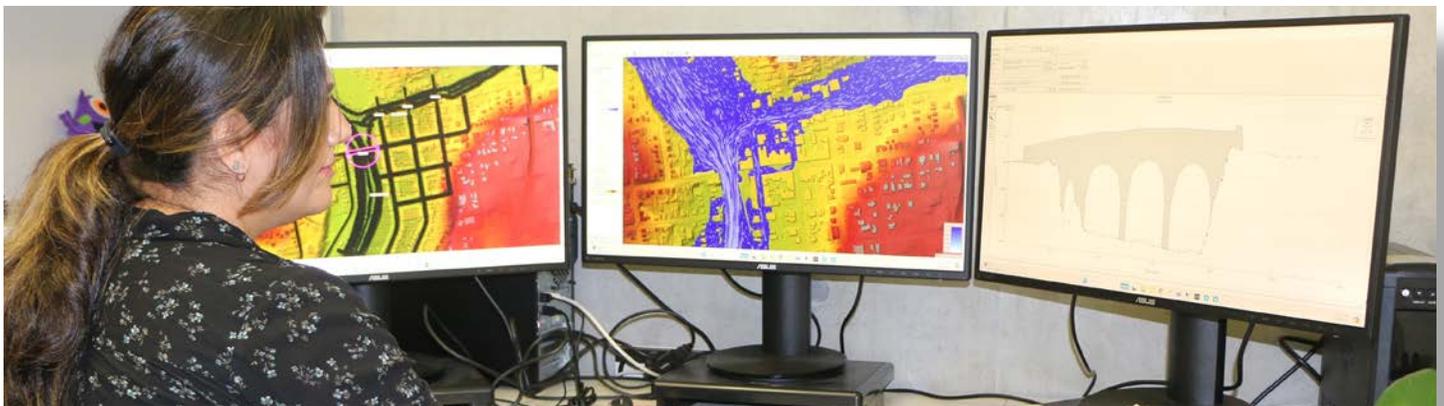




## 2025 Draft Budget: Overview

The Upper Thames River Conservation Authority's (UTRCA) 2025 Draft Budget reflects expected costs to support legislative requirements, local environmental needs, and municipal and public demands for service.

The budget separates the UTRCA's programs and services into three categories, consistent with Section 21 of the Conservation Authorities Act (CA Act) and as required by Mandatory Programs and Services Regulation O.Reg. 686/21.



### Category 1 Programs and Services

Mandatory Category 1 programs and services are defined in provincial regulation. These are the only programs that can be funded with municipal levy.

- Planning and regulations:
  - Regulations and enforcement under the CA Act (Prohibited Activities, Exemptions and Permits)
  - Planning activities
- Water management:
  - Flood forecasting and warning
  - Infrastructure operations and maintenance
  - Mapping, studies, and information management
  - Climate change risk and mitigation
  - Low water response
  - Natural hazards outreach
- Land management:
  - Land management, risk, enforcement
  - Lands strategy implementation
  - Public access to UTRCA lands for passive recreation
  - Natural heritage conservation on UTRCA lands
- Provincial surface water and groundwater monitoring programs
- Drinking water source protection
- Watershed strategy implementation
- Essential corporate costs

## Category 1 Budget Considerations

### Stabilizing Funding for Category 1 Programs and Services

In 2024, the municipal levy supported close to 60% of the cost of providing the UTRCA's mandatory programs and services, resulting in a forecast deficit of \$1.2 million dollars. The previous five years of budgets also had projected deficits.

The 2025 Draft Budget increases the municipal share of Category 1 expenses to 67%. This increase in levy, in conjunction with other sources of funding, allows the UTRCA to present a balanced budget for Category 1 programs, helping to ensure that continued deficit budgets will not unduly impact reserves. Consistent and dependable funding for mandatory programs and services is critical to ensure the Authority delivers these services and fulfills its provincial mandate.

### Significant Increase in Capital Projects for Specific Municipalities

Considerable capital work has been planned for 2025 as the UTRCA continues to maintain aging infrastructure. Inflation has meant rising costs and it is difficult to estimate project costs for future projects with certainty.

The 2025 Draft Budget includes increases to capital project costs, which can vary significantly for benefiting municipalities. Staff are meeting with each municipality to discuss the timing and phases of implementation and levying. The UTRCA has applied for alternative funding to offset capital costs to member municipalities.

### Limited Alternative Funding Sources

The UTRCA's mandatory Category 1 programs and services require long-term stable funding to meet our legislative responsibilities, but alternative funding sources are very limited.

- The ongoing provincial freeze on planning and permitting fees limits the amount of user fees that can be collected. Currently, the UTRCA only recoups approximately 33% of the cost of providing planning and development services.
- Funding available through the province's Water and Erosion Control Infrastructure program has remained at \$5M province-wide for more than 20 years.

- The UTRCA's share of the provincial Conservation Authorities Act transfer payment, which had not increased in more than 20 years, was cut in half to \$181,000 in 2019.
- While the UTRCA has provincial funding to deliver the Drinking Water Source Protection program until March 2027, the province has capped overhead costs. This potential gap in program funding can be accommodated in 2025 but future budgets may need to include a Clean Water Act levy.

### Municipal Levy

The UTRCA levies the member municipalities for operating and capital costs for mandatory Category 1 programs and services. There are two levy components:

#### General Levy:

- Supports all Category 1 programs and services.
- Apportioned among member municipalities according to the Modified Current Value Assessment (MCVA), in compliance with Budget and Apportionment Regulation (O.Reg. 402/22).
- Appears as 94% operating budget and 6% capital budget in the 2025 Draft Budget.

#### Benefit-based Levy:

- Supports specific structures (i.e., dams, channels, dykes), which are all Category 1 costs.
- Local share of the costs is funded by the municipalities that benefit from the structure.
- Wildwood and Pittock Dams both have two main benefitting municipalities with the balance of their costs shared among all member municipalities.
- For all other structures, including Fanshawe Dam, the municipality where each structure is located is the sole beneficiary and pays all the local share of that structure's operating and capital costs.
- Appears as 80% capital budget and 20% operating budget for structures in the 2025 Draft Budget.

## Category 2 Programs and Services

Category 2 programs and services are delivered on behalf of a municipality, with funding under agreement with that municipality. Examples include:

- Drinking water source protection risk management services
- Municipal contract work

## Category 3 Programs and Services

Cost apportionment agreements have been negotiated with participating municipalities for the UTRCA's Category 3 programs and services, which include:

- Landowner stewardship and restoration
- Subwatershed planning and environmental monitoring
- Community partnerships and education

The UTRCA has been delivering these watershed-determined programs and services under the Conservation Authorities Act for over 75 years. They support landowners, communities, and youth with science-based projects and opportunities that restore and enhance watershed health and resiliency to climate change.

The cost apportioning agreements provide base contributions to stabilize funding sources, enabling the UTRCA to leverage grant programs and reduce Category 1 corporate costs. In the 2025 Draft Budget, the cost apportioning contributions leverage more than \$13 for each \$1 invested by participating municipalities.

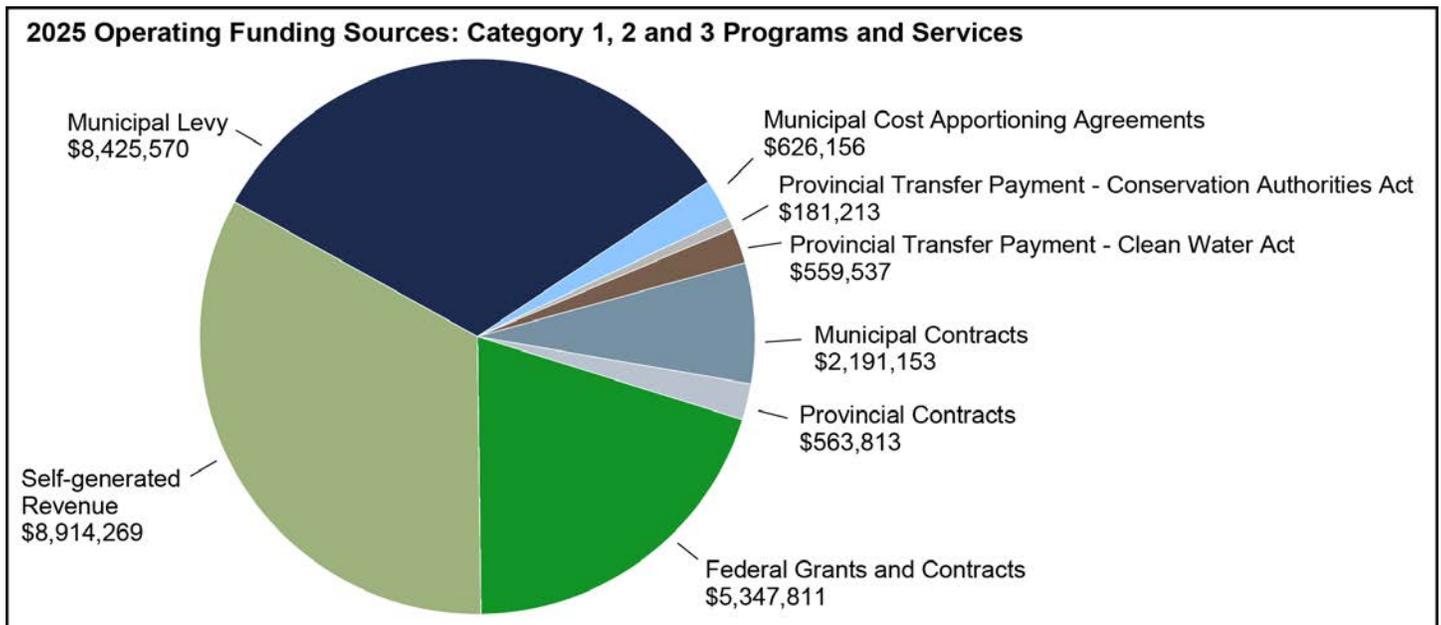
## Category 3 Budget Considerations

### Alternative Funding Sources

Alternative funding sources support many Category 3 programs and services. The 2025 Draft Budget reflects significant federal funding for the UTRCA's landowner stewardship efforts to reduce phosphorus run off across the watershed, beginning in the fall of 2024 and continuing through 2027. While the UTRCA's total operating costs for all programs and services are 16% higher in 2025 than in 2024 due to the federal grants, the corresponding program revenue is also in the budget.

### Other Category 3 Programs and Services

Campground operations are also in Category 3 but are not included in municipal cost apportioning agreements as their funding is self-generated. They will remain a separate category item in the budget, with any revenues generated from operations directed towards a reserve fund to support much needed capital improvements.



## About Us

The UTRCA is a local watershed management agency that delivers programs and services to protect and manage impacts on water and other natural resources, in partnership with all levels of government, landowners, and many other organizations.

The UTRCA works in partnership with the 17 municipalities in the Upper Thames River watershed. These municipalities appoint 15 members to the Board of Directors, which sets the UTRCA's overall policy direction and is responsive to local issues and concerns.

The UTRCA is dedicated to achieving a healthy environment on behalf of the member municipalities, by:

- Protecting people and property from flood and erosion hazards and supporting safe development,
- Protecting and enhancing water quality and a sustainable water supply,
- Making science-based decisions and delivering landowner stewardship,
- Providing natural spaces and recreational opportunities,
- Empowering communities and youth,
- Leading through expertise, diversity, and accountability, and
- Supporting sustainable organizational practices and policies.

