



Speaking Notes
Mayor Richard Stewart

Event: 2025 Budget – Introductory Remarks

Date: Monday, Dec. 2, 2024 – 7 p.m.

Location: Council Chambers, Coquitlam City Hall

Check against delivery.

Good evening, everyone.

Before we begin, I want to start in a good way by acknowledging with gratitude and respect that the name Coquitlam was derived from the hən̓q̓əmi̓hən̓ (*HUN-kuh-MEE-num*) word kʷikʷə́ləm (*kwee-KWET-lum*) meaning “Red Fish Up the River”. The City is honoured to be located on the kʷikʷə́ləm traditional and ancestral lands, including those parts that were historically shared with the q̓ícə́y (*kat-zee*), and other Coast Salish Peoples.

A Thoughtful Approach to Budgeting

Tonight, we begin with one of the most important discussions of the year: the 2025 City Budget and the 2025-2029 Financial Plan. This plan is the result of thoughtful collaboration and reflects our shared commitment to fiscal responsibility, community safety, and sustainable growth.

Creating a budget is never easy, and that is especially true in our current economic climate. Rising costs, legislative changes, and the demands of a growing population make it increasingly complex. While no one here takes property tax increases lightly, our responsibility is clear: to sustain the services our residents rely on, meet our legislated mandates, and ensure Coquitlam’s growth is managed responsibly.

Despite the challenges, this budget demonstrates this Council’s unwavering commitment to our community—investing in public services, community safety and infrastructure, while keeping affordability in mind.

Balancing Pressures and Priorities

Like households across Coquitlam, the City is also navigating inflation and rising costs. Residents are seeing higher bills for housing, food, and utilities, and we, too, face increased costs, such as construction inflation, labour shortages and external pressures like the funding for Metro Vancouver’s North Shore Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Adding to these challenges are provincial legislative changes, including the *Housing Supply Act* and Homes for People plan. While these initiatives bring much-needed provincial focus on housing affordability, they also create significant financial and operational strain for

municipalities. Coquitlam is already a leader in the provision of needed housing – first in housing starts per capita and second in rental starts in the region – but growth brings demands for more infrastructure, services, and public safety measures. These are costs we cannot defer.

At the same time, we need to keep community feedback top of mind. Nearly 500 residents shared their priorities through our budget process, with 60% supporting current funding levels. This reflects what we heard through the most recent Community Satisfaction Survey, where residents emphasized the value of services like public safety, solid waste, and parks. Affordability is a growing concern, and we've worked hard to strike a balance—limiting new spending while ensuring critical services are maintained.

Collaboration and Rigour in Decision-Making

Coquitlam's 2025 budget reflects a rigorous, collaborative approach to decision-making that balances immediate needs with long-term planning. At the heart of this process was Council's direction to minimize tax increases and new funding requests by looking internally for solutions.

The components of this approach are not new, but through additional scrutiny, we have found efficiencies to address some of the budget drivers and minimize tax impacts without affecting service delivery. Examples of this include:

- Departments reallocated existing budgets to address rising costs without compromising services.
- Staff and Council worked together to ensure alignment with Coquitlam's 2024-2027 Strategic Plan, focusing on community safety, housing affordability, environmental sustainability and financial stability.
- Strategic use of reserves to address immediate funding needs to sustain service levels, particularly those related to roads, utilities and housing initiatives.

Sound Financial Planning for Coquitlam's Future

Throughout the budget process we were very focused on maximizing value for taxpayers and delivering services responsibly.

- ***Continued support for infrastructure sustainability:*** Additional infrastructure sustainability funding allocated to key infrastructure assets, ensures our city's facilities, roads, and utilities remain safe and reliable.
- ***Enhancing financial policies:*** Policies like the Development Stabilization Reserve Policy ensure long-term financial resilience with an additional contribution from tax growth revenues planned for 2025, strengthening Coquitlam's capacity to manage the related significant future growth costs.

Key Drivers of the 2025 Budget

The proposed property tax increase for 2025 is 6.83%, which equates to approximately \$175 for the average household.

The total impact for 2025, when we add in the utility adjustments for water, sewer and drainage, and waste collection, is just over \$300 or \$25 per month.

Earlier I mentioned some of the broader financial pressures on the City.

Let's break down some of the key factors driving this budget:

- **RCMP Contract Impacts:** The federally imposed increase in the RCMP contract represents almost \$3 million or a 1.47% tax impact—a significant but necessary investment to ensure our city remains safe.
- **Extreme Weather Preparedness:** Additional funding for extreme weather operations ensures Coquitlam is prepared to respond to increasingly severe weather events.
- **Legislative Changes and Downloading:** New mandates and responsibilities transferred from other levels of government—such as those associated with emergency management, housing initiatives and land-use planning requirements—have added significant financial and operational pressures to the City's budget.
- **Cultural Investments:** Increased funding to support Coquitlam's cultural partners—including the Public Library, Evergreen Cultural Centre, Place des Arts and the Heritage Society—ensuring they continue to enrich our community's literacy, heritage, and cultural vibrancy.

Strategic Investments in a Growing and Thriving Community

However, the 2025 budget is more than a set of numbers; it highlights the meaningful ways we are responding to community priorities, and focuses on strategic investments to meet the needs of our growing city. Specifically, I would like to highlight:

- **Public Safety Investments:** This year's budget includes funding for a Community Safety Advisor and four new RCMP officers, increasing capacity and reducing overtime demands. This is in addition to the funding approved in 2024 for 10 new fire fighters and nine additional RCMP officers. This investment underscores our unwavering commitment to maintaining a safe and resilient community.
- **No- and Low-Cost Recreation Programs:** We are expanding accessible recreation opportunities to ensure residents of all ages and income levels can benefit from recreation and fitness activities. These programs are at the heart of what makes Coquitlam an inclusive and connected community.

- **Infrastructure and Growth:** Priority capital projects like the Northeast Community Centre and Burke Mountain Athletic Park reflect our focus on building facilities that support both the current and future needs of our growing community.
- **Sustainable Capital Planning:** Allocating operating funding related our new facilities and assets ensures they are sustainably funded throughout their lifetime, not just at the construction stage.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Investments in electric vehicles and energy-efficient initiatives demonstrate our commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preserving Coquitlam’s livability for generations to come.

Fiscal Responsibility and Prudent Management

In my time on Council, Coquitlam has been – and continues to be – guided by sound financial planning. This has allowed us to optimize reserves, mitigate one-time costs, plan for the future and keep tax increases low wherever possible. By adhering to the budget we set and our internal scrutiny, we have ensured our resources are directed to high-impact areas while being prudent with the public purse.

An example of this includes leveraging operating contingency funds to reduce the significant sewer and drainage rate increases caused by Metro Vancouver’s Northshore Waste Water Treatment Plant. That project alone is responsible for a 10% increase in Coquitlam’s sewer and drainage rates. By using our contingencies, Coquitlam went from a potential 20% increase down to 16%, reducing the financial impact to our residents.

Another example of this scrutiny is focusing on workplace safety measures that deliver both cost savings through reduced WorkSafe BC premiums and long-term safety benefits for our workforce.

We remain committed to finding efficiencies while ensuring that our services meet the high standards Coquitlam residents expect and deserve. Our balanced approach limited new funding requests and prioritized the areas of greatest need.

Collaboration and Community Input

This budget reflects the hard work and input of many. City staff, Council, and residents all played critical roles in shaping this plan. As I mentioned earlier, over 500 residents participated in the online survey, providing valuable insights and reinforcing the importance of balancing affordability with the need to invest in essential services and infrastructure.

We are fortunate to have a strong team of staff experts whose knowledge and dedication guide our decisions. Coquitlam’s staff bring a depth of expertise that ensures our policy work is informed, deliberate, and impactful. This Council has built a culture that values and relies on that expertise, recognizing its importance in maintaining our community’s

success. Without this collaboration, we would risk undermining the very goals we strive to achieve.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this process. Your engagement and dedication ensure that Coquitlam continues to be a remarkable community.

Closing: Building Coquitlam’s Future Together

This budget is more than dollars and cents; it’s a plan for a safe, vibrant, and sustainable future. It balances the immediate needs of our community with the long-term vision that will shape Coquitlam for generations to come.

Together, we are ensuring Coquitlam remains not only a great place to live today but also a city where our children and grandchildren can thrive.

Thank you. Merci. ç·iθamə cən (*high-SAY-up-kuh*).