overtime, but the actions alone will not be able to get the program all the way there. Staff will report back on annual basis.

Davis says that he's concerned about supporting a program where it's not clear about what might happen to some properties, especially Apps Mill. He understands the need to act quickly but he has a lot of unanswered questions.

White says he understands those concerns and that they're legitimate, but they have a \$300k hole that they need to fill & there's no easy way to do it. Apps is not going to be closed tomorrow. Nature Centres are an important component & if there's a way to keep going they will.

Challinor says that "no one ever shrunk to greatness" and asks about revenue sources. Stocco says she's not sure what portion of in-person learning vs hybrid, the request for hybrid has come from the boards, but the idea setting is a natural setting and they" preserve that.

Challinor notes this is also a challenge for the school board, especially with transportation costs. He suggests have staff come back more often than once yearly, at least in the short term even if it's just for information.

Stocco agrees and says that she should have added "at minimum" to annual reporting. White notes that is says as much in the motion:

- back to the General membership for construction award approval.
- g. **GM-10-23-76 - Outdoor Environmental Education Program Review**
- THAT the Grand River Conservation Authority endorse the proposed actions and transition plan outlined within this report to move its Outdoor Environmental Education Program towards a breakeven business model that does not rely on municipal apportionment (levy);**
- AND THAT staff report back to the board at minimum on an annual basis on progress made.**

James asks about co-op placements, any discussion of investment from post-secondary? Stocco says that they haven't had any conversations yet, but they will be looking at that as an opportunity.

Chew asks how the GRCA can have conversations with school boards about managing the programs. Stocco says that they have regular convos, and have looked at 5-year agreements, but they get their funding confirmed on an annual basis, so that makes things tricky.

Recommendations:

- back to the General membership for construction award approval.
- g. **GM-10-23-76 - Outdoor Environmental Education Program Review**
- THAT the Grand River Conservation Authority endorse the proposed actions and transition plan outlined within this report to move its Outdoor Environmental Education Program towards a breakeven business model that does not rely on municipal apportionment (levy);**
- AND THAT staff report back to the board at minimum on an annual basis on progress made.**

Davis has an amendment. He says that there should be discussions with municipalities about making this funding category 2, and his motion is to refer until those discussions take place.

Stocco says that this is about the program not the facilities. There are lots of opportunities for those discussions, but they need to proceed with changing programming. White proposes language that if a centre is meant to close, then they have to approach city for funding.

Davis says the two issues are connected, and he doesn't think that they should be making changes until they have those convos with municipalities about adding education programs to category 2.

So Davis clarifies, he wants a deferral until there's been a "robust" conversation with municipalities about moving this to category 2. Staff say that it's still technically cat. 3, but they can ask municipalities to cover cost, and that could go thru individual cities & towns.

Now we're debating deferral/referral definitions. Also, no seconder yet.

Staff note that a deferral has to be to a specific time. White asks Davis, who asks staff how much time they need. CAO Lawson says that they have been talking to municipal staff with the inventory showing ed programs as cat. 3, but council decisions would take months.

Davis suggests a deferral to April, but White scoffs at that and asks about January, would that impact this budget. Staff say that the 2024 budget has no influence from this report in terms of the immediate year. White asks Davis about January, and Davis is fine.

Coleman seconds. White says that this puts the obligation on councils to move quickly at putting this on their agenda by January. Motion to defer passes with 3 against (including Guelph Cllr Billings).

Shantz asks for clarity: A program is only moved if a facility is closed? Doesn't need an answer to that today.

Next, Provincial Offences Act Officer Appointments -

Motion THAT the Grand River Conservation Authority re-appoint all Provincial Offences Act Officers under Section 30.1 of the Conservation Authorities Act, to take effect on the date of proclamation is approved.

Next, Conestogo Dam Bridge Deck Rehabilitation - Energy Attenuator - Project Award

Motion THAT the GRCA award the contract for the Conestogo Dam Bridge Deck Rehabilitation – Energy Attenuator supply and installation project to Royal Fence Limited for the amount of \$129,500 (excluding HST).AND THAT an overall project budget of \$142,450 (excluding HST). Approved.

Next, Permits Issued under Ontario Regulation 150/06 – Every quarter, GRCA staff provide a report about the number of permits authorized under Ontario Regulation 150/06. In July, August and September there were 217 permits approved and issued, including 11 for Guelph.

Report about current watershed conditions is approved.

Next, Other Business - Governance and Attendance. Specifically, comments about hybrid meetings.

Not sure who, but he says that it would be helpful if there was a quorum of people at the GRCA centre in-person unless they're unwell or "live on the fringes" (Guy Gardhouse was cited as an example). He thinks that in-person is the default.

Foxton adds bad weather as a reason not to be there in-person, weather conditions could be hugely different over the watershed. Shantz says she doesn't disagree about being face-to-face, but she had back-to-back meetings and was able to do both thanks to hybrid.

Gardhouse says he likes the convenience of hybrid, but knows important of meeting live, but the efficiencies of hybrid speak for themselves. Also, it's a reduction to the carbon footprint.

Says he intends to be at the next meeting in-person.

White says the obligation for members is to their municipalities, but it's agreed that some virtual is a good thing. Coleman says he's disappointed that out of 26 members there's only 9-12 people in-person. Encourages everyone to come out in-person. Misses interaction w/staff

One member says he does not agree with hybrid meeting. At all.

Chew agrees you can't replace in-person interactions, and suggests that maybe there's a quota, like once every 6 months.

James says hybrid makes the meetings more accessible in some ways, helps members be present even if they can't physically be in the space. Doesn't think they'll be going back to completely in-person, can't be absolutist.

Billings says its great to encourage in-person participating, but some people have medical issues or compromised immune system. She considers it an accessibility issue.

Another member notes that given the geographic area it's an hour or two hour drive for some people to get here. Also, could they add a social element, give people more of a reason to come out other than a boring meeting.

Foxton says that they cut out the breakfasts and that's benefited her diet, and notes that if there is a medical issue then that's an acceptable exemption.

White says he's heard that virtual is an important tool, but there is more of a desire to have more people in-person. He's not sure about policy of mandatory attendance though, perhaps there's a middle ground that staff can come up with a takeaway.

Board is now moving into closed session for:

- Minutes from the previous closed session
- Labour Relations or employee negotiations
- Litigation or potential litigation

The board is now meeting in-camera. Will let you know what comes out of it soon.



Coming out of closed:

Motion that the GRCA receive a report for staff model for outdoor ed program as info.

Approved.

Motion that report violation of ON reg 150/06 be received. Approved.



And that's...



@threadreaderapp unroll please!

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