
City of Burlington 2026 Budget Proposal

Executive Summary

The 2026 budget proposal builds on Burlington's commitment to sustainability, safety, community vibrancy, and fiscal responsibility. This integrated plan supports strategic infrastructure renewal, environmental leadership, organizational modernization, and enhanced community well-being — setting the city on a strong path toward a resilient and inclusive future.

Key Recommendations

1. Employee Compensation and Well-being

- Freeze non-union pay for 2026 and 2027, prioritizing fiscal discipline while protecting service delivery.
 - Enhance employee wellness:
 - Expanded mental health and well-being supports.
 - Begin phased implementation of a 4-day workweek.
 - Increase starting vacation entitlement to three weeks, with accelerated progression timelines.
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2. Transit Service Enhancements

- Add 16 transit drivers in 2026, no new buses, funded through increased ridership and reduced overtime.
- The proposed amount does not help Burlington achieve its now expired Transit Plan. While Burlington Transit has made terrific gains in its ridership, it has not completed its goals of improving service. This amount will help achieve the goals set out in the plan. Council should ask that Staff develop a Service Plan for 2026 consisting of options that will range from increasing service with 5 Operators, 8 Operators and 16 Operators. These Service Plan options should be developed and presented to Council during Budget 2026 and refined for implementation in June 2026. Handi-Van service should not be expanded at this time.

- Free transit initiatives:
 - Free Summer transit for students to be permanently funded
 - Free Christmas and March Break transit, funded through the Youth Initiatives Reserve as a pilot pending results from Summer ridership.
 - Free transit and shuttles during Sound of Music Festival and RibFest, and free transit on Canada Day and New Year's Eve, funded potentially through the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) and sponsorships.
 - Pilot renewable diesel transition for transit and fleet vehicles to advance climate targets.
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3. Infrastructure and Environmental Investments

- Increase the Infrastructure Renewal Levy to 3% gradually from 2026-2031, strengthening funding for critical asset renewal and resiliency.
 - Use the Infrastructure Renewal levy to support:
 - The Multiyear Community Investment Fund.
 - Immediate expansion of the tree replacement program, increasing the planting/replacement ratio to 3:1, strengthening Burlington's climate adaptation and urban canopy goals.
 - Dedicate MAT revenues to develop a Sport Tourism, Development, and Infrastructure Strategy, enhancing economic activity and community health.
 - This strategy should be used to attract more sport events and tourism in Burlington but also develop the infrastructure needed. This strategy should specifically look at developing a 50m Pool, Indoor Soccer facility and other sport infrastructure located at Sherwood Forest Park.
 - Explore Sustainability-as-a-Service models to advance Net Zero goals, leveraging private-sector partnerships for building retrofits, fleet electrification, and green infrastructure.
 - Use the Green Initiatives Reserve to fund:
 - The next Climate Action and Resilience Plan.
 - Wind Study
 - Biodiversity Strategy, to enhance local ecosystems.
 - Feasibility study on implementing District Energy, supporting low-carbon community-scale heating and cooling.
 - Increase funding for new community gardens, advancing local food security and neighbourhood connection.
 - Explore opportunities to increase naturalized areas, reducing maintenance costs and improving climate and ecological resilience.
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4. Downtown and Mobility Strategies

- Initiate a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Strategy, supporting sustainable, active travel potentially funded by parking reserves given the current ongoing parking strategy for the Downtown.
 - Use parking revenues to fund the next Downtown Burlington Master Plan, ensuring vibrancy and economic vitality.
 - Increase Automated Speed Enforcement (ASE) cameras to 8, enhancing road safety and advancing Vision Zero goals.
 - Accelerate the Mainway Grade Separation Project to 2026, beginning planning and early design to improve safety, reduce delays and unlock a important economic corridor.
 - Initiate a Rail Crossing Planning Project, covering Mainway and all crossings in the Integrated Mobility Plan, prioritizing safety and future grade separations.
 - Implement ward-based Vision Zero community safety plans, modeled on Sheldon Creek:
 - Develop tailored local traffic safety and speed management plans in each ward.
 - Engage residents, schools, and stakeholders in co-design.
 - Include data-driven traffic calming, safe crossings, neighborhood design improvements, and targeted education campaigns.
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5. Organizational Capacity and Customer Service

- Extend the HERO coordinator contract for two additional years, enhancing customer service capacity.
 - Add a Sport Tourism Coordinator, funded via MAT, to drive sport event attraction and strategy implementation.
 - Add a TDM Coordinator, to lead TDM strategy rollout and active transportation initiatives.
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6. Youth and Community Development

- Initiate a new Youth Strategy, funded through the Youth Initiatives Reserve, to engage youth, support leadership development, and improve access to programs and services.
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7. Revenue Generation and Long-term Sustainability

- Launch a sponsorship and advertising review, to expand non-tax revenue streams.
 - Conduct a feasibility study on a potential Stormwater Fee, integrated into the Stormwater Management Plan, to secure sustainable funding for climate resilience infrastructure.
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8. Service Review, Transformation, and Civic Engagement

- Launch, with resident involvement, a transparent Service Review and Transformation Committee, starting in 2026 and preparing recommendations for the 2027 Budget:
 - Evaluate and modernize City services.
 - Identify efficiencies and ensure alignment with evolving community needs.
 - Approach: Collaborative, transparent, and community-engaged.
 - Explore participatory budgeting beginning in 2027, empowering residents to propose and vote on local investment priorities, strengthening civic engagement and trust.
 - Bring forward all options to achieve the tax rate as set out by the Mayor.
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9. Comprehensive Staff and Project Inventory

- Bring forward to Council a consolidated list of:
 - Unfunded staff positions, supporting future workforce strategy.
 - Approved and unapproved initiatives, for strategic prioritization.
 - Capital projects, with funding status and readiness to advance.
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Conclusion

The 2026 budget proposal is a robust, strategic roadmap that balances Burlington's immediate service needs with long-term goals for sustainability, safety, community vibrancy, and organizational transformation. Through increased infrastructure investment, enhanced mobility and climate action, support for youth and neighborhoods, and new engagement initiatives, Burlington will continue to lead as a resilient, inclusive, and future-ready city.
