



## **City Council News** March 6, 2019

### **Survey says...**

Local governments are required by law to consult with the public prior finalizing their annual budget and five-year financial plan. Over the last term, Council tried hosting town halls to get early input into the City's budget rather than simply asking people to show up at City Hall during a regular Council meeting. Unfortunately, while we did get a few more people showing up at the Town Hall meetings than at the Council regular meetings, attendance was still very low.

Last year, for the first time, we tried using an online survey to gather feedback during our budget process. The participation rate was higher than either the Town Halls or the regular Council meeting sessions, with 116 people completing the survey. Overall, the results were very positive, with the vast majority of people indicating they were supportive of the general direction Council was taking the City in.

However, the comments people made on last year's survey revealed there was significant confusion about the City's responsibilities versus those of the provincial and federal governments. For example, some people made strong demands on the City to fund the bypass, or a new hospital, or a new school. Some also suggested that Council improve health care delivery or more teachers or more judges and prosecutors. All of these investments are, of course, not in the domain of local government and completely out of scope for the City's budget.

This year, the City once again used an online survey to gather input on the 2019 budget. Learning from last year, a preface was developed for this survey that attempted to clarify what is and is not funded with local tax dollars. Council is very pleased with the feedback we received, as 544 people participated this year and the commentary

was much more focused on matters that are in Council's domain.

Like 2018, the vast majority of people are satisfied with the general direction the City is taking with respect to public services and investments and indicated a willingness to pay more taxes to maintain the current service levels rather than see them reduced. In particular, people stated they would pay more taxes to increase the number of RCMP officers the City funds in order to deal with what was the number one concern of the majority of respondents: property crime.

There were also some interesting mixed messages in this year's survey results, however, providing us with great feedback on areas where we need to provide more clarity and context for our ratepayers.

For example, while people clearly wanted Council to add more police officers, funding for bylaw officers was rated as one of the least important budget items by the majority of respondents. Yet, Bylaw Officers are a vital part of our overall policing function and play a significant role in assisting us to maintain safe streets and neighbourhoods. In fact, in the 2019 budget we will not only be adding 2 more RCMP Officers (bringing the funded complement up to 23) we will also be adding more bylaw capacity, as the combination of RCMP and Bylaw is a best practice in maintaining safe streets and neighbourhoods.

Another example is that people clearly want us to focus more on economic development, but the majority of respondents also suggested we reduce spending on beautification and hosting community events. These latter two are a critical part of our economic development strategy and, as hosting the recent Curling Championships showed, fundamental to our transition to a more diverse economy.

Therefore, not only did we use the 2019 survey results to shape this year's budget, we will also use them to refine our communications strategy and provide more clarity to the public about what the City funds and why.

Thank you to all who participated in this year's survey.

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