

Administrative and Financial Services



Administrative and Financial Services reflects the combined operations of the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), the Director of Council and Community Services / Clerk and the Director of Financial Services / Treasurer. Working in collaboration with Council, the community and our partners, the CAO is responsible for the strategic leadership of the Corporation as well as fulfilling the role of key advisor to Council and the Senior Management Team. The Director of Council and Community Services / Clerk is responsible for the legislated duties of the Clerk which are focused on serving as the secretariat and official communicator for Council. By establishing systems of records management, freedom of information and protection of privacy and communications, the department ensures access to County of Essex business is open and transparent. The Director of Financial Services / Treasurer is responsible for the legislated duties of the Treasurer which are focused on serving as the primary overseer for all financial affairs of the Corporation. Services in the finance department also include risk management, payroll, procurement, information technology and

geographical information systems. The combined expertise in Administrative and Financial Services ensures the Corporation's compass remains aligned with Council's strategic goals and objectives.

Level of Service Statement

Administrative and Financial Services provides support to the five (5) primary services provided by the County: Community Services, Sun Parlor Home, Emergency Services, Infrastructure and Planning Services and the Essex County Library. By providing strategic, legislative, legal, labour, communication, financial, procurement and information technology advice and supports, the department acts as the administrative backbone for the Corporation. In the two-tier municipal system, County staff in Administrative and Financial Services also strive to be a regional resource to peers at the local level, strengthening intergovernmental relations and sharing ideas and best practices.

2021 Achievements and Challenges

A mid-year leadership change occurred in 2021 due to the retirement of the former CAO. A thoughtful review of existing service levels and procedures is underway, and will lead to a Corporate Strategic Planning exercise in 2022.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued throughout the year, this department has frequently shifted priorities and resources. Safety of staff remained the prime focus during periods of lockdown, and IT resources continued to be deployed securely to support staff who were working from home.

Procurement staff accelerated the necessary purchases required to establish Mass Vaccination sites in Leamington and Amherstburg, and finance staff meticulously tracked associated costs and expedited payments to the host municipalities. As provincial restrictions eased and the corporation pivoted to a maintenance / recovery phase, IT resources were returned and inventoried for future deployment. Managing the technical needs of the entire workforce and guarding the Corporation's network against heightened security attacks continues to be the focus for IT.

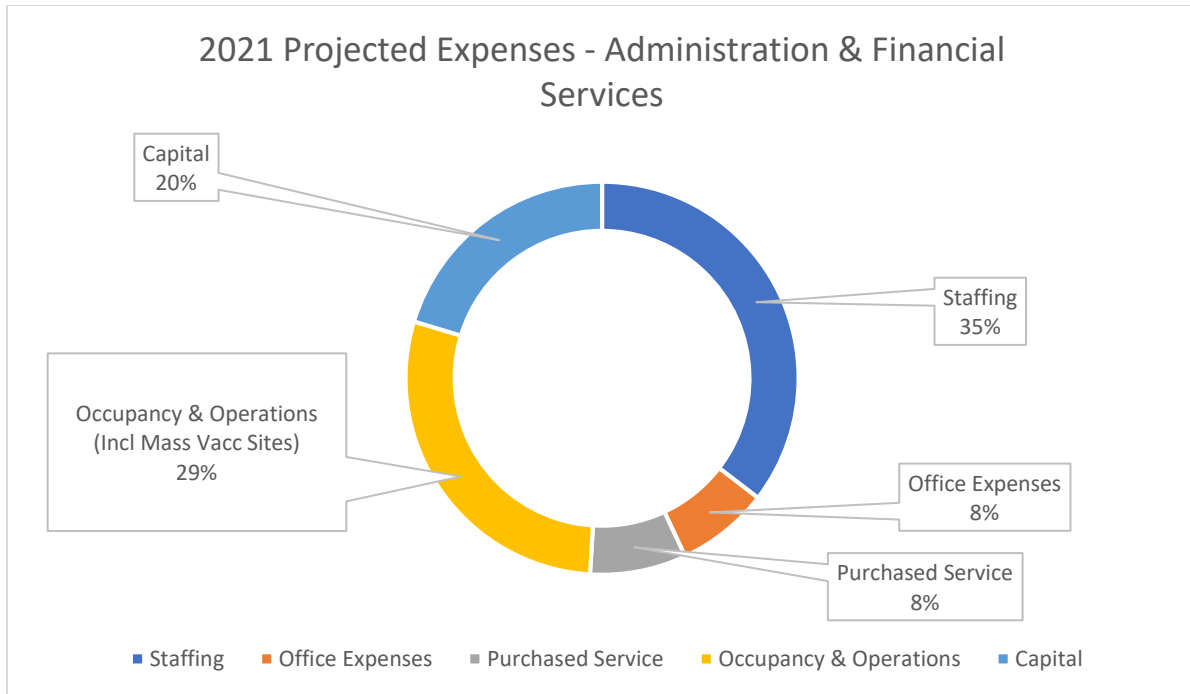
Payroll and finance resources were strained throughout the year as the team administered the PSW Temporary Wage Enhancement for Sun Parlor Home employees and managed the administrative burden resulting from a high level of staff recruitment and turnover. In addition, finance staff worked with all departments to track expenditures related to the pandemic and provide financial support in managing subsidy claims. At the same time, the Financial Services department acted as project lead for a new Human Resource Information System (HRIS) software (payroll / human resources / scheduling). The goal of the project is to minimize manual gathering and

transferring of payroll and employee information and empower staff and management with greater access to information and services. System design is currently underway and user testing / go-live will occur in 2022.

Staffing changes occurred within the Communications and Organizational Development staff as well, however the team continues to build on employee engagement activities and staff training, improving internal communications and refining the County's marketing strategy. Communication with all staff has been paramount during the many changes that occurred during the year, and the focus has been on providing accurate COVID-19 information and resources to support the mental wellness of our workforce. And while employee safety required physical distancing for most of the year, the employee engagement committee has been revived and employee events are underway again in the fall of 2021.

In 2021 the County sought to modernize its records and information management program. This pursuit involved a consulting firm conducting an exhaustive inspection of information assets, internal competency levels, policies, and procedures. Further analyzed, was the County's level of exposure to risk as it relates to privacy, information assets, vital records and continuity of service. A multi-year implementation plan has been developed which sets out the recommendations that will be phased-in over the coming years. Although the County has implemented some modern tools for managing its information assets, the rapid pace of technological changes, exponential growth of information and increasing emphasis on the need for privacy, security, and legal access to information have demanded a fulsome update of current practices. Ever-changing work environments and the erosion of corporate memory are contributing to the need for change. Efficient, information-driven business processes are at the core of effective and cost-efficient government. Assuring compliance with legislative obligations for records in the control and custody of the County of Essex is essential as the department moves forward with the Records and Information Management program.

The graph below illustrates the key areas of spending in Administrative and Financial Services for this past year (projected to December 31, 2021). Note that Occupancy and Operations reflects one time spending of \$2.2 million in support of Mass Vaccination Centres and COVID-19 expenditures which were funded by Provincial Safe Restart funds.



Challenges Facing Administrative and Financial Services in 2022

Changes in administrative leadership and the 2022 start of a new Term of Council present an opportune time to conduct a strategic planning exercise for the County of Essex. A comprehensive review of all County services and relationships will tie together the results of recent departmental service delivery reviews, conduct facility and resource rationalization, and result in a plan that delineates Council’s vision and priorities for the future. The strategic plan will become the guiding principles that influence long range asset planning, allocation of resources, regional priorities and performance management.

Effective communication and data analytics are key success factors for this department. Improvements to the staff intranet, modernization of record management systems and the completion of the HRIS software conversion are top priorities.

Risk management and analysis is growing in importance as threats facing the Corporation increase. General liability risk and associated insurance costs will continue to be monitored in 2022, and Health Benefit reserve funds will be used to offset the significant premium increases that will be experienced. Cyber threats, which are growing in frequency against municipalities will also continue to be a focus of risk management work. Risk associated with the procurement process has also escalated, and the need to protect the Corporation by supporting rigorous standardized purchasing

practices has been noted. Efficiencies from centralizing procurement will also be realized in 2022.

The redesign of work environments to ensure safe physical distancing, unobstructed paths for staff movement and efficient design of work spaces is paramount. Workplace redesign and demolition will occur in 2022, with a focus on staff synergy, safety, and energy efficiency.

Proposed 2022 Budget Plan

An opportunity to achieve corporate efficiencies and reduce risk by recruiting a County Solicitor was approved by Council in 2021 and is anticipated to be in place by the beginning of 2022. Administrative supports for the solicitor are also included in the 2022 work plan and will fill a resource gap for the entire department, allowing leaders to become less prescriptive and more essential in their daily work.

Risk management will also be addressed through the mid year addition of Records Information Management personnel to support modernization of our existing systems and to implement the recommendations of the Records Management study conducted in 2021.

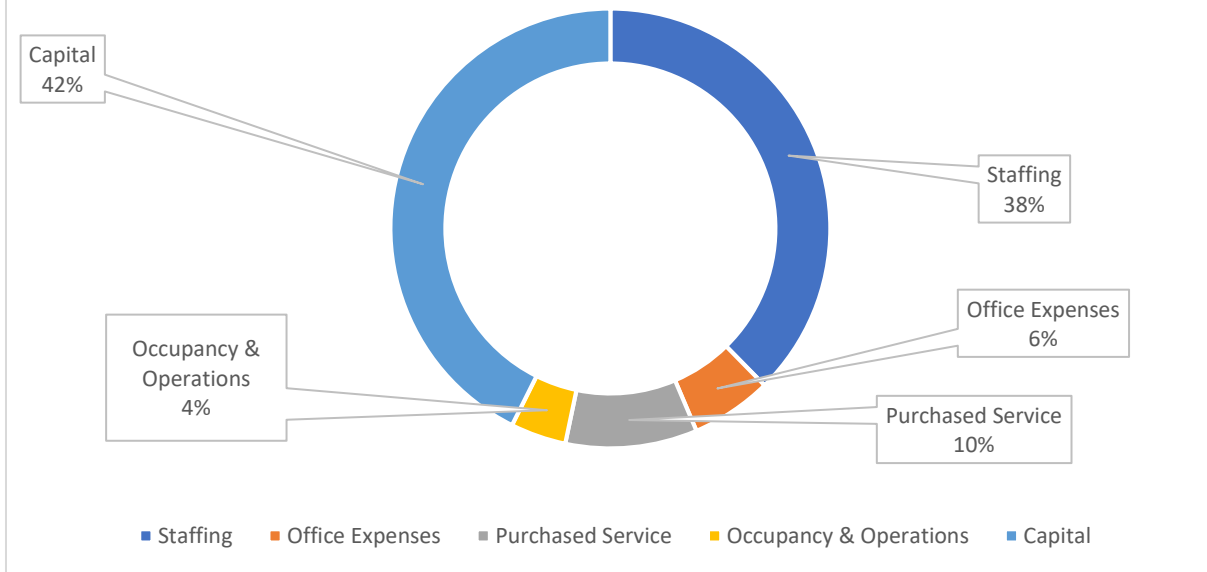
Significant projects for the Communications Department include the redevelopment and deployment of a staff intranet system and additional employee engagement initiatives, including corporate wide training opportunities. Communication and change management initiatives during the HRIS software conversion will place substantial demands on the communication team for the first half of 2022.

Finance and payroll continue to manage heavy burdens for reporting and analytics as temporary wage enhancements continue into the new year for Sun Parlor Home, and the administration of numerous changing pandemic funding programs continue. In addition, this team is the subject matter experts who will be heavily involved in the user testing and final deployment for the HRIS software that will modernize the County's human capital asset system.

Safeguarding the assets of the Corporation will continue to be the focus for the IT team, and network security will be paramount. The IT department and Financial Services in general will undertake a service delivery/operational review in 2022.

The graph on the following page illustrates the key areas of proposed 2022 Budget spending in Administration & Financial Services.

2022 Proposed Budget - Administration & Financial Services



Overall, the 2022 Budget for Administrative and Financial Services, net of recoveries, totals \$4,994,100 (11.6% increase over the 2021 Budget of \$4,473,990).