

**DATE:** November 7, 2019

**TO:** MAYOR AND COUNCIL

**NAME AND TITLE:** Rob van Adrichem, Director of External Relations

**SUBJECT:** Talktober 2019

**ATTACHMENT(S):** 2019 Talktober Q&A and Post-it Note Comments

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

That the report dated November 7, 2019 from the Director of External Relations titled "Talktober 2019", BE RECEIVED FOR INFORMATION.

**PURPOSE:**

Through the month of October, the City presents various opportunities for public engagement as part of Talktober. This report provides a summary of these activities for 2019 and the initial results.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

As identified in the 2018 Annual Report, Council aims to:

- Encourage meaningful public participation in the City's processes and procedures, including Council committees
- Communicate with employees, citizens, local organizations, other governments, and targeted constituencies outside of Prince George to increase public awareness of City operations and advance the community's interests
- Prioritize infrastructure re-investment and renewal to ensure the delivery of critical recreation, emergency, transportation, and utility services
- Maintain fiscal sustainability and balance service levels with affordability of City services, facilities, and operations

**DISCUSSION:**

Talktober 2019 involved in-person events and online activities on both the City website and social media channels.

**In-person events:** Events were held at the Prince George Conference and Civic Centre on October 1 and 2, featuring Q&A sessions moderated by the Mayor as well as information on the historic development of Prince George presented by the City Manager. Displays provided information about the development of Prince George, City utilities and infrastructure, taxation levels, comparisons with other cities, and opportunities for feedback. Talktober events in previous years were held in the evening; the 2019 events were held during the day and in the evening in an effort to enhance attendance. About 50 people attended the events over both days.

Comments, questions, and feedback provided through the Q&A session and a comment board were collected and organized into themes. The summary of this feedback is attached to this report.

**Budget survey:** Through the month of October, the City provided access to an online budget survey that provided residents with the opportunity to indicate their suggestions for the budget allocations that should be made to a dozen City services and functions. Just over 270 people completed the survey in 2019, a 40% increase over the participation in 2018. The survey tool used by the City allows respondents to customize the survey to their individual property assessment, enabling them to see the precise amount of taxes they pay and how it is allocated across the different municipal functions.

Overall, respondents indicated that additional funds should be provided to police and snow control. On average, they indicated that fewer financial resources should be allocated to community grants, planning and development, parks, engineering services, the library, and corporate services. Those services that respondents felt should retain the same budget allocation included fire protection, recreation services, bylaw services, and transportation infrastructure.

The 2019 survey also provided an opportunity to submit free-form comments in response to a question asking survey respondents to explain why they made the choices they did. Just over 160 comments were received, representing about 60% of the total number of survey respondents. About one-third of all the comments received mentioned crime and concerns about public safety, and these were often made in connection with suggested funding increases for the RCMP, for example. Equally predominant in the free-form section were comments related to levels of City spending, often made in connection with the salaries for City officials, perceived inefficiencies in budgeting and decision-making, property taxes, and the City's debt load. Urgency in improving the downtown was another popular topic, though not as common as the other two.

**Online information and news coverage:** In support of both the public events and the budget survey, information was placed on the City website and social media channels. The Talktober webpage ([www.princegeorge.ca/talktober](http://www.princegeorge.ca/talktober)) provided a link to the budget tool and included a summary of the information presented at the public events. This included a recording of the City Manager's presentation and a compilation of the information presented on the display boards. There were nearly 400 visits to the Talktober web page through the month of October.

Social media posts in September and October provided information about the public events, the budget survey, and the City's infrastructure and historic development. These utilized all of the City's channels: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, and LinkedIn. Across all of these channels, the City published just over 80 posts/tweets, cumulatively viewed approximately 150,000 times. The most popular posts were on Facebook.

There were 170 mentions of Talktober 2019 in the local news media, a three-fold increase from Talktober 2016, which was the last time the City held a series of public engagement events during the month of October (Talktober was postponed in 2017 because of the municipal referendum and not held in 2018 due to the general local election).

#### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:**

Talktober 2019 provided a focused period of public engagement and extensive information was collected on topics that residents feel are critical to consider as members of Council, staff, and citizens work together to make Prince George an even better community. In addition, there were numerous other public engagement activities in 2019, such as surveys related to climate action, childcare, sewer use, and the City's mobile app, and open houses on community wildfire protection. Extensive public engagement also

previously informed significant City initiatives ranging from the Official Community Plan to the Parks Strategy.

The information about the historic development of Prince George that was presented during Talktober was intended to provide some background context to the consultation; this information will continue to be publicly accessible and utilized by the City in communication about infrastructure and future community development.

Talktober 2019 was organized by a group of staff from Planning and Development, Engineering, Public Works, Finance, and External Relations along with input from members of the City's public engagement team. The experiences of previous Talktober activities, including those undertaken in 2019, as well as direction from Council, will inform planning for Talktober 2020.

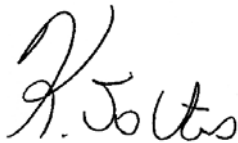
**RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:**



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Rob van Adrichem, Director of External Relations

**APPROVED:**



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Kathleen Soltis, City Manager  
Meeting date: November 18, 2019