



Jennifer Wyness, Ward 2 Councillor

Voting Rationale for Mid-Cycle Adjustments to 2023-2026 Service Plans and Budgets

On November 22nd, 2024, I voted against the mid-cycle adjustments to the 2023-2026 Service Plans and Budgets – as I have for the previous two budgets.

This was a difficult budget to address, given the level of spending and tax increases over the last two budgets. With the city growing at a rapid pace, Calgarians are intensely feeling the financial pressures of inflation, and citizens are frustrated that Council decisions are out of touch with what Calgarians need and want.

Our budgets need to indicate that we understand what Calgarians are experiencing. We needed to be disciplined and make the hard and boring budget choices that fight for families – not for downtown interests – and instead focus on what our core municipal responsibilities should be.

Why did I vote against?

First, my reason is the same as the previous two years. The cost-of-living pressures that Calgarians are facing have only gotten worse.

In the original four-year budget, we committed to Calgarians a 3.7% annual increase. Last year, the majority of Council completely disregarded that commitment, **and** voted for a 7.8% increase for residential properties and voted to shift a greater tax responsibility from non-residential to residential property owners.

Deferring infrastructure projects so we can complete pet projects is only increasing costs and taxes. This budget, and the last, have shifted significant project spending to the next budget cycle. As a result, I fear that the next Council is going to be left holding the deferred infrastructure bills and left with no choice but to significantly raise taxes. Calgary's construction sector is facing significant labour, material, and equipment pressures due to the number and scale of major capital projects such as the Greenline, Event Centre,

downtown renovations, and record-setting housing starts. Given the criticality of the projects to come, the Calgary market is only going to see continued constraints and inflation.

Second, this budget does not protect The City's financial sustainability, nor has it focused on core municipal responsibilities.

Throughout this budget cycle, Council has chosen to spend primarily in the downtown instead of investing in safety, transit, and amenities across all wards in Calgary. Rather than show fiscal restraint last year and stick to the original budget, Council majority voted again for even greater investments to prop up the downtown. This spending now totals over half a billion in special incentives for developers and amenity projects.

I want to see The City spend on core municipal responsibilities, such as fixing roads, pedestrian safety, maintaining and upgrading our water infrastructure, and providing reliable transit & amenities for all Calgarians. We have had the means to do this through our local access fees and dividends, but instead, we chose to spend on pet projects.

Third, The City and majority of Council continue to bury healthcare spending in our budgets. When we do this, we lose our advocacy position to push the province and federal governments to pay for what is clearly their responsibility. I fully support increased spending on programs for Calgarians who are experiencing homelessness, the effects of poverty, mental health, and addictions. This is why I brought forward an amendment to the budget to keep Mental Health spending out of base spending to better maintain our ability to set clear boundaries, and advocate to the province and federal governments to fund healthcare fully.

Fourth, the electric vehicle market is unstable with the majority of players under insolvency protection. Council gave direction to Administration two years ago to procure buses, and have failed due to market instability, all while inflations and costs continue to escalate. All of this is concerning for warranties, the long-term availability of parts and reliable operations of an EV bus fleet. EV buses are also twice the cost to purchase, have significantly more downtime than other fuel sources due to charging time, and causes greater wear-and-tear on our roads which will require greater road investments in the future.

I do not have confidence that now is the right time to invest in battery electric vehicles. My focus is to get more transit available to citizens, and I do not wish to risk the reliability of our bus transit system on an unstable sector. For that reason, I brought forward a motion to

direct Administration to remove battery electric buses as an option for transit bus vehicles, and immediately cancel all active and planned procurements for battery electric buses. Unfortunately, this amendment did not pass.

I will continue to listen to my constituents and continue to vote against budgets that do not improve affordability and City services for Calgarians, nor for budgets that are not aligned with our core municipal responsibilities.



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