



2024 to 2027 Business Plan

Service: Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

\$11.32	0.29%
Annual cost for the average rate payer (2024 to 2027)	Of the 2024 to 2027 City of London Net Property Tax Supported Budget

Who we are:

- Conservation authorities are local watershed management agencies that deliver 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 Upper Thames River Conservation Authority's (UTRCA) area of jurisdiction, the upper watershed of the Thames River, covers 3,430 square kilometres in southwestern Ontario and is home to approximately 593,700 people. The Thames is a Canadian Heritage River.
- The 17 municipalities within the upper Thames watershed appoint representatives to the UTRCA's Board of Directors. The City of London is represented by four directors, including three Councillors and one citizen appointment. The directors represent the local urban and rural communities, deciding policies and programs that will lead to a healthy watershed. The Conservation Authorities Act and its related regulations prescribe the role and responsibilities of conservation authorities.

What we do:

- Protect people and property and support safe development.
- Deliver landowner stewardship.
- Provide natural spaces and recreational opportunities.
- Support science-based decisions.
- Empower communities and youth.

Why we do it:

- **Mandatory** - The UTRCA is mandated under the Conservation Authorities Act and its related regulations to provide programs and services designed to further the conservation, restoration, development, and management of natural resources in Ontario. The UTRCA undertakes watershed-based programs to protect people and property from flooding and other natural hazards and to conserve natural resources for economic, social, and environmental benefits. Positive actions in one part of the watershed have positive impacts downstream. All municipalities benefit when these programs are undertaken on a watershed basis.

The following table provides an overview of the budget for this service.

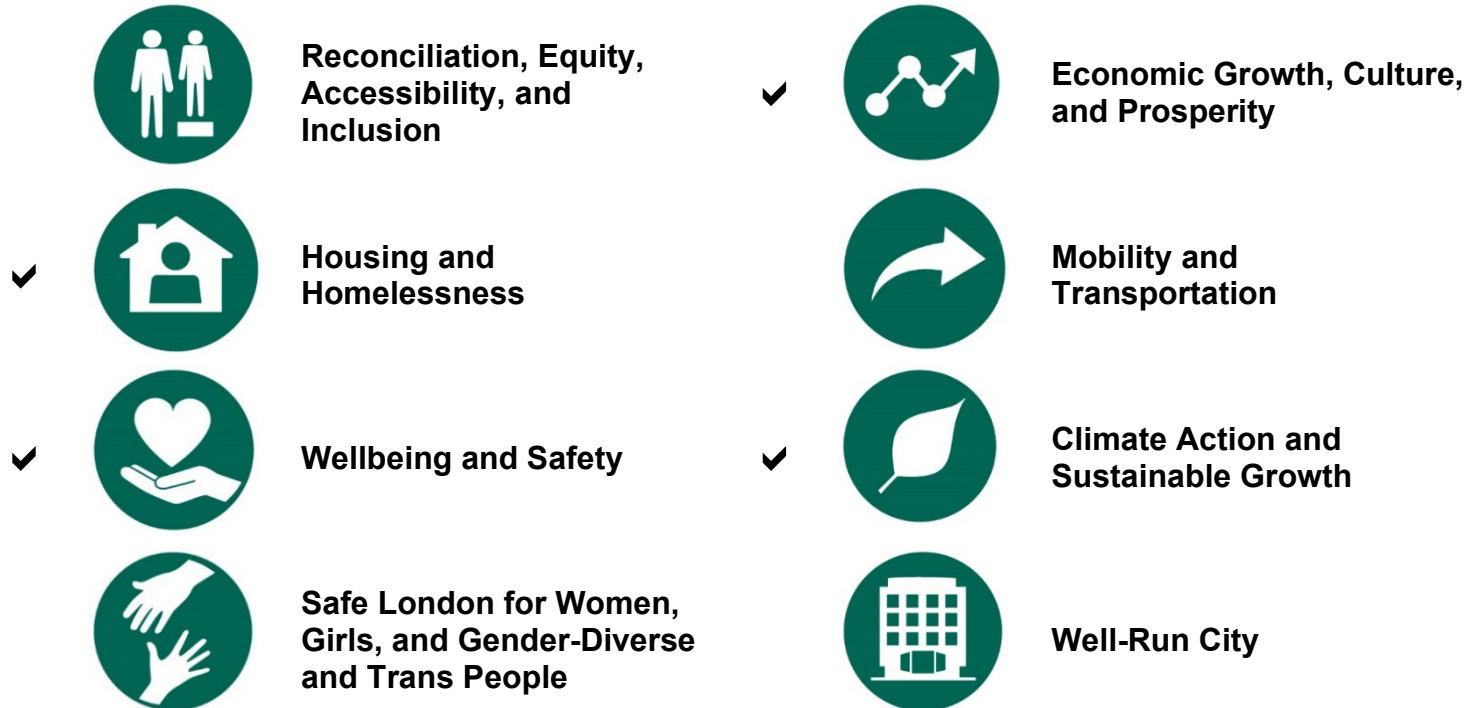
Budget Summary (\$000's)	2024	2025	2026	2027	2024 to 2027 TOTAL
Gross Operating Expenditures	\$23,165	\$24,097	\$25,029	\$25,797	\$98,088
Other Revenues	-\$17,462	-\$17,653	-\$18,183	-\$18,691	-\$71,989
Net Operating Budget	\$5,703	\$6,444	\$6,846	\$7,106	\$26,099
Net Tax Levy Supported Operating Budget	\$2,281	\$2,578	\$2,738	\$2,843	\$10,440
Wastewater and Treatment Rate Supported Operating Budget	\$3,422	\$3,866	\$4,108	\$4,263	\$15,659
Total Capital Expenditures	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Full-Time Equivalents (FTE's) ¹	149.0	205.0	216.0	216.0	N/A

Reflects 2024 to 2027 adopted City budget as of December 1, 2025.

Note 1: FTE count updated to reflect Questica budget figures from implementation in 2024.

Linkage to the 2023 to 2027 Strategic Plan

This service supports the following Strategic Areas of Focus in the 2023 to 2027 Strategic Plan:



Environmental, Socio-economic Equity and Governance (ESG) Considerations

Environmental, Socio-economic Equity and Governance Profile for this service:

Environmental:

UTRCA's business is closely aligned with several actions in London's Climate Emergency Action Plan and assists the City in increasing resiliency to extreme weather events through the implementation of an integrated, science-based watershed approach. All UTRCA's programs and services work in collaboration to inform watershed residents about the natural environment in which they live, work, and play. Programs and services protect life and property from natural hazards such as flooding and erosion and mitigate the effects of natural hazards, including a rapidly changing climate, by planting trees, undertaking stewardship and restoration projects such as wetland and tall grass prairie creation, and managing and protecting significant landholdings from invasive species while ensuring these areas are available for passive and active recreation.

- UTRCA ensures that its programs and services are relevant to the user groups it serves by complying with the Conservation Authorities Act and its related regulations, consulting regularly with the community and user groups, and working closely with member municipalities.
- UTRCA's Business Plan addresses a variety of climate emergency aspects as summarized below.

Engaging, Inspiring and Learning from People:

Provide community partnerships and education programs that increase awareness of, support for, and involvement in projects and activities that restore and enhance watershed health and resiliency to climate change.

- Empower communities and youth through opportunities to experience and learn about conservation. Build capacity in local communities by providing hands-on learning opportunities to address local environmental concerns and a changing climate.
- In partnership with watershed Boards of Education, develop and deliver curriculum-based environmental education programs that reach over 20,000 students per year with place-based information. Education programs help communities and youth understand how to protect watershed resources and avoid risks from flooding and related hazards, and support community partnership activities.
- In partnership with indigenous communities, develop and deliver environmental Indigenous programming and services to implement the actions of the Shared Waters Approach.

Energy Use and Conservation:

- Reduce fleet emissions through a Green Fleet Strategy that includes increasing electric vehicle (EV) use and researching investment to provide charging units on Conservation Authority (CA) properties.
- Reduce travel by maintaining pandemic business protocols such as on-line meetings.
- Reduce paper usage and carbon emissions by expanding electronic business practices (i.e., paperless accounting).

Carbon Sequestration Potential, Natural Heritage Loss/Disconnection, Biodiversity Loss

- Preserve and protect approximately 6,000 hectares of land including woodlots, riparian meadows, wetlands, and environmentally significant areas.
- Improve and expand natural heritage areas through land acquisition, which also increases resiliency to climate change.
- Report on local watershed conditions every five years, in partnership with Conservation Ontario. The Upper Thames River Watershed Report Cards provide information on surface water, groundwater, forest, and wetland conditions within 28 subwatersheds to promote an understanding of local (subwatershed) health and emerging trends as a basis for setting environmental management priorities and inspiring local environmental action.
- Manage invasive species and create pollinator habitat and tall grass prairies on UTRCA's own landholdings. Provide technical advice and funding for landowners to undertake management plans on CA owned property.
- Provide comprehensive planning, technical services, and engineering planning and design for a variety of stewardship practices. Technical plans are tailored to individual farm projects, recognizing the diverse agricultural landscape across the watershed.
- Provide advice on in-stream and riparian restoration as well as wetland restoration enhancement projects that provide flood retention, reduce peak flows, mitigate erosion hazards, and improve flow regimes.
- Offer tree planting and woodlot management services for landowners. Windbreaks and land retirement plantings reduce soil erosion, increase natural cover and habitat, and build climate change resilience across the watershed.
- Manage the Clean Water Program which provides incentives to landowners to undertake stewardship projects on their own lands, including creating wetland, establishing tall grass prairies, and implementing projects to improve soil health, water quality and quantity, and biodiversity.
- UTRCA's Demonstration Farm is an example of efforts to share information and coordinate innovation through research, demonstration projects, workshops, and field tours in partnership with landowners, agencies, academia, and the agriculture industry.

Extreme Weather Events Risks/Rising Insurance Costs and Shifting Access to Capital Requirements:

- Reduce the risk of property damage and loss of lives due to flooding by providing watershed municipalities with flood forecasting and warning services, including issuing flood bulletins to municipal flood coordinators and other agencies.
- Operate and maintain water control structures (dams, dykes, channels, floodwalls), constructed in partnership with municipalities, to control flood flows and augment stream flow during dry periods.
- Provide outreach and education on flood forecasting program and safety measures.
- Monitor watershed conditions to detect low water conditions and support the Upper Thames River Low Water Response Team in responding to low water events.
- Maintain floodplain mapping and conduct necessary communication initiatives to inform stakeholders and update mapping, Board approved policies, official plans, and on-line mapping tool.
- Deliver the Authority's permitting responsibilities, ensuring compliance with Ontario Regulation 179/06 and related policies, site inspections, communications with agents and consultants, and appropriate enforcement action.
- Fulfill the Authority's delegated responsibilities to represent the Provincial interest in natural hazards providing technical information and advice on land-use planning applications and comprehensive Official Plans and Zoning By-laws.

Socio-economic Equity:

- UTRCA works toward creating an inclusive work environment respecting ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, gender expression, sexual orientation, and physical or mental ability through the UTRCA's Team for Inclusion, Diversity and Equity.
- UTRCA is strengthening relationships with local First Nations and urban indigenous communities by implementing the recommendations of the Thames River (Deshkan Zibi) Shared Waters Approach to Water Quality and Quantity and through the development of the UTRCA's Shared Waters Action Plan.
- UTRCA is taking actions to address barriers to inclusion in its programs and services including the following:
Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) compliant website and documents, accessible docks and/or boat launches at Fanshawe, Wildwood, and Pittock Conservation Area, training employees and board members on Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity, and Truth and Reconciliation, providing 11 small day-use conservation areas (CAs) and tracts that are open to the public, free of charge, as well as an arboretum. Each CA is managed or co-managed by a local service club or the municipality, Library Park Pass programs enable library patrons to "check out" a day pass to visit Fanshawe, Pittock, and Wildwood Conservation Areas. These CAs provide hiking and biking opportunities ranging in length from 1.2 kilometres to 24 kilometres.

Governance:

- The Conservation Authorities Act and its related regulations guide the programs and services offered by UTRCA and hold it accountable to the Province and its member municipalities.
 - UTRCA is bound by the CA Act and Ontario Regulation 686/21 to offer the following programs and services:
 - Risk of Natural Hazards (Planning and Regulation, Flood Forecasting/Warning/Low Water, Dam Operations, Technical Studies),
 - Conservation and Management of CA Lands,
 - Provincial Water Quality Monitoring,
 - Drinking Water Source Protection Program,
 - General Operating Expenses (Administration, Communications, Information Technology, and GIS).
 - As a result of Ontario Regulations 686/21, additional programs and services have been added that need to be in place by December 31, 2024, including:
 1. Conservation Areas Management Strategy to guide the management of Conservation Authority owned lands,
 2. Land Inventory,
 3. Watershed Based Resource Management Strategy,
 4. Operation Plans and Asset Management related to Flood and Erosion Control Infrastructure,
 5. Ice Management Plan.
- UTRCA has no option but to meet the requirements outlined in the CA Act and Ontario Regulation 686/21. UTRCA's programs and services are monitored by UTRCA's Board of Directors, which is comprised of representatives from UTRCA's seventeen member municipalities. The Board makes program decisions and allocates funds.
- Consistent with the Information Requirements contained in Ontario Regulation 400/22, the UTRCA makes public on its website: contact information for each member of the Board of Directors, meeting schedules, agendas and minutes of meetings, all executed agreements with participating municipalities, all by-laws of the authority, audited financial statements, and the strategic plan.

The following section provides an overview of the key activities the service plans to undertake from 2024 to 2027 to implement the Corporation's 2023 to 2027 Strategic Plan, as well as an overview of the risks and challenges the service is anticipated to experience during this period.

Service Highlights 2024 to 2027

- Fulfilling requirements of Ontario Regulation 686/21 by ensuring the following items are completed by December 31, 2024, including: Conservation Areas Strategy – strategy to guide the management of Conservation Authority owned lands, Conservation Lands Inventory, Watershed Based Resource Management Strategy, Operation Plans and Asset Management related to Flood and Erosion Control Infrastructure, and Ice Management Plan.
- Once these strategies and plans are completed, implementation will be ongoing.
- Developing and implementing processes that meet the Provincial standards and legislative requirements to improve efficiencies in planning and development processes.
- Undertaking asset management planning for all UTRCA assets.
- Implementing the UTRCA Shared Waters Action Plan.
- Implementing a policy and procedure to address homeless encampments on CA owned and managed lands with compassion and a standard of health and safety.

Risks and Challenges Anticipated in 2024 to 2027

- UTRCA is obligated to deliver all the mandatory programs and services outlined in Ontario Regulation 686/21 by December 31, 2024. Additional staffing will be required beyond 2024 to facilitate the ongoing maintenance of Ontario Regulation 686/21 requirements and other legislative pressures related to growth and development including ongoing floodplain modelling and mapping updates and the necessary public consultation. A legislative business case was approved as part of the 2024 to 2027 Multi-Year Budget to secure funding to back-fill for the resources required to fulfill the new legislative requirements.
- Growth-related development pressure surrounding UTRCA owned/controlled lands (e.g., encroachments, encampments, infrastructure needs for adjacent uses, etc.) require staff time and resources.
- UTRCA is planning to undertake a comprehensive asset management planning process 2024 to 2027 to appropriately account for all assets owned by the Authority.
- UTRCA's water and erosion control infrastructure is aging and must be appropriately accounted for in capital asset management planning.
- Significant increases in capital costs have been realized for projects initiated in 2023. In some cases, project proposals for flood and erosion control capital projects doubled forecasted costs.

- Use of UTRCA's passive recreation facilities continues to increase, taxing staffing levels and resulting in uncontrollable costs such as ensuring proper maintenance and risk management. While the use of UTRCA's passive recreation opportunities has increased, staffing levels have not.
- Inflationary pressures are being mitigated by staging implementation of a 2021 Salary and Pay Equity review over two years; however, staffing retention, cost of living, and succession planning will remain pressures from 2024 to 2027.
- In late 2025, the Ontario government proposed consolidating its 36 conservation authorities into 7 regional ones, under this proposal, UTRCA would be consolidated into the new Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority together with seven other CA's and encompass 81 municipalities. This new governance structure is proposed to be effective following the municipal elections in 2026.

Other reference information and links:

- Link to the UTRCA website <https://thamesriver.on.ca/>

Contact:

- Tracy Annett, General Manager – Secretary Treasurer
- 519-451-2800 Extension 253
- annettt@thamesriver.on.ca