

TIRRA – AGM – May 16, 2026

Islands Trust 2026/27 Budget – What It Means for Island Residents

The Islands Trust has approved its 2026/27 budget at **\$11.8 million**, continuing a multi-year trend of rising costs and increasing property taxes across the Trust Area.

Key Takeaways

1. Continued Budget Growth means Higher Taxes

- The 2026/27 budget represents an **8.1% increase to the local tax base per household**.
- Since 2023/24, the overall Islands Trust budget has grown by **approximately 19%**, significantly outpacing inflation (~13%).
- This increase directly translates into **higher property taxes for island residents**.

2. Why Costs Are Rising

Several key factors are driving the increase:

- **Loss of grant funding**, requiring about **\$1.5 million in additional taxation** to replace it.
- **Rising salary costs**, including:
 - Filling previously vacant positions
 - Ongoing wage increases (approx. 3% annually)
- **Increased staffing levels**, including several new or expanded roles:
 - Manager of Indigenous Relations (~\$110,000/year)
 - Engagement and Communications Lead (~\$90,000/year)
 - Senior Policy Advisor (~\$117,500/year)
 - Indigenous Relations Advisor (0.5 FTE, ~\$56,000/year)
 - Additional roles under \$100,000/year

These positions represent **over \$370,000+ annually in salary costs**, before benefits and overhead.

- **Upcoming election costs** in October 2026

3. No New Core Services — But Costs Still Increasing

The Trust has stated the budget will:

- **Maintain existing service levels**
- Support **ongoing projects**, rather than introduce major new ones

Despite this, overall spending continues to rise, meaning residents are paying more **without a clear increase in core services**.

4. Expansion Beyond Core Mandate

A growing portion of spending is directed toward:

- Indigenous relations initiatives and staffing (including **\$260,000+ in program funding**)
- Communications and engagement roles
- Policy development and planning programs

This reflects a broader operational scope beyond the Trust's traditional mandate of **"preserve and protect"** the islands.

5. Transparency and Accessibility of Information

The Islands Trust produces a very large volume of documentation as part of its budgeting and governance process, but this does not necessarily translate into clear or accessible information for the public:

- Key budget details are buried within **extensive council agenda packages (approximately 750 pages per meeting, or roughly 3,000 pages per year)**
- There is **no simple, consolidated explanation of how spending decisions connect to outcomes or priorities**
- Finding relevant financial information often requires navigating complex document systems and searching through hundreds of pages

As a result, while a large amount of information is technically available, it can be **difficult for residents to understand how their tax dollars are being spent or to assess the effectiveness of that spending.**

6. Structural Pressures Will Continue

Many of the largest costs are **non-discretionary**, including:

- Salaries (now increasing with added staff and wage agreements)
- Legislated services
- Governance requirements

This means:

- Future budgets are likely to continue increasing
- Taxpayers may face **ongoing annual tax increases**, particularly as new staff positions become permanent

The Bigger Picture

Over the past four years:

- Budget increases have been **consistent and above inflation**
- **Property taxes have risen accordingly**
- Spending growth has been driven in large part by **increased staffing levels, compensation, and program expansion**

Bottom Line

For island residents, the 2026/27 budget means:

- **Higher property taxes (8.1% increase this year)**
- A continuation of **multi-year budget growth**
- Increasing costs driven in part by **new staffing commitments and structural expenses**
- A reporting system that makes it **challenging for the public to clearly understand and evaluate how funds are being used**

This summary is based on a detailed report prepared by Paul Duncan.