Bruyere Bytes #1 - parking

Town of Esquimalt/Bruyere Bytes

D

Dan Bruyere <danbruyere57@gmail.com> Jul 13, 2024, 11:44 AM

To Council

Good morning, Mayor and Council. As you know I have sent many emails and made a couple of presentations over the past six or seven months, but I'm going to switch it up a little bit. Rather than send in extensive notes that are a page or two long with much information, I will break my comments up into smaller bite size pieces; hopefully, that way, they will be easier to digest.

So here is Bruyere Byte number 1:

At the council meeting this past Monday, there was much discussion around street parking and the frustration residents are experiencing with increased contractor traffic as various developments proceed. Staff discussed bylaw enforcement, construction parking management plans, additions of FTEs to staff, etc. Understandably, there was some alarm voiced by members of council on this last aspect, and rightfully so.

Here is my solution: do nothing.

Here's why:

1. This is a temporary problem. Construction will wind down and the contractor traffic will subside as the workers, and their trucks move to the next site. And so on.
2. Street parking is public parking; the resident is not entitled to the one or two car spaces of possible parking in front of their house lot.
3. Trying to reserve streets for residential parking only simply moves the problem to the next street over, and so on. An ever-widening ripple effect that can't be won.
4. There is a great demand for more affordable (read: tax subsidized) housing. Many people support that initiative; this is a consequence of the resultant increased construction activity.
5. We are already under pressure on the budget and property tax increases. The discussion of management plans and additional FTEs for this process is alarming.
6. Though residents make it clear to Council that they are displeased, Council need not react to every complaint if the solution is not available, even after incurring great expense. There is a limit to what can be done. Let those residents know about points 1 through 6, above. Courage.

7. In sort of a backhanded way, a bit of frustration on the parking front could drive people to use more public transit, or cycling, which is in keeping with what appears to be Council's vision. Why work toward alleviating that frustration? (to be clear, I don't support the large expenditures on biking lanes as I have said in past notes)

Those are my thoughts on this issue. Watch this space for more Bruyere Bytes in the weeks to come!

Regards,
Dan Bruyere

Esquimalt

Bruyere Bytes #2 - Policing

Town of Esquimalt/Bruyere Bytes

D

Dan Bruyere <danbruyere57@gmail.com> Mon, Jul 15, 2024, 0:19 AM

To Council

Good morning, Mayor and Council. For the second edition of Bruyere Bytes, I want to discuss policing and the impact of recent events downtown. Please note the budgeted amounts I reference here and in future notes are extrapolated from the Budgeted Expenditures chart in the 2024 Draft Budget Presentation posted on the Town's website (using Police = $10million as a basis). I may be slightly off overall, but I don't see the Operating Budget posted elsewhere.

Police ~$10million or 19.8% of budget

1. If my notes are correct, Esquimalt pays about 13.6% of VicPD budget. Please correct me if I am wrong.
2. Recent events on Pandora Avenue have caused the Police Chief to announce that fire and paramedic services will only be provided to that district (900 block of Pandora) with a police escort going forward. There are many calls to that area each day.
3. As a result, costs will go up and Victoria and Esquimalt police services will be impacted.

I am aware that Esquimalt is looking at alternative models to de-link ourselves from Vic PD and I support this initiative. However, in the meantime, can we reopen the methodology which was used to arrive at the 13.6% share? Was this based upon crime rates (or some other such metric) when the deal was first struck years ago? As anecdotally it appears Victoria crime rates have risen and Esquimalt's are relatively static, perhaps there is a protocol in the original agreement which allows for a reset from time to time. Also, as the Provincial Government's policies and actions or inactions have contributed to the scenes on Pandora and elsewhere, is now the time to approach them once again on the unfairness of having the residents of Esquimalt carry so much of the freight?

I look forward to attending the COTW meeting tonight.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,
Dan Bruyere

Esquimalt, BC

Bruyere Bytes #3 - 2025 Budget Planning - bending the curve

Town of Esquimalt/Bruyere Bytes

D

Dan Bruyere <danbruyere57@gmail.com> Mon, Dec 9, 2024, 3:52 PM

To Council

Good afternoon, Mayor and Council, it's been some time since the last Byte, but I haven't left the country or fallen off the edge of the earth, just wrapped up in family, travel, and renos, in that order. However, I'm back in the saddle and as always deeply interested in the affairs of the Town. At this point, it's likely time to begin discussing the upcoming 2025 budget process once again.

I don't see any new 2025 models on the Town's website other than some carry-overs which have been populated under the 2025 column, though in that regard the $461k increase for staffing and $638k for policing pencilled in is alarming. But more on that in future Bytes.

You've seen the charts below before, but I wanted to refresh our memories on how far my home's property taxes have outstripped inflation over the past few years. I've included the data tables so you can challenge them if you wish, but the taxes are from my tax notices, and the inflation rates are sourced from the internet. One should note that my rates increased by 5.3% in 2024 versus 2023, though the message from Mayor Desjardins (ref: 2024 Tax & Budget Information mail out) outlined that the revenue required to balance the budget was 7.72%. The difference is a result of my assessed value dropping YoY, but still, a $7358 tax bill is eye watering, and will become unsustainable for Sue and me unless we bend that curve back towards inflation, and beyond. For reference, when we purchased the house in 2021, the tax bill was $6054.

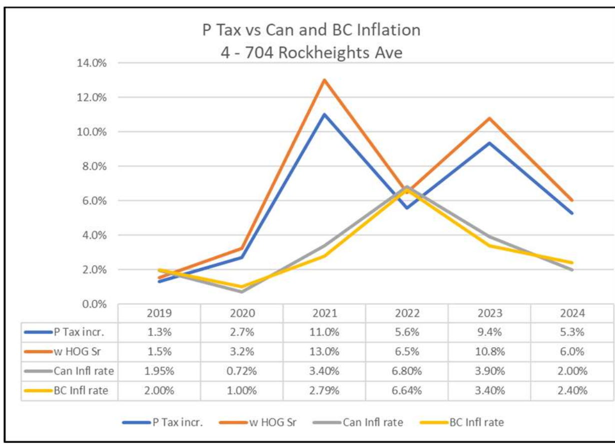
So, as we come into the budget, I note that BC's inflation rate is around 2.4%, and Canada's 2.0%. In my meetings with the Mayor earlier this year, and subsequently with Councillors Morrison and Cavens, I recommended that for this cycle, Council give the various departments a hard target of inflation plus population growth as a ceiling and go from there. Please note that this would be a ceiling, with an aspirational target of less than that. As far as I can see on the internet (ref: StatsCan), Esquimalt's population between the 2016 and 2021 census declined slightly, and one 2024 estimate continues that trend, but on the face of it, to continue to see significant growth in staffing and other operating expenses is counterintuitive. Also, from the videos I have seen, the Vic PD budget continues to face immense upward pressure with the corresponding impact on Esquimalt. Where are we on divorcing ourselves from that arrangement as that ship will pull us under?

I understand many of the pressures on the budget are mandatory, usually contractual, or safety based, but that means we have to take a very, very hard look at any discretionary spending to achieve the goal I have outlined above.

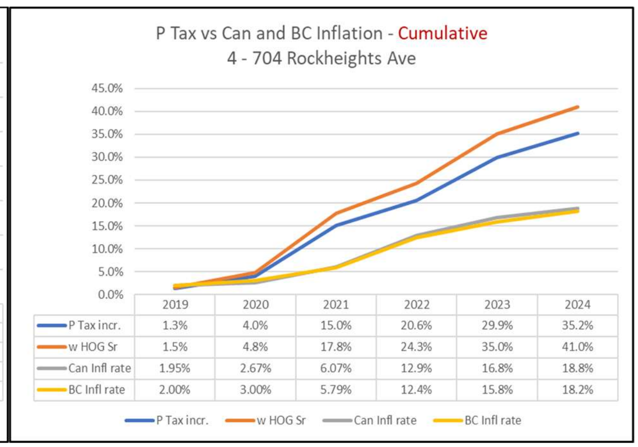
Thankyou for your time. Watch this space for more Bytes soon!

Regards,
Dan Bruyere

Esquimalt, BC



	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
P Tax incr.	1.3%	2.7%	11.0%	5.6%	9.4%	5.3%
w HOG Sr	1.5%	3.2%	13.0%	6.5%	10.8%	6.0%
Can Infl rate	1.95%	0.72%	3.40%	6.80%	3.90%	2.00%
BC Infl rate	2.00%	1.00%	2.79%	6.64%	3.40%	2.40%



	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
P Tax incr.	1.3%	4.0%	15.0%	20.6%	29.9%	35.2%
w HOG Sr	1.5%	4.8%	17.8%	24.3%	35.0%	41.0%
Can Infl rate	1.95%	2.67%	6.07%	12.9%	16.8%	18.8%
BC Infl rate	2.00%	3.00%	5.79%	12.4%	15.8%	18.2%

Bruyere Bytes #4 - bike lanes

Town of Esquimalt/Bruyere Bytes

D

Dan Bruyere <danbruyere57@gmail.com> Sun, Jan 19, 2025, 4:50 PM

To Council

Dear Mayor and Council;

As the bike lane survey close date draws near, I thought I would add a few more thoughts on the ATNP for your consideration. I have also completed the survey.

I'm sure you have received much feedback on the project already, so to help focus my comments I have broken them into four categories as befits the townscape - beauty, vitality, cost, and odds and sods - as there is much to unpack here, and much at stake.

Beauty

- Meridians are special and break up the concrete jungle. I understand they were created in 1993 so to undo the work and foresight of our forefathers would be a travesty
- Meridians make downtown Esquimalt unique and must be preserved, and this attractive area was one the reasons we chose to move to this community
- Concrete barriers with plastic pipes atop are lifeless ugly things and present the opposite of the green, leafy islands, full of life
- Concrete production is one of the most carbon intensive processes there is; trees and shrubs absorb carbon (carbon sink) and return oxygen to the atmosphere
- Plastic pipes are petroleum based
- Requisite cleaning takes public resources in manpower, equipment and materials (including gasoline/diesel).

Vitality

- A town centre must be business-friendly to retain its vitality, making it a place where people want to go, and linger, and return to
- Businesses need adjacent parking to receive customers and deliveries, and ship their wares
- Removing parking in favour of cyclists will sound a death knell for several businesses along Esquimalt Road, impacting vitality and tax base
- Cyclists passing by on their bikes and e-bikes while commuting into and out of Victoria will offer no such return (existing, beautiful, and well-maintained E&N Trail is available for commuters and other cyclists)
- The very nature of cycling is discretionary and a big part of the attraction - the freedom. One is free to choose when and where they ride. If one street is deemed too dangerous, pick another, or walk, or take the bus, or drive. Or if a rider chooses that street, be accountable, obey the traffic patterns, and keep your head on a swivel. I say this as a daily cyclist in and out of downtown Calgary for twenty odd years, mainly on at-grade residential and commercial streets, 20 kms per day or more. It’s a choice I made for convenience, exercise, and yes, freedom

- A business owner on Esquimalt Road has no such option - having adequate parking is mandatory to their livelihood.

Cost

- If I recall the last two budgets correctly, we have spent over $6 million on biking infrastructure over the past two years. For a community of 18000, this is exemplary
- The Town had to compromise on the Public Safety Building as we were short of funds. Could we have included both fire AND police in the PSB to serve all residents rather than allocating ~$6mil to serve a relatively small special interest group?
- Aging infrastructure (arena 60 years old, rec centre 50 years old, etc.) will be requiring investment, as well as any "surprises" in other areas
- Apparently, the engagement survey occurred in 2020 with a few hundred responses, some from o/s Esquimalt, so a relatively small number from which to draw large conclusions regarding capital allocations
- Per your engineering staff from one of last year's COTW, island removal and reclamation are estimated at $100,000 each
- Esquimalt property taxes are high. One only has to quickly scan the right-hand column of a realtor's listing to see we are among the highest. This will repel possible new residents and may drive existing residents to sell and move to a lower-tax community (I personally know of a couple who did so). Spending needs to be efficient in areas that benefit the most people
- In any budget there is mandatory and discretionary spending. More bike lane spending is definitely the latter and these days no longer affordable given the current state of affairs in the cost of living. We must be strategic in our spending for the benefit of the vast majority of our citizens,

Odds and Sods

- The original survey is five years old and performed during the covid pandemic with relatively few respondents relative to Esquimalt's population at the time. Are the findings still relevant or are we tying ourselves to an outdated ideology? How many residents use the current bike lanes is suspect as my anecdotal observations (previously provided, with charts) indicate very few, on average less than 3 users per trip. If this is more for the benefit of commuters into the City, many may not pay property taxes here and the E&N Trail would be a viable route for them (as mentioned above)
- The cycling community is well organized and quickly mobilizes to shut down any threat to their goal of the total realization of hardened, protected bike lanes to the fullest extent possible. They broach no dissent to this vision. Their position is uncompromising, and in my view this bullying tactic must stop. As mentioned above the Town has already spent or committed $6 million plus on these hardened bike lanes and it may be time to say that that

is enough. Times have changed, costs are high, our population is flat and generally aging, and committing significant funds to a rather small, unique group is not justified

- Other communities such as Oak Bay have resisted the inclination to put in these lanes, so it is not unprecedented. Also, it is pertinent to consider that Toronto is considering removing bike lanes on three main thoroughfares (Bloor, University, Yonge)
- Survey results, outdated or not, are only part of the input into the decision tree. Council will make their final decision on a host of factors including, hopefully, some of those which I have included here.

Closing statement

- As a resident and taxpayer of Esquimalt, I do not support any further expenditures on the development of protected bike lanes beyond fresh paint on existing infrastructure. The biking community has been well served already on Lampson, Tillicum and Esquimalt, and with the E&N Trail, and in the spirit of reasonable compromise should be satisfied with the changes which have been made as a result of the ATPN of 2020 to date.

I apologize for the length of this note but I tried to make it as succinct as possible given the issue at hand. Also, I will not be attending the COTW tomorrow as unfortunately we have welcomed covid into our home this past week so I'm a bit under the weather. I am, however, available via email or phone if you have any questions or comments,

Thank you once again for your time and consideration.

Regards,
Dan Bruyere

4 - 704 Rockheights Ave

Esquimalt, B.C.

Bruyere Bytes #5 - Comments on September 29 Council meetings

Town of Esquimalt/Bruyere Bytes

Dan Bruyere <danbruyere57@gmail.com> Wed, Oct 1, 2025, 1:39 PM

To Council

Sue and I appreciated attending these meetings in person this past Monday evening. As Council is aware, we have been alarmed by the rapid increase in our property taxes since moving here in 2022 and encourage Council to try to bend the curve back toward inflation as much as possible. As the chart below shows, our taxes have increased by 33.9% since the 2021 levy, and are well beyond national and provincial inflation, and population growth (Esquimalt's population was recorded at

17,533 in the 2021 Canadian Census and was previously recorded at 17,655 in the 2016 census). Note 2024 and 2022 were promising, and we would request Council to target a return to a similar range at a maximum in the 2026 budget, and beyond. Ideally, as I have stated in previous emails, we should target inflation plus actual population growth. This means reducing discretionary spending as much as possible, and increasing revenues, if possible.

With that said, and our hard-earned tax dollars in mind, here are our comments on the week's meetings:

Council Priorities Plan Review:

1. CAO Mr. Moran admitted that about 90% of his staff activities are committed to Operational activities, the remainder to working on special projects, and that there is a gap between capability and capacity. The project list runs for many pages, and several have been deferred for multiple quarters. I would suggest Council might take a hard look at the list and pare it back to a more manageable level.
2. The Director of Corp Services indicated FOI requests take up much time, as does report building, and budgeting, among other things. I'm not sure what each dept's service level agreements or KPI's look like, but perhaps Council could look at easing those somewhat in the interest of cost savings. For example, going from one week to two in response time on a given item would not be the end of the world in our quest to bend the curve.
3. Development Services explained building permit revenue has declined over the past couple of years as the real estate market slows, which should give Council pause as they consider the 2026 budget. He also commented that current permits do not have an affordable housing component to them (if I understood him correctly). As I have stated before, I don't believe the Township should contribute municipal property tax funds to AH as the province has earmarked significant funds from their budget (from their website, their 2023 budget included $1.3 billion for homelessness prevention and reduction efforts, and an additional $4.3 billion for subsidised housing, which included support for those currently homeless or unstably housed). We don't need to play in that sandbox.
4. Financial Services Mr. Irvine said he had sent out budget '26 instructions to managers on August 31, with the first draft back in late October/early November. I hope these instructions had a target percentage included in them as opposed to the "throw it at the wall and see what sticks" method. The latter results in an over-prescribed budget that Council then has to wrestle with to get it down to something more reasonable. We have discussed this before. He also mentioned a decline in "PILT" (I may have the acronym wrong) payments which will have an impact on the upcoming budget.
5. There were further presentations from the Fire Chief, and Managers or Directors from Engineering, HR & Community Relations, Communications, Parks and Rec, and Community

Safety and Strategic Initiatives. Can some of these roles be combined? It seems like a lot for a community of 18,000.

Council of the Whole Meeting:

1. Council approved the acceptance of the 2025 Firesmart Community Funding of $138,003.65. The Fire Chief indicated they would like to hire a Fire Smart Coordinator to manage this fund, and that this would be a full-time position. When Councillor Morrison questioned whether this should be a temporary position as FT comes with other obligations as an employer (severance, benefits), Mr. Moran explained we didn't want to tie the position to funding that needs to be renewed annually, and that town employees (staff) were all tied to funding in one way or another anyway, if I understood him correctly. My questions:
   - I believe staff salaries are mainly paid by property taxes, for the most part, with some offsetting grant monies/ or am I mistaken?
   - Do we need to hire a new person to manage the $138k because much of that would be consumed by his or her salary?
   - If we have received this grant in the past, it appears we didn't need to hire someone to manage it previously?
   - If we really need to hire someone and nobody else in the Town's current employee group can manage this, why not make it a contract (temporary) position with the clarification up front that it is tied to the funding and will be reviewed each year for extension?
   - With the new hires in the Fire Department, would they have the spare capacity to manage this fund, perhaps with a bonus attached?
2. Council is reviewing our membership in the South Island Prosperity Partnership, to the tune of $40k per year. They will also look at a 5-year membership during the budget process. As only 5 of the 13 municipalities in the CRD are currently members, this would seem to fall into the discretionary spending bucket - please see my opening statement.

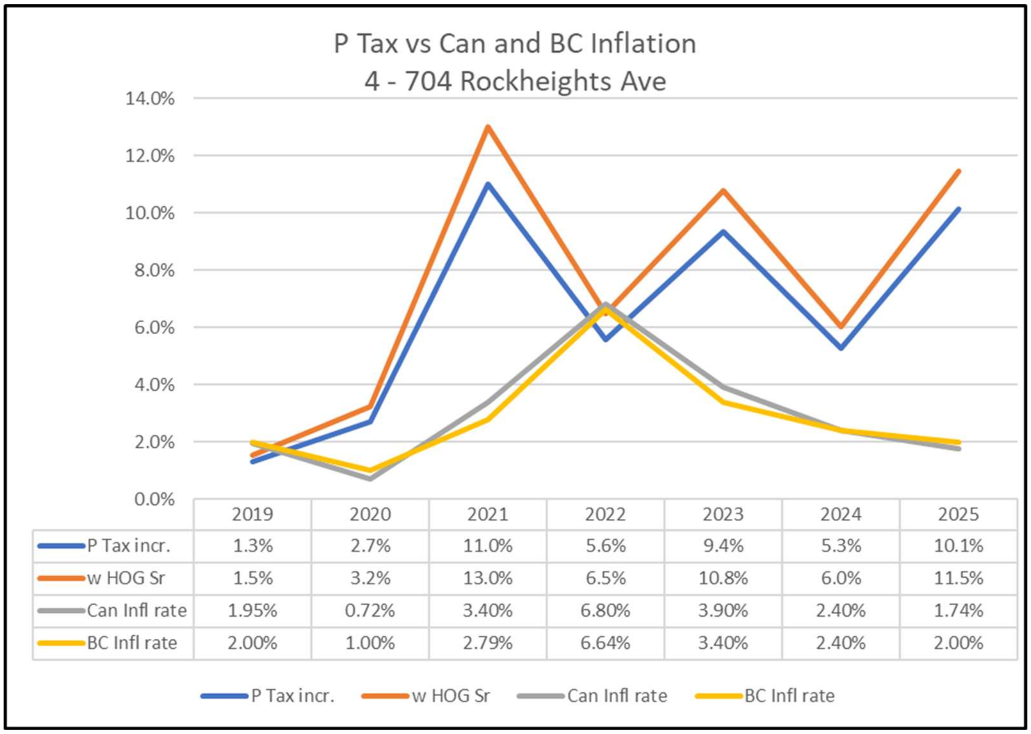
Thank you for your time in reviewing our comments and questions. We look forward to the upcoming budget process and will provide our comments accordingly.

Copies of Bruyere Bytes 1 through 4 available by request.

Regards,

Dan Bruyere

Esquimalt



	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
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w HOG Sr	1.5%	3.2%	13.0%	6.5%	10.8%	6.0%	11.5%
Can Infl rate	1.95%	0.72%	3.40%	6.80%	3.90%	2.40%	1.74%
BC Infl rate	2.00%	1.00%	2.79%	6.64%	3.40%	2.40%	2.00%

Bruyere Bytes #6 - 2026 Budget

Town of Esquimalt/Bruyere Bytes

D

Dan Bruyere <danbruyere57@gmail.com> Sat, Jan 10, 2026 12:24 PM

To Council

Good afternoon, Mayor and Council. As we are now into the 2026 property tax calculation cycle, please consider my questions and concerns as outlined below. Since we purchased our home in late 2021, our tax bill has increased by 33.9%. More recently, I've seen increases of 9.4, 5.3 and 10.1% for 2023, 2024, and 2025 respectively, while over the same period the assessed value of my home has decreased by -3.0% (CAO Horan asked me about assessed valuation in our meeting last year but I had to check). Something is not adding up.

A quick survey of municipalities in BC slots Esquimalt on the higher end of the list: lower (more affordable) than Powell River, Kamloops, Nanaimo, Campbell River, Victoria and Saanich, but higher (more expensive) than Colwood, Sooke, Langford and Sidney. This is for tax assessments on a home valued close to my own per the latest notice. Make no mistake, we are in a competitive market when people and businesses are considering a move in or out of a municipality, and property taxes are a significant factor in those considerations. Why settle for the middle when we can be among the best?

Esquimalt has the potential to be a destination for people from across the country to retire or work or open businesses (see the Rosemead Inn) for all the reasons I'm sure you are aware of, but high property taxes will have an impact on those decisions. There may be a certain indifference to the tax burden from some longer-term residents as they have done well in the valuations of their homes over the past 10 or 20 years, the result being they defer their taxes knowing that there will be a reckoning at such time as they sell. I guess the feeling is that sure, I owe $60 or $70k in back taxes (plus interest) but having made a million dollars on valuations, it's no big deal. However, this will not extend to the prospective "new" residents such as ourselves as we pay the full freight, and it will affect the ability to sell an existing home or rent an apartment for that matter (property taxes affect rental rates too). Further, being competitive is becoming even more important as last year the Business Council of British Columbia, which tracks interprovincial migration, found that out-migration of B.C. residents to other provinces surged to almost 70,000 people over the last few years. The business council said this was a record level — by comparison, the next closest peaks in out-migration were 64,000 in 1998 and 65,000 in 1975.

As in the past, I strongly recommend we bend the curve in our tax increase back toward what we saw in 2019 and 2020, which was 1.3 and 2.7% respectively. Discretionary spending needs to be studied closely, and reduced to accommodate mandatory spending such as union increases, for example. Our target should be inflation - currently pegged at 2.2% as of November 2025 - plus or minus verifiable, real population growth from the previous year. To continue with the increases we have seen over the past few years, and which are baked into the 5 year plan, is unsustainable from a tax-payer perspective.

To better understand the Town's tax strategy, I reviewed the "Budget Book 2025" posted on your website, aka Budget Overview 2025, which contains the 5-year plan out to 2029. While there is a lot of information and data presented therein, I do have questions and I present some, but not all, of them below:

1. On page 10, under "Consolidated Budget - 5 Year Plan", property taxes revenues are forecast to grow from $25.5 million to $34.3 million by 2029, a 34.3% increase. As I have already experienced that since purchasing in 2021, that gives one pause. Again, not sustainable from a household budget point of view. What assumptions have been made to arrive at this forecasted increase?
2. On page 4, staffing has increased by 16 FTEs (130 to 146) from 2021 to 2025, representing a 12.3% increase. As stated on page 8, "Salaries, wages and benefits increase: The most significant cost driver for the annual budget continues to be labour related costs which represent more than half of the Township's operating budget expenses". According to the 2021 Census by Statistics Canada, Esquimalt is home to 17,533 residents, representing a -0.7% change from the 2016 Census. Does Council have data to show we have grown since 2021? What are the drivers for increasing staff? I would recommend a hiring freeze until such time as the 2026 Census is complete so we can see how the population has changed, up or down, and the new Council can address those challenges (2026 being an election year). The Town could also consider increasing the use of contractors, or contract

staff, thereby avoiding the liability of benefits (S&D, collective bargaining, retirement plans, severance allowances, etc.) which accrue to employees. For example, this past year the Town constructed a utility shed in Centennial Park and I observed Town employees and equipment working there over several months. Budget Project Number R267 was assigned to this construction for $35,000, which seems a lot for a shed. How did we do? Could a contractor who specializes in shed building (including electrical components) have been a more competitive option? The same question could be applied against Town staff putting up and taking down Christmas decorations, as I saw this week. There are companies that do this which are likely cost competitive versus assigning the Township's skilled union employees with Town trucks and equipment to these tasks. Finally, we need to consider the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on many administrative positions. The onset of AI should only make those roles more efficient and expand the capacity of existing staff.

3. There is further commentary in the document that the Town is under pressure to provide support in non-traditional areas like affordable housing, homelessness, climate change, accessibility, etc., but perhaps it is time to start pushing back on some of these obligations being downloaded from the province. For example, as mentioned in my note to Council of October 20, 2025, the Provincial government spends billions on related issues (2023 - $1.5B for homeless prevention and reduction efforts, plus $4.3B for subsidized housing, which includes support for those currently homeless or unstably housed). Many support organizations have sprung up (e.g. Our Place, Salvation Army, SHVDES, Solid, etc.) in the CRD and around the province, so there appears to be no shortage of supporting funding and infrastructure which of course is also funded by our provincial income and other tax dollars.

4. Also, on page 10 in the 5 year plan, why are department cost recoveries flat at $835,450 per year from 2025 to 2029? Can this be grown? Perhaps we should look at other sources of revenue, like bike licenses (to offset the costs of the concrete barriers and their maintenance), increased fees for users of our recreational facilities for those from other municipalities who don't pay into our tax burden, metered parking at those same facilities (including the Gorge Pavilion) with a pass for Esquimalt residences, higher "chicken" fees for the backyard hen houses springing up around us, higher event fees for use of the Gorge Pavilion and other Town assets, etc. Of course there would be an additional administrative burden to manage this, but I would suggest the additional administrative burden could be handled by the existing Town staff - as their experience grows in their current roles, and with the application of AI, so too would their efficiency expand.

5. On page 11, Policing, which includes annual cost increases and new resource additions, represents a significant component of the annual operating budget. For 2025, on a single department basis, the police budget of $10.8 million is only eclipsed by Parks and Rec at $11.0 million. The police budget is forecast to grow to $11.8 million in 2026, and to $14.9 million by 2029. This seems high for a small township of 18,000 people (recent policing costs per capita 2024-2026: Victoria: $598 (highest in BC), **Esquimalt:$456**, Saanich:$350, Colwood:$263, Langford:$214). I understand that Council has been studying options to segregate ourselves from the arrangement with VicPD, but so far we have been unable to pull that trigger. However, short of starting from scratch, there may be an opening to reduce

our share of the VicPD's budget which is currently around 14%: Section 11.2 of the police framework agreement of 2014 states " it is anticipated that the Budget Allocation Formula shall take into account factors based on the actual experience during the operation of the Agreement and will utilize quantifiable criteria which reflect each Municipality's relative need for police resources". Can we take advantage of this clause to reduce our percentage share of the overall police budget as I think we can agree the activities requiring police attention in the two municipalities have shifted over the past 12 years? An example of "quantifiable criteria" could be the "Calls for Service" chart presented by VPD at a recent Town meeting. From Q2 2024 to Q2 2025, dispatched calls for Esquimalt amounted to 7.58% of all calls, the balance being for Victoria calls. This metric puts the lie to Esquimalt being responsible for 14% of the VPD Budget, and my guess is that other data, from time sheets for example, would show a similar trend. As well, in 2024 we approved the addition of a Reintegration Sargeant for $198,000 (plus benefits) to work with the other officers on leave to return to active duty more quickly, thereby reducing overtime. Has this position been effective? What metrics do we have to show the success? Has this mitigated VPD's recently stated intention that they will be filling 25 more police positions this year (16 new, 9 previously approved)? Please note that Councillor Boardman, our new representative on the Police Board, and I have had discussions on this over the latter part of last year so she may have made headway on this already. I would also suggest leaning on our new MLA, Darlene Rotchford, to help shepherd a fair reduction of our share through the provincial government as she would be fully apprised of the issue from her days on Esquimalt's Town Council (full disclosure, I recently reached out to Darlene on this matter as well).

6. On Page 11, Parks and Rec has the highest departmental spending at almost $11 million dollars in 2025 and grows each year to a forecasted $12 million in 2029. As mentioned above, perhaps we could consider increasing fees to offset some of this increase. Also, as the pool is the warmest in the city, have we calculated the energy savings by lowering it by 3 or 4 degrees, making it more economic while at the same time making it more of a recreational pool, rather than a soaker pool for our more sedentary customers (and less GHGs emitted). Finally, I have anecdotal reports that many of the people using this facility are from other than Esquimalt and thus would not contribute to our tax base.

7. There is a debate on service levels and whether they are appropriate and sustainable. Perhaps they are too high. I for one would accept lower service levels in some areas if that would give Council some breathing room in keeping taxes low. For example, staying with Parks and Recreation, and being as it has the highest spending of any department, perhaps we should audit its activities and benchmark against appropriate municipalities to see if our service levels there exceed requirements. Do we need as many staff there or can they be reassigned? Do we need to weed, water and clip as much as we do now?

8. On page 8, under Budget Drivers, the document states that "rather than applying a standard increase to all budgets, departments review their budgets and adjust where required, using actual costs, inflation rates and market information as applicable". Given my increases of 9.4, 5.3 and 10.1% over the past three years, with a decreased assessed value, perhaps

this isn't working as well as one might hope. Maybe it's time for Council to assign a target of, say inflation plus real population growth, and expect the departments to meet that target. Hold their feet to the fire, as it were. Unavoidable costs, such as those driven by collective bargaining agreements, would have to be offset by reductions in discretionary spending. It can be done as we have seen recently in other municipalities (see below).

There are still more areas for conservation of spending, but this gives a flavour, and though it may seem like an impossible task, there are recent examples of where the challenge of reducing or minimizing taxes is being met:

- The City of Vancouver has passed a 2026 budget with a freeze on municipal property taxes, i.e. **0%**, added $50 million more for the city's police department, and enacted a host of cuts to a number of other departments including urban design and sustainability (-14%), environmental and facilities management (-13%), finance and supply chain management (-14%), and arts, culture, and community services (-15%).
- The City of Calgary had an 8.9% increase in 2025 and began 2026's process with a budget increase presented by staff of 5.4% but ended with 1.6% by holding departments to account, raising transit fees, cutting environmental programs by $9 million, reducing office conversion programs (office towers converted to homes for the unhoused) by $5 million, and removing mental health and addictions funding from their base budget to a one-time program.

In my working career, I always made a conscious effort to treat any money I was spending on behalf of our partners as if it were my own. That didn't always endear me to our company's Operations groups, but it kept the ship afloat. I'm sure Council feels the same way when it comes to spending our tax dollars.

On a final note, the other day I was at Costco and noted that a medium sized "oven roast", nothing fancy, was priced at $185, and a bag of essential groceries at Country Grocers is routinely $100 or more. Affordability of food and shelter continues to rank as the highest concern for most Canadians, and this will continue in 2026. This is the environment in which Council has to consider their options as we move toward fixing the 2026 tax rates. Tough times call for courageous decisions, and taxpayers need a break.

I hope Council finds this helpful, and perhaps raises a few questions and opportunities not yet considered. If you need any more information or input, please do not hesitate to reach out. As is my practice, I will share this note with my friends and colleagues as well so I may have more commentary for Council as the 2026 budget develops.

Regards,

Dan Bruyere

Esquimalt

(Bruyere Bytes No's. 1 through 5 available on request)

Bruyere Bytes #7 - Esquimalt Municipal Tax 2026 - 11.32% increase

Town of Esquimalt/Bruyere Bytes

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Dan Bruyere <danbruyere57@gmail.com> Sun, Jul 5, 2026 2:52 PM

To Council

Good afternoon, Mayor and Council.

As the council is aware, since purchasing our home in late 2021 I have been persistently encouraging council to "bend the curve" each year to bring our taxes back toward an aspirational goal of inflation (or CPI) plus population growth. Once again, I am disappointed to see the upward trend continuing, and accelerating, as shown in the charts below. Indeed, my overall tax burden has increased by 47.7% since 2021, which is clearly unsustainable. During this time, I have made many recommendations on how we could possibly reduce spending and raise revenues, and I hope some of them may have been put to use, but I have not been made aware of this if so.

For 2026, compared to the 13 municipalities in the CRD, Esquimalt tops the list at 11.32%, and is fourth highest when comparing the period 2023 to 2026, behind only Langford, Sooke and Oak Bay. And the future does not bode well if we don't change direction. At the council meeting on March 2, 2026, Ian Irvine, our Director of Financial Services and IT, informed the council that our **2027 and 2028 *base* tax increases will be 11% and 10% respectively**, driven by the baked-in costs of policing (3%), wages, benefits and staffing (3-5%), infrastructure reserves (3%) and library and OCP costs deferred to 2027. On top of that, these increases do not account for any new supplemental requests for funding which may be considered, and significant projects which are coming up, like the ERP renewal (see March 2 2026 council meeting, 1:07:37 mark on the video available on the Town's website). As I said, unsustainable.

In "a message from Mayor Barb Desjardins" which accompanies our property tax notices, the mayor explains why our increase is 11.32%. I would like to respond to the factors she describes as being "largely outside of the Township's direct control":

- Inflationary pressures on goods and services
    - that may be, but reducing spending by taking a hard look at any discretionary spending will automatically reduce the impact of inflation. It is not difficult to define what is mandatory and what is discretionary - ask any household budgets being discussed around the kitchen table. For example, mandatory costs would be dictated by existing laws, contracts, and essential services. Discretionary would be optional expenses used for community improvement, recreation, parks, funding local festivities and groups, upgrading library technology and bike lanes.
- Wages and benefits

- We should consider an immediate hiring freeze, as once a new employee is added, the follow-on effects are that person's pensions, benefits, and annual increases. Review the roles of all Town employees, restack as necessary, and continuously improve performance and effectiveness in order to reduce headcount through retirement and attrition.
- Council should determine if we can use contract services to greater effect and affordability rather than having Township employees complete all tasks. The hanging up and taking down of Xmas decorations and building new sheds in our parks come to mind, and I'm sure there are other areas which could be contracted out economically.
- As council has stated in the past, "the most significant cost driver for the annual budget continues to be labour related costs which represent more than half of the Township's operating budget expenses". According to the 2021 Census by Statistics Canada, Esquimalt is home to 17,533 residents. Current projections released by the CRD pegs the number at 19513, an 11% increase. Between 2022 and 2026, Township staffing grew from 133 to 153 FTE's, a 15% increase (does not include our share of policing), so there is some room for improvement - more, or less, depending on where the official census lands this year.

- Policing
  - Historically, the policing costs have consistently represented approximately 21% of Township operating costs; however, the amount requested has increased 39% between 2022 and 2026 ($8.5 million vs $11.8 million). Esquimalt is required to pay ~14% of VPDs budget according to the order in council passed years ago, yet according to a presentation by former VPD Chief Del Manik last fall, Esquimalt only accounted for 7.58% of all Calls for Service into VPD for the five quarters between Q2 2024 and Q2 2025 inclusive. I have been in contact with Councillor Boardman on this and believe she is pursuing it as part of her role on the police board, but given the size of this component, the upward pressure on VPD to continuously increase officer numbers, and the apparent unfairness of the uneven load sharing, an adjustment of the agreement is imperative.
- Library Services, and other service levels
  - I could not parse out the exact impact of these items, but this could fall into a review looking for effective reductions in services across all departments. Could we scale back library hours? How about schedules at the Rec Centre? Can we cut the grass at Bowlen Park less often? Can we reduce overtime or weekend work? All of these questions and more need to be investigated by the new council
- 3% contribution to infrastructure reserves
  - I believe this has been raised from the traditional 1% to this year's 3% as it came to light in the February 2, 2026 council meeting that we had an $11.9 million backlog in the pavement management plan (37:13 of the video) and another $25 million gap in

infrastructure which was overdue for replacement (47:54 of the video). How did we arrive at this juncture and what controls are in place to ensure it doesn't happen again. And if we are $36 million behind in mandatory infrastructure, why are we spending time, money and resources on discretionary items like bike lanes? Is this a function of the unreasonable adhesion to the Active Transportation Network Plan, which was created over five years ago, a time before Covid had run its course, before higher taxes and inflation, before $100+ bags of groceries? Perhaps it is time to pause on this Plan and defer further spending until such time as the new council has time to consider what is planned, what has been accomplished and whether there should be some adjustments.

  - In concert with this, at the council meeting tomorrow, item 4 is a recommendation to council to award a construction contract (ENG #26-03), including optional and provisional work and future change orders within the approved budget, to Hazelwood Construction Services Inc. in the amount of $3,616,759.80, for Esquimalt Road Phase 2 - Active Transportation Improvements and Underground Utility Renewals project. My question is, all things considered and as the council's term is up in a mere three months, should they be awarding a contract of this magnitude and committing the incoming council to deal with the expenditure? I would recommend at least deferring the discretionary spending component of this contract but continuing with the mandatory component (see definitions above), or deferring on the recommendation altogether and leaving it for the new council's deliberations,

- Housing, climate action, the local economy, and healthy communities
  - According to a recent study published by the Business Council of BC (link below), health, social services and housing – areas of provincial responsibility – recorded the fastest growth in real per capita spending for BC municipalities (74% over 2010–24). This raises questions about whether there has been an implicit downloading of responsibilities by the province, a decision by municipal leaders to broaden their mandate, or an inefficient duplication of activities between provincial and local governments. Council has to take a hard look at where they are spending money in these areas - I would include climate action here - as other levels of government are spending billions to address these issues. Downloading more hardship onto the citizens of Esquimalt with little to no perceived benefit is unfair and impractical.
- For the average Esquimalt household, this year's increase represents approximately $420
  - My calculations are somewhat different. From a Times Colonist study published on June 29, 2026, comparing all municipalities in the CRD, the average assessed residential property in Esquimalt is $1.105 million. Using my own assessed value and tax increase, a property of that value will see an increase of $649, approximately 55% higher than the mayor's estimate. Plus, given Mr. Irvine's estimated base tax increase as shown above, homeowners (and landlords, which impacts renters) will see increases of $720 and $792 in 2027 and 2028 respectively ($2161 in total).

So, with respect, I would dispute that the double-digit tax increases are from factors beyond our control as a council and a community. It will take some work and some courage, but we can, and must, take that control back.

As I have in the past, I would recommend that going forward council determines the acceptable target increase for the budget and ensures the departments hit it, rather than staff showing up with a 13% increase as was the case this year, then struggling to pare back a couple of points through the process. I also recommend an aspirational goal of inflation plus population growth, which is also supported by the Business Council's report in the link.

Thank you for your time. As always, Bruyere Bytes #1 through #6 are available from me if you wish to refresh yourselves on any of them. I will also share this note with my friends and colleagues as many of them have similar concerns and may have further questions for you.

Please feel free to contact me at any time on any issue.

Regards,
Dan Bruyere

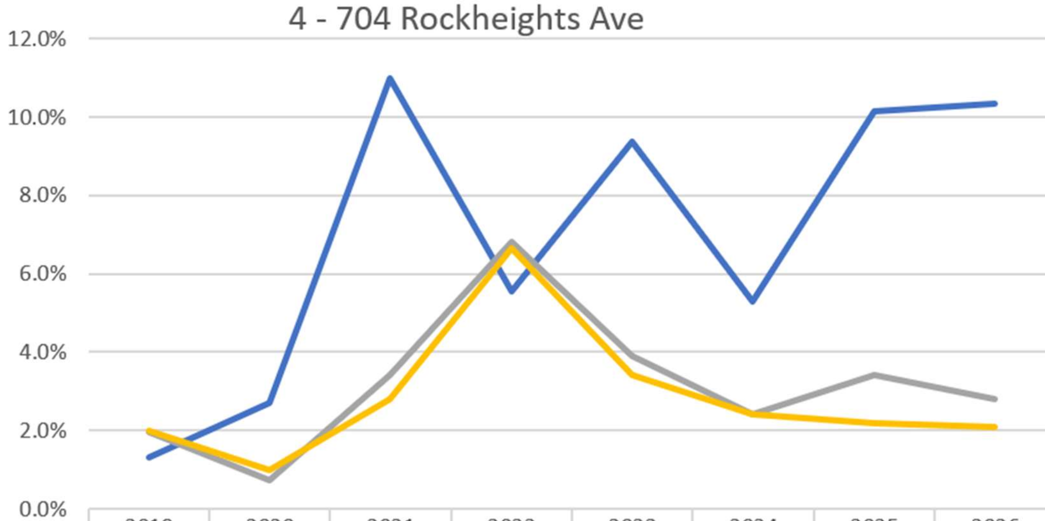
4-704 Rockheights Ave

Esquimalt, BC

Business council of BC property tax study - 2010 to 2026:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/m31zzcha99wfpgglrkfnm/AJCUHlz27jVygzR4loYmDjk?rlkey=kyvh9zs577x5alyfx4np8rkjd&st=mq8vb1l4&e=1&dl=0

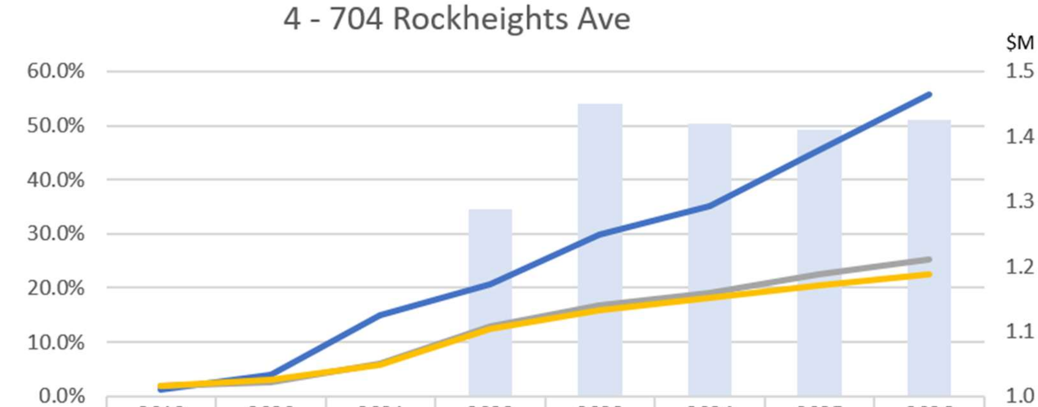
P Tax vs Can and BC Inflation
4 - 704 Rockheights Ave



	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
P Tax incr.	1.3%	2.7%	11.0%	5.6%	9.4%	5.3%	10.1%	10.3%
Can Infl rate	1.95%	0.72%	3.40%	6.80%	3.90%	2.40%	3.40%	2.80%
BC Infl rate	2.00%	1.00%	2.79%	6.64%	3.40%	2.40%	2.20%	2.10%

P Tax incr. Can Infl rate BC Infl rate

P Tax vs Can and BC Inflation - Cumulative
4 - 704 Rockheights Ave



	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Ass'd Val ($M)				1.3	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.4
P Tax incr.	1.3%	4.0%	15.0%	20.6%	29.9%	35.2%	45.4%	55.7%
Can Infl rate	1.95%	2.67%	6.07%	12.9%	16.8%	19.2%	22.6%	25.4%
BC Infl rate	2.00%	3.00%	5.79%	12.4%	15.8%	18.2%	20.4%	22.5%

Ass'd Val ($M) P Tax incr. Can Infl rate BC Infl rate