



**CALGARY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

**Budget Workshop**

**Tuesday, April 12, 2011**

The Calgary Chamber of Commerce hosted a budget engagement workshop on April 12. The session involved 17 participants representing Chamber members and the community at large. Participants shared their input over a 1.5 hour period, centred on three main questions. The results of the discussion are summarized below.

**1. Priority Setting - What are your three priorities for The City in the next three years?**

When defining the priorities of the city, the question that was frequently asked was: “What are core services?” By calling services that the private sector cannot provide as well as the municipal government (such as Police, Fire, Public Transit, Maintaining current infrastructure, etc) as “core”, participants distinguished between needs and wants so as to establish a broader vision for the city. Participants indicated that they wanted to move beyond reallocation of resources, to set a strategic direction that precedes the need to have the resources to finance this vision. By creating the image we want to portray to our community and to the world, Calgary can become ever greater.

Under these parameters, the following three priorities were developed:

- **Governance: Transparency and Accountability**
  - Competitive Benchmarking: Transparency needs to be coupled with accountability. Right now, citizens are challenged to understand the extent to which Calgary is efficient based on the data, since the data is in a vacuum. It is important to provide performance data and comparison to ensure that operations are efficient.  
It might also be necessary to change what we are measuring and instead shift towards the performance metric of impact.
  - Empowering Communities: City should change mindset from growth in service areas and more funding to looking to empower others. .This means shifting to becoming an enabler and allowing communities to solve problems. This can be done by clarifying roles and focusing on core services that allow ‘space’ for the individual, community or business to provide services, not necessarily The City.
  - Focus on the Big Picture: Council should rely upon Administration’s expertise with respect to the details. By making the process less political, Council is able to stay out of the minutia (e.g. individual land use re-designations) and focus instead on creating a vision for the City. A vision that leads priority setting would in turn create a framework that is consistently applied to decisions.
  
- **Fiscal management**
  - Looking at the long run: Include lifecycle infrastructure financing and management costs when considering new projects. This builds a systematic efficiency in the budgeting process.
  - Reflecting our values is imperative for the budgeting process. To change City Hall culture from ‘growth mentality’ to measuring impact, we need to move away from just factoring in cost in deciding on our priorities.



- Responsive budgeting to help create efficiencies based on determined priorities. Then the City can focus on impact with funding following in the last stage.

- **Strong Communities**

- New urban growth pattern: Less dense communities were seen as an impediment in improving efficiency of services. Participants seek greater density, walkable neighbourhoods and safe, complete communities. Zoning policies and practices should support this goal.
- Economic Vitality: A vibrant business community can help drive city building. This means that Council needs to ensure we have affordable housing, a streamlined regulatory environment, as well as reliable transit that connects major hubs and quadrants of the City. The free-flow of goods, people and intellectual capital can improve quality of life in Calgary. A value-add, knowledge-based economy requires amenities for the next wave of talent.
- People orientated service - Delivery of core services needs to change with the changing face of the City, especially those that arise as Calgary continues to grow as a large urban centre with a large number of new immigrants.

## 2. Action - How can we achieve these priorities?

We need to allow our decision-makers have the ability to try new ways of doing things and experiment with these processes to truly achieve the level of greatness we know our city is capable of. Providing a sense of ownership means including the ability to cut programs or restructure them to achieve efficiencies.

The question boils down to whether the City should even be providing some of these services in the first place. Perhaps the City should instead provide support mechanisms for entrepreneurship and private innovation. Actions need to be driven by strategic direction based on policy and priorities, rather than mere funding constraints.

- **Funding:**

- Service Impact: The City should run its facilities and services like a business and realize that excessive bureaucracy is a business cost as well. Move to a one window approach to services (e.g. meet with one group to discuss a land development project versus the current process of many).  
Most people don't mind paying the tax if they can see the service they get. Comparatively speaking, Calgary has low taxes relative to affordability index. By turning the conversation to how we balance tax competitiveness but still offer good services and programs, the city can expand its impact.
- Re-evaluate the affordability of services: Right now, the return on services is not visible or tangible. Agencies charging excessive fees and taxes fly under the radar screen. The City has to have some user pay services while acknowledging that you can't have full cost-recovery exclusively. Access to services by those who cannot afford them must be maintained while ensuring that the citizens who barely use any services are not fully subsidizing the use of services by others.
- Budgeting process: Beyond benchmarking on performance, the City needs to reflect what was incorporated and discuss the reasons why feedback wasn't used. It needs to offer best practices to educate not only Administration and Council in their decision-making but also when consulting citizens on how service delivery can be improved.



- **Governance reform**

- More Planning: Current economic climate and level of citizen engagement presents a great opportunity to redesign decision-making process with more openness and accountability. The City should pursue research and pilot programs on dual delivery models as well as improve coordination across city departments in implementation of planning policies. Furthermore, there is currently a lot of unnecessary confusion between guidelines and rules. The City should move from process to rules, rather than the other way around.
- Engage a variety of stakeholders: Entrepreneurs who encourage a good business environment need to be leveraged in creating community investments. By recognizing and supporting the role of BRZs and other business associations in creating great business districts, the City gets more of a buy-in from its citizens.
- Aldermanic System: Participants suggested that there should be City-wide aldermanic representation to prevent less Ward-centric focus. This would also require streamlining committees so as to accommodate more citizen input.

- **Land use reform**

- Dealing with fringe development requires an improved regional planning framework and more investment in regional transportation and service delivery.
- Densification in all communities: Clearly and consistently applying Planit Calgary policies and principles in all communities means that we have to remove politics from the process. Instead, we need to focus on the big picture throughout the implementation and application of Planit Calgary policies and reform the planning process to ensure timely and coordinated implementation planning policies in the city. Phase in municipal infrastructure investment (e.g. transit, etc) to coincide with densified development
- Principled Approach: By enabling flexibility, predictability and timeliness in zoning decisions, it is possible to draw more investment to the city and create great communities.

### 3. Engagement – How can the budgeting and engagement process be improved?

- **Priority Setting**

- Greater awareness of how Council works would be beneficial, as it is difficult to provide informed feedback without knowledge. We're not specialists but we know the kind of community we want and want to understand the process that can make this vision a reality.
- Benchmarking: Current process is not comparing apples to apples. We need to know what comparable jurisdictions are doing to make informed decisions, especially on performance metrics across cities based on outcomes.

- **Governance Amendments**

- Relationships within the City: Need a better balance between administration and Council in the role of the budget process, particularly since there is a perception that the City Administrators & Managers run the show. It is also necessary to have the City Auditor compare unit costs of services provided (such as taxes and fees) relative to competing cities.
- Relationships with external funding entities (such as the federal and provincial governments) need to be improved since so much of the City's future is in the hands of other levels of government. We have to keep advocating to have more jurisdiction over funding tools. Also, Council has to look at the regulatory process when considering funding as the allocation of resources can be influential in decision-making



- **Authentic and accessible engagement**

- Engagement with Public: Participants would like to see administration work more closely with council and the public to set priorities and this highlights the need to fix the input process. People want to be consulted in decision making, and not as just another box to check.
- Vertical vs. Horizontal strata engagement: There is a real need to create an environment where different people are engaged across the City. People need to have an opportunity or a pathway to provide input apart from calling their Aldermen as this allows only a narrow, vocal band of citizens to have their voice heard.  
It is also necessary to respond to changing demographics and technology when engaging. Having Open data/ open government leads to improved transparency, and this can be done through simple things such as making the City of Calgary website more user-friendly and cultivating a culture at City Hall that is open to new ideas and innovation.
- Scepticism of the process: Many felt that the current form of citizen engagement seems elitist as only “professional committee goers” can lobby their position. The City should use different ways to access Calgarians by creating a local and personal connection to citizens as well as by utilizing different media avenues based on constituency.  
Many were also unsure of how comments will be incorporated, asking the question “Has the document already been written and now we are simply going through the motions?” People want to know that their voice is being heard and is not just a pointless exercise.