

Priorities for The City's 2012 - 2014 Budget and Planning

The City of Calgary is doing an excellent job at providing services for residents, including for those who are most vulnerable. United Way is proud of The City's efforts to create a fair, inclusive city through policies such as the Fair Calgary Policy and the Welcoming Communities Policy, and initiatives provided by the Affordable Housing Unit and Family and Community Support Services, among others. The City continues to work towards an inclusive community by engaging residents in the budget and planning process - for that we commend you.

United Way and The City of Calgary have a long history of working together on important initiatives. For example, United Way and Family and Community Support Services co-fund various initiatives and work together to better coordinate services and programs. In 2006 and 2009, United Way and The City of Calgary jointly sponsored a survey of social issues and needs in Calgary. United Way and Family and Community Support Services share a jointly appointed Social Planner who works on our mutual interest in strengthening neighbourhoods.

We look forward to our future work together, and see this engagement process as another opportunity to support The City's work. United Way therefore recommends The City prioritize the four following areas:

1. Community economic development
2. Affordable, safe transportation
3. A strong social safety net
4. Civic engagement

The following pages offer ideas on how The City can enhance its commitment to these four areas, and commends The City for the ways in which it is already doing so.

1. Community economic development

What's Great:

The City has shown commitment to a community economic development approach in several ways:

- imagineCalgary targets principles related to CED, such as meaningful work, sense of community, locally produced goods and services, and a variety of housing options
- FCSS's Social Sustainability Framework incorporates CED in addressing neighbourhoods and economic self-sufficiency
- The Calgary Economic Development Strategy focuses on people and community
- Business Revitalization Zones (BRZs) have a local focus on economic development of neighbourhoods.

What Could Be Enhanced:

Community economic development (CED) focuses on inclusion and opportunities for marginalized individuals to participate in the economy - it is therefore a key driver to reduce poverty. The City can further enhance its commitment in several ways.

Examples:

- Business Revitalization Zones can focus on producing positive social outcomes in the communities they are working
- Calgary's business units can adopt a CED approach to frame their 3 year planning
- FCSS's Strong Neighbourhoods initiative can align with various CED organizations and projects, as well as BRZs and Calgary Economic Development
- The City can target purchasing from social enterprises and social businesses

Promising Initiative:

Baton Rouge's 'Operation Restore Pride' sends City workers and volunteers to impoverished neighbourhoods every 6 weeks to provide repair, engage in outreach and promote safe communities, and to connect local employers to unemployed residents seeking work. United Way can enhance this work with our days of caring.

2. Affordable, safe transportation

What's Great:

United Way commends Calgary Transit for providing discounted public transit passes to low-income individuals, and children, youth and seniors. In Nov. 2010, Council agreed to lower the cost of the Low Income Monthly Transit Pass to \$40/ mth down from 41.50/ mth instead of raising it.

What Could Be Enhanced:

Transit is the second greatest household expenditure after housing. In order for Calgarians to gain the benefits of the many programs and services offered by The City and others, they must be able to affordably travel there. While the low income transit pass and Youth transit pass address this issue, there are several barriers to accessing these passes:

Low Income Monthly Transit Pass:

- There are few options for proving income (only Notice of (Re)Assessment is accepted)
- The application process is complicated and burdensome, and
- Eligibility requirements exclude some of the most vulnerable:
 - a. Those with household incomes between 76 - 100% of LICO are ineligible
 - b. Youth who are under the age of 18 are ineligible

Youth Pass:

- Many vulnerable youth are not eligible to receive the discounted youth transit pass due to the fact that they must be enrolled in school
- The youth pass, which offers less of a discount than the low-income pass, is not offered during the summer months

Enhancements to this system would address the transportation barriers faced by individuals who are economically challenged, which can in turn improve their ability to access services and supports that will help them exit poverty.

Promising Initiative:

Kingston Ontario's Municipal Fee Assistance program provides residents with lower incomes a discount on monthly transit passes and reduced-cost access to sports, wellness cultural, and other recreation and leisure opportunities - all through one application process.

3. A strong social safety net

What's Great:

United Way commends The City of Calgary for providing a number of programs and services that support people who are vulnerable. For example, The City:

- Operates numerous affordable housing initiatives
- Endorsed the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness
- Runs an After School Initiative for youth
- Adopted a Low-Income Strategy for the Recreation unit
- Develops, supports and funds preventative social services through Family and Community Support Services

Additionally, the Mayor has set in motion a Mayor's Taskforce on Poverty Reduction. Municipal leadership on a collaborative, multi-stakeholder initiative that coordinates a city-wide poverty reduction strategy is necessary to 'move the needle' on poverty in Calgary. Agreement around goals, targets, and measures will allow us to effectively evaluate our impact on reducing poverty in Calgary.

What Could Be Enhanced:

In order to work towards poverty reduction in our city, United Way recommends The City prioritize social supports and address barriers preventing people from accessing these supports. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities draws our attention to the fact that as federal and provincial governments have clawed back the social safety net over the past several years, municipalities must step-up to fill in the gaps.

Examples:

- Secondary Suites provide affordable housing options to low-income Calgarians. Liberalizing regulations that prevent secondary suites from being developed would help remedy the lack of affordable housing in Calgary
- Early childhood development programs are an important means of mitigating childhood deficits and promoting healthy development - The City can support this by introducing more, or enhancing existing, programs and family supports in the form of parenting and literacy centres, home visiting, and parent and child playgroups.
- Expanded and accessible access for youth to recreation opportunities would increase youth's self-esteem and engagement in the community.
- Access to libraries currently costs adults \$12 per year and seniors \$9 per year. While this fee is waived for some, it is not waived for all on a low-income. The City can contribute to increasing literacy by removing barriers to accessing The City's libraries.
- Dental health is an important part of overall health and wellbeing. The City could provide dental health coverage to those without employer coverage living on a low-income. This would be an excellent way to re-distribute savings from no longer fluoridating The City's water system.

- Research shows that those living in poverty spend more of their disposable income on food, pay more due to inaccessibility to fresh produce, and consume a less nutritious diet (Stapleton, 2010). The City can alleviate these challenges by enticing grocery chains and other food retailers in areas where few exist ('food deserts') by pointing out potential catchment areas, easing taxation regulations and eliminating zoning restrictions. The City could also provide shuttle buses to grocery and other fresh food source from low-income areas where there are few existing sources.

Promising Initiatives:

St. Petersburg's Mayor's Mentors & More brings mentors and scholarships to all the city's schools through corporate sponsorships and sector-wide partnerships.

An increasingly popular program implemented by cities and nations worldwide are conditional cash transfers where households meeting certain behavioural requirements, generally related to children's education and health, are provided with cash payments. They have had positive outcomes in terms of improved school enrollment and increased nutrition.

A city in Michigan has developed a partnership with a life insurance company to provide free life insurance policies to low- and moderate-income residents.

4. Civic engagement

What's Great:

Calgary is quickly becoming recognized for having a municipality that demonstrates great respect for the voices of its residents. Recently, The City has enhanced opportunities for citizen engagement in City processes, such as budget amendments and planning. The Land Use Planning & Policy unit has involved communities in the development of key documents, such as imagineCalgary, the Municipal Development Plan and the Transportation Plan. This has allowed residents to gain a sense of ownership for their communities, and a greater sense of pride in their city.

What Could Be Enhanced:

The City can facilitate a strengthened democracy by continuing to engage Calgarians in city processes and planning whenever possible. Increasing civic engagement among those who are marginalized is critical to the process of developing or amending policies and practices that impact these communities. There are several ways in which The City can work to encourage civic engagement in Calgary.

Examples:

- The City manages an extensive network of facilities and programs that reach a broad-section of the population that cuts across incomes, ethnicities and backgrounds; these are potential sites for raising awareness of issues and promoting civic engagement.
- The City can facilitate community gatherings by providing use of City-owned spaces for community gatherings and initiatives.
- Once Bill C-41 receives Royal Assent, The City of Calgary will be able to re-purpose surplus school sites for public-related services. The City may choose to re-purpose them as facilities that support individuals living in low income such as libraries, civic engagement centres, or affordable housing.