

Chamber Response to the 2026-2027 Municipal Budget

Chair McIntosh and Members of the Finance and Administration Committee of Council

The Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce represents nearly 800 businesses across all sectors of our local economy. With commercial properties taxed at nearly double the residential rate and industrial at more than triple, local enterprises are essential to funding municipal services. Between 2020 and 2025, the City's operating budget grew by more than 26 per cent, while municipal debt has risen nearly 1,700 per cent over the past decade, raising concerns about affordability and debt servicing. With such increases, transparency and accountability are essential.

A critical part of the Chamber's role is advocacy. We champion transparent, responsible governance by respectfully holding government decision-makers accountable for delivering on their promises. We actively and consistently engage with decision-makers to ensure policy changes benefit the business community and build our local economy.

The Chamber's Municipal Financial Accountability Task Force, which is focused on improving transparency and ensuring the responsible and efficient use of municipal tax dollars, has produced a list of recommendations that builds on this priority. The group reviewed the municipality's budgeting processes, financial practices and performance reports, drawing on member feedback, comparative research and analysis of public financial data.

Some of the challenges identified by the task force's work were reinforced during this year's budget engagement process, which offered limited opportunity for meaningful input.

On September 29, the Chamber inquired with City staff about the status of budget engagement process as a June 2025 Finance and Administration Committee report noted that scheduled budget input would take place from September 1 to October 31, 2025.

On October 8, the Chamber received notice of a two-week period for budget input. A brief survey was available with little supporting documentation or context. For example, the June budget forecast and the business case report presented to Finance and Administration Committee on October 14 (during the public input period) are not accessible on the engagement page.

These experiences reflect a sentiment we are hearing from our members that there is potential to improve how the City meaningfully seeks and incorporates feedback during the budget process.

The Task Force's recommendations below, which could be implemented at minimal cost, are practical, evidence-based and designed to improve efficiency, transparency and long-term sustainability. They focus on improving divisional financial reporting, clarifying spending decisions and adopting accessible, data-driven budgeting tools.



Service Delivery and Staffing Improvements

1. Perform a detailed financial analysis of high-cost discretionary services

Non-mandated services, such as Pioneer Manor, operate at a significant taxpayer subsidy and often cost more than similar services run by private or not-for-profit organizations. A comprehensive internal review would help align service investments with community priorities and fiscal sustainability, while keeping quality of service in mind.

2. Prepare a multi-year staffing rationalization plan with public reporting

Staffing is the City's largest budget driver, with full-time positions increasing nearly seven per cent since 2020. A transparent workforce plan with clear targets and regular updates would promote accountability and better align staffing with service demand.

3. Analyze and address high-cost overtime areas

Overtime spending, especially in Fire Services and Long-Term Care, regularly exceeds allocated budgets. A dedicated and in-depth review would potentially ease financial pressure, reduce burnout and ensure efficient and consistent service.

4. Conduct an analysis of potential cost savings through outsourcing

Peer municipalities have achieved measurable efficiencies by outsourcing select services. Strategic partnerships could reduce overhead, lower staffing costs and allow municipal staff to focus on core functions.

Financial Accountability and Transparency

1. Adopt a rolling zero-based divisional budgeting schedule with public reporting

The City's budgeting approach builds on previous years, which can disguise inefficiencies. A rotating, division-by-division schedule of zero-based budgeting would improve transparency, identify low-value spending and promote continuous improvement, while addressing City staff concerns regarding resources and time to complete this work.

2. Present and approve the annual budget by division

Greater Sudbury's operating budget is approved with minimal public discussion. Approving budgets by division would improve oversight and help both Council and the public better understand trends, cost drivers and service impacts.

3. Return to an annual operating budget process

An annual operating budget cycle improves adaptability, allowing Council to respond to updated forecasts and evolving priorities. For example, recent shifts like recycling savings and cost changes from an organizational restructure impact future budget but are harder to adjust under a multi-year model. Returning to annual budgeting and business planning would improve transparency and strengthen financial oversight.



4. Implement public reporting on all municipal contract awards

Public reporting on municipal contracts under \$200,000 is limited. Complete and transparent information related to contractor work is not available. Consistent public disclosure of all contract awards would enhance transparency and financial accountability and strengthen public confidence in how contracts are awarded.

Digital Transformation and Public Engagement

1. Embed structured public feedback mechanisms

Public engagement in the budget process is limited and disconnected from key decision-making points. To strengthen transparency and accountability, the City should establish a structured framework for year-round feedback. This should include clear input opportunities at multiple stages, transparent communication on how feedback informs decisions, and an accessible timeline outlining when key decisions are made and how the community can get involved at each stage.

2. Implement relevant public financial performance reporting

The City's current financial reporting is difficult to interpret. Comparisons to other municipalities are inconsistent, with different models and comparator communities used in reports. Standardized benchmarking and consistent comparators when comparing Sudbury's performance to peer municipalities would support open governance and informed decision-making.

Greater Sudbury is a city of potential, and our members want to see this realized through open decision-making and responsible spending. We believe these recommendations offer a practical path toward a more transparent, efficient and sustainable budget process that reflects the priorities of residents and businesses.

Businesses are key financial contributors to the City of Greater Sudbury's tax revenue and deserve the opportunity to provide meaningful feedback on the budget process. We appreciate the opportunity to comment and look forward to continued collaboration as Council works to build a budget grounded in fiscal discipline, transparency and shared community priorities.

Sincerely,



Marie Litalien
President and CEO
Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce

