

## Making Choices That Matter Phase 3 Community Conversation Cafes

May 2012

### Additional Comments from "City service bills" submitted at face-to-face sessions

Total Number of Participants: 203

Note: Not all respondents answered ALL of the questions.

#### OVERALL PROCESS

##### COMMENTS:

- The entire budget process does not affect politician's performance. As long as the budget is "one bit of here and a bit of there", this process has no meaning. The city is supporting a system where it has to constantly raise taxes. It does not know how it intends to keep costs in check. Too often, politicians see short-term gains as a way to run the city, but only its employees that benefit. The large sector is left out just to pay for it.
- Run a proper poll on spending. One citizen, one vote instead of this free of all exercise.
- Past Engagement Experiences - River Park - Britannia Beach. More people airing their beefs instead of coming up with ideas. Online forums and open houses - we got bogged down. Dog walkers versus people who wanted to restore the park, this was not productive. Constructive methods for improvements, restoration and sustainability.
- No discussion on budgeting is complete without discussing mill rate supported VS user fee supported services. Services of private benefit (i.e.: pet licensing and bylaw enforcement) should be entirely fee-based.

#### PHASE 3 PROCESS AND MATERIALS

##### COMMENTS:

- There cannot be Leave It As Is Bill because it does not address the need for leaner and more sustainable government. The city is relatively well run but it loves on borrowed time and borrowed money. Future generations will be saddled with huge tax bills precisely because the city wants to be everything to everyone.
- The one thing that wasn't emphasized was the relative breakdown of the city budget. A graphic reflection of this would have been helpful.
- This Current Process - Notification process for events isn't good enough. Third phase has been the first experience. Phase 1 and 2 - didn't see signs.
- Hard to believe no one from Transportation, one of the most expensive services could be found to attend this meeting. This is an indication of how airport issue overwhelms all other transportation for the future.

- I respectfully decline to put forth a number for increase or decrease. This is too important for such a quick budget allocation.
- All BU's information is confusing e.g.: regarding capital budgets. Capital must be re-allocated.
- I notice this discussion focuses on the operating budget. What about the capital budget? When citizens think about their city, they're thinking about big capital projects, in addition to the day-to-day work. Will there be another consultation on the capital budget?
- The city budget should be put on line in full. Possibly line by line, itemized in detail.
- Find this process difficult without meaningful input into present city efficiencies. Would like to see a process that includes community groups as assets. Present city services could be more efficient if communities were truly partners. Not considered to be antagonists.
- Interesting to note that many departments have identifies impacts to their 311 responses as the item that would be impacted by small % increases/decreases. It appears they see this work as an add-on in their departments. Why isn't it more integrated into their regular work?
- This process is flawed as there is the absence of information related to 1 - No information related last year's budget - areas of increase - areas of decrease. 2 - No information related to city growth or population density. 3 - No information related to cost per person or service per person (re: number of police officers on shift to population) 4 - Lack of sub line item areas in budget. 5 - Absence of demographic information.
- It would have been good to have data to 2010 budget amounts, how much Calgary has grown (increase in population, increase in square miles, etc.)

## CITY STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

### COMMENTS:

- We have a great city. I think our Mayor is doing a great job. I would like to see each department more accountable for their budget. I know people who work for the city, phone in sick a lot, on the Internet while they should be working, and these people are stealing my tax dollars. City needs to have a by-law where neighbours who choose not to take care of their properties are fined. Why should our property value be affected by a bad homeowner?
- Cut the middle management!
- The amount of time, paperwork and bureaucracy it takes to "pay" for internal services, from marketing to communications to IT service. Is there a way to efficiently streamline budgets so this bureaucracy stops? So this affects multiple businesses and internal systems that is a system within itself.
- The best government is a government that has to do the least. In that basis, I tend to suggest that government should outsource/contract out as much services as possible. Don't try to get the hands into everything, let the private sectors (in their expert areas) do their work. I much prefer paying a private company to do their job for me than paying taxes.
- Privatization of Services. Government having their hands in everything is inefficient. Privatize more services. Privatize IT, Parks/Recreation, Waste/Recycling. Let private companies run public transit. Union wages are too high for many services
- Turn off the money tap; cut funding to departments across the board. Freeze hiring. Bring wages into line with

private sector

- Government Structure (unions) Unions have a place. They provide workers with a wage that allows them a relatively good standard of living. Keep city unions in place. Government in certain businesses is good in order to regulate services. The bureaucratic mindset develops and the government grows. No need to grow it more than necessary.
- All positions vacated, either by retirement, quits or termination must be reviewed prior to filling.
- Development policy at the city needs to change. We talk about the Province and its responsibility for building codes, but it is the city that approves the development plan for new communities. Yes, building codes are set in Edmonton; but the city can say to developers, build with a larger setback, exceed codes for materials or your plan does not get approved. If it means residential costs go up, they go up. It costs all taxpayers for Fire/Police to respond to disaster or more for LRTs to be built to communities because that was in the developer's sales pitch to homebuyers. We need leadership here.
- One thing that has long baffled me is the number and frequency of consultants the City hires. During my brief stint with the City in LUPP, they retained consultants to lead participants through Planning "Charades". Why on earth don't we build that capacity among City staff and stop hiring the bloody consultants!
- Cross department problems exist. Example - On 40th Avenue, by the graveyard/confederation park, the snowplows come and pile snow on the sidewalk. After the park/graveyard clear the sidewalk, this makes elementary students occasionally choose to walk on the road. I cannot say anything because I am walking to work on the road too. Summer comes and the street cleaners come before the sidewalk is cleared of gravel. The sidewalk was once cleared, but now it is difficult to run on for fear of slipping on the gravel.
- Various - get out of other levels of government's areas i.e.: affordable housing, social services, and environmental regulation. City needs to stand up to downloading from other levels of government without attendant financial tools.
- Curious as to a City of Calgary "Learning Strategy" Depts. /BU's are very siloed in their approaches PTO Also - a conversion? LMS - or learning management system. Purchasing of pieces of software e.g.: Adobe captivate for developing new generation training. Piecemeal & ad hoc process currently. Kudos - lots of learning & growth opportunity @ COC!! Thank you.
- As the aging workforce retires, the city needs to be involved in succession planning. However, the city must also prepare for a scenario in which the tax base shrinks as retirements increase. The younger generation will lack the capacity to absorb tax increases without serious economic impacts. This means the city must plan for a smaller workforce and a smaller budget. A smaller budget and workforce cannot be circumvented with expensive contractors. Already the city uses too many contractors ineffectively. In the future, city employees will need to be equipped with a greater skillset to take on multiple roles within their job title, reduce the consultant budget and increase the staff career development budget. Use consulting dollars not to get stuff done but to train and monitor city employees.
- Calgary is great at creating plans and not following through. We need greater integration; we need much better cooperation between departments. I'm frustrated seeing roads ripped up after being resurfaced. Much of that waste could be eliminated with planning & foresight. Structurally our city is functional and workable, but we clearly have problems. Sprawl affects the entire city; older neighbourhoods need attention & renewal. Strong community plans are essential to prevent a block of mansions changing the character of a community or a neighbourhood falling into disrepair or neglect. Planning, density in a smart way. In the long haul it will reduce our costs. Have the courage to establish a plan and ACT on it to make it happen. Departments cannot be increased or decreased in

isolation, they each need to work towards the plan we intend to work towards.

- The city should - through all Business Units - ensure customer service so timely response to Calgarians whether by email or phone are met.
- Treat tax dollars as if it were your own. Careful and cautious, but with compassion for people who have less. Demand that managers be held to account for performance, demand that employees be regularly evaluated - get rid of dead weight, but always treat everyone in fair and transparent manner. Live fine values of a great city. More dollars need to go to areas of the city that are behind Forest Lawn. Encourage developers to provide services to suburbs. Have tax incentives, etc.

## BUDGET

### COMMENTS:

- All the Items: How much is this costing per tax dollar - that would help. Example - \$294.7 M - Is this net? We should see net, expense, etc.
- I think that there should be flexibility in the budget process so that dollars can be moved around between expenditures instead of using dollars just because we can. For example, put more money into direct services and be able to add to the budget from the "furniture" budget. Every year we have "extra" money we must spend before year-end. This leads to a rush on spending on unnecessary items i.e. no program dollars for the community, but we can buy new desks/chairs, etc. The focus should always be services for Calgarians not to support the bureaucracy.
- What about revenue? The corporation does a good job with its operating budget. However, the biggest issue is the transformation of urban infrastructure over the long term. Over time, we will need massive increases to the capital budget, in order to invest in new capital, equipment, utilities, and other critical services. If these investments are deferred, operating costs will escalate over time. There is only one taxpayer who pays for operating & capital costs. Taxpayers don't care about provincial/municipal jurisdiction. Further, an aging workforce with retirements will shift the tax burden onto the younger workforce. There will be less ability to raise taxes without crippling the economy. My solution is to fund long-term infrastructure through IMAGINE CALGARY BONDS, available for purchase by Calgarians. I think Calgarians would welcome a safe, secure, low-risk, low-interest 20-30 year bond as part of their investment portfolio. Imagine what these bonds could be used for: - High speed magnetic? Trains along the "ring-road" and other regional corridors. - New infrastructure within the City for freight transport to get heavy trucks off our roads. - Expanding the community & health services network. - Upgrading our water systems to ensure we better manage our most fragile resource. Think outside the box when it comes to revenue!
- You tell us how much a service costs but not how you can make more to help pay for the service. I believe in lower taxes & more user fees.
- It is unrealistic to believe that funding can stay at current levels without deterioration of services and a reduction in quality of life. The current budget percentages are probably where they need to be. I believe that some "nice to haves" may have to go in order to support critical services such as fire, over transport, roads, etc. I would prefer to see cuts to public art, golf courses, etc. and more money toward public libraries, parks, etc. that can be accessed by more people for a variety of purposes rather than facilities & services that only fill one niche need. Multi-use facilities can serve a variety of needs (community space, public art, programs & recreation). The city should encourage partnerships between funded arts groups with libraries for example to make the most of its resources. I would be willing to pay more taxes to support budget items that I care about: green space, parks, off-leash, better transportation, snow removal, libraries, etc.

<b>COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES</b>
<b>COMMENTS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arts and Culture (Recreation - CSPS) The city needs to attract and retain top quality staff. However, the amount of travel, including international travel that is done by the Manager of Arts and Culture is shameful. These are tax dollars, not monopoly money. How can the city justify regular travel for no good reason? With social media (especially Skype) there is no reason for face-to-face meetings between Arts and Culture representatives and international artists, period. Not on the tax papers dollars.</li> <li>I would really like to advocate for the city to create poverty policy, especially with a gendered lens. It is a fact - women are more likely to be poor than men. I also believe that increased police presence and visibility is not the answer to preventing crime, but creates a culture of distrust. I believe the answer lies in strengthening communities and community supports.</li> </ul>
<b>RECYCLING</b>
<b>COMMENTS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regarding the waste collection and recycling - Those who generate excessive garbage should be penalized. We recycle and put out one bag every two weeks. The recycling bins seem to go out every week if they are only half full, then we are spending way too much on this service.</li> </ul>
<b>PARKS</b>
<b>COMMENTS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doing well with off leash areas for dogs. Just wish you had enclosed runs and I would pay to use it.</li> <li>If all citizens have access to active places, they will become contributing citizens. This links with recreation, health, policing and community spirit.</li> </ul>
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>
<b>COMMENTS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senior bus passes a really good thing! There is discussion on increasing senior bus passes. Just because some people choose to work or must work past age 65 is no excuse for a substantial increase. Seniors using bus passes of necessity or by choice keep cars off the road. Increase the cost and you will have people returning to use the car. At the most \$40.00 per pass if increases are needed. Do not increase low-income subsidized passes.</li> <li>Interchange at Glenmore and 37th Street, SW. The guy who designed this should be crowned "King of Calgary" and put in charge of budgeting.</li> <li>T15s cast shadows and make it much darker. When streetlights are out of order, it takes a long time to fix. If I report it, it takes too long. Streetlights should be numbered - much easier to report broken ones. It is a waste of time right now. Light in China Town has been burnt out for over a year. We walk, so this is important.</li> <li>More spacious LRT stations would increase safety, especially during rush hour. Stations are overcrowded. Put up safety bars at stations. Use turn dials or some sort of gate. Would avoid mad rushes of people - that is scary. I don't think the C-Train is the only choice. We should think about subways for new communities from suburbs to inner city or a sky-train like Vancouver.</li> </ul>
<b>ELIMINATION</b>
<b>COMMENTS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I don't have a specific service in mind, but I think there should be a review to eliminate unnecessary services.</li> </ul>

- Eliminate nothing, but reduce administrative costs to make more efficient.

### SERVICES THAT AREN'T WORKING WELL

#### COMMENTS:

- The city website is horrible. How much dollars has been thrown at this so far?
- 311 - Personally, I found it really hard to make an online complaint. I wanted to submit a complaint about a neighbor's un-shoveled sidewalk, it was nearly impossible. Being tech savvy, I found a round-a-bout way, but I'm not someone that wants to call. Blame it on my technically inclined generation. Personally, I think all budgets should start at 0 and peens should have to be justified so that all costs are required rather than people making up ways to spend the dollar. Then you aren't spending ridiculous money on useless furniture and rather on useful costs. I think every single department should be required to do so. It will require a bit of paradigm shift, but it needs to happen. IT should just be how much is spent, but rather how well it's spent. Charities are held to account to where every dollar goes and how effectively it is used. Shouldn't the city be too? The value given by each dollar should be considered. I don't feel money is really valued by the city and its departments.