

# THA seeks \$3.7B to run its affairs



THA Secretary of Finance Petal-Ann Roberts delivers the budget presentation yesterday.

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The Tobago House of Assembly (THA) has made it clear it will not accept anything less than 5.9 per cent of the national budget as its allocation for the fiscal year 2025/2026.

Last year, the THA requested \$3.9 billion and received \$2.59 billion in the national budget.

In her first-ever budget presentation yesterday, THA Secretary of Finance Petal-Ann Roberts requested a total of \$3.71 billion based on what she said was “a projected national budget of \$63.5 billion.”

“Let me state here, Madam Presiding Officer, that any allocation to the THA in fiscal 2026 that is less than 5.9 per cent will constitute a non-alleviation of the per capita expenditure inequality that has defined the national budget and its appropriation bill since 1962,” Roberts said.

“Basically, all Tobago is requesting is per capita expenditure equality as a minimum revenue share to the THA, based primarily on the island’s population as a percentage share of the national population. In dollars and cents, this is calculated as \$5.90 out of every \$100 in proposed national expenditure in fiscal 2026.”

Roberts said the days of Tobago receiving less than its fair share must end.

“Today is not the day,” she said.

“We have raised the bar. Unlike the PNM, we don’t see excuses as deliverables.”

This marked the final budget presentation of the current THA term, which ends in December. Roberts used the opportunity to reflect on the THA’s achievements and laid out the plans for the island’s economic future.

In an emotional moment, she reminded the Assembly that this was the first time a woman was presenting a THA budget in the island’s history.

“This is my maiden budget presentation and the first to be presented by a female Secretary of Finance in the 45-year history of the Tobago House of Assembly,” she said.

She thanked Chief Secretary Farley Augustine for trusting her with the finance portfolio, which he gave up during a reshuffle last year.

Roberts also took aim at the former People’s National Movement-led THA and central government, blaming them for leaving behind more than \$1 billion in unpaid debts.

“In our restricted space, we managed and paid approximately \$300 million for recurrent liabilities and over \$75 million in development programme debts owed to contractors without compromising our development programme and service delivery,” she said.

She also claimed that access to grant funding had been stalled under the previous government.

“Over a year ago, the IDB approved US\$100,000 to assist the Division of Finance... Notwithstanding several letters and phone calls... up to today, the non-objection letter was not sent to the IDB for the THA to access this much-needed financial assistance,” Roberts said.

Despite the economic challenges, Roberts said the THA had made progress in governance and service delivery.

“This administration’s fiscal 2026 fiscal package signifies a pivotal moment in our collective journey to transform Tobago into a prosperous economy defined by sustainable growth and fiscal stability,” she said.

She also celebrated the completion and tabling of six years of financial statements, which she said was a first in the THA’s history.

“This is indeed historic, as for the first time in the history of the Tobago House of Assembly, our financial statements are completed, publicised, and ready for audit,” she said.

“It stands as a testament to this administration’s steadfast dedication to good governance, transparency, and public accountability.”

The budget’s theme was “Accelerating Growth, Anchoring Fiscal Stability.”

Roberts said targeted investments would be made in tourism, agriculture, infrastructure, digital technologies, education, healthcare and support for small businesses.

She made a final push for Tobago’s autonomy, saying the island must have the right to borrow, manage its own affairs, and access international funding without Port-of-Spain’s approval.

“The THA is currently constitutionally and legislatively debarred from exercising any fiscal

authority,” she said. “Fiscal stability ... can only be anchored by the effective and meaningful completion of the decades-old, ongoing internal self-government project,” she said.

#### 2025–2026 THA Budget allocation breakdown

- Total Requested: \$3.71B
- Recurrent Expenditure: \$2.71B
- Assembly Legislature – \$25.7M
- Office of the Chief Secretary – \$184.4M
- Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy – \$262.1M
- Division of Tourism, Culture, Antiquities and Transportation – \$179.5M
- Division of Education, Research and Technology – \$476.5M
- Division of Community Development, Youth Development and Sport – \$122.6M
- Division of Infrastructure, Quarries and Urban Development – \$381.7M
- Division of Food Security, Natural Resources and Sustainable Development – \$188.6M
- Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection – \$845.6M
- Division of Settlements, Public Utilities and Rural Development – \$43.2M
- URP: \$91.9M
- CEPEP: \$43.4M