

STAFF REPORT TO FINANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

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DATE: August 15, 2024

TO: STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND AUDIT

NAME AND TITLE: Eric Depenau, Director of Administrative Services

SUBJECT: Budget 2025 Community Engagement

ATTACHMENT(S): None.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Standing Committee on Finance and Audit RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION the report dated August 15, 2025, from the Director of Administrative Services titled "Budget 2025 Community Engagement".

PURPOSE:

To provide an overview of how the City will seek public input into the 2025 municipal budget.

BACKGROUND:

The City annually presents opportunities for residents to provide input on municipal budget priorities. This has typically involved both digital and in-person opportunities. The results are provided to Council at the start of budget deliberations to aid in decision-making.

In 2023 the City, again provided a budget survey using the Citizen Budget platform as well as five additional service level satisfaction surveys. The five satisfaction surveys focused on important City services with a goal to understand how satisfied citizens are with the following services and receive their suggestions on improvements:

- Roads and sidewalks
- Parks and trails
- Events and recreation
- Snow and ice control
- Protective services

There were also three two-hour community town hall style meetings in 2023 with a total attendance estimated at 46 residents. There were 9-12 staff in attendance at each meeting. The cost for the venues and audio-visual needs was \$6,235. The cost of staff overtime for the three events was \$1,640.11 not including those staff who did not claim the overtime.

2025 engagement

To allow citizens to participate in more ways this year the following opportunities are proposed:

- A budget 2025 engagement page will be created on the City's Get Involved page on the website to host all the engagement opportunities and financial information.
- All financial reports, including projected numbers for the cost of services in 2025, will be presented to Council and will also be hosted on the City's Get Involved page so all information regarding the 2025 budget can be found on one location.
- Beginning in early September staff will launch the five satisfaction surveys via the new platform on the website. This is an opportunity for citizens to share their views on five core municipal services: parks and trails, events and recreation, roads and sidewalks, snow removal, and protective services. This will allow residents to provide feedback on their satisfaction with services that they are most interested in. Their feedback will assist staff in determining where to focus efforts and budget requests for 2025. These surveys will also be printed and available at City Hall for those who prefer paper copies. Those responses will be manually entered by City staff.
- In late October, the annual Citizen Budget survey will launch. Due to the nature of the survey, it is only available digitally.
- Staff will work with the library to determine if computers and assistance might be available to assist citizens who would like to take the digital survey.
- These activities will be well advertised through media, social media, and traditional advertising.

In addition to all the above, there are two options for the Committee to consider for the in-person portion of budget engagement.

Option A

In October the City could host one open house event. This event will be more robust than the previous events and may include, posters with dot matrix voting, opportunities to provide feedback based on where you live, speed networking with council members, individual scheduled presentations with Q&A for each service area. This more involved event will likely span 4-5 hours. The event will be held in the late-afternoon and evening at the Conference and Civic Centre. The City's senior leadership team will be present to respond to questions. City Council is invited to attend to listen to the questions and information shared as well as participate in the speed networking if desired.

The various activities proposed will involve considerable staff time and planning. As such only one event of this nature will be possible.

Option B

Similar to last year, three 2-hour evening events at various locations in the community could be planned for late October. This will include a budget presentation and an opportunity for questions and comments. There will also be information posters and hand-outs.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

This public engagement plan is in alignment with the Council priorities under the Pillar, City Government and Infrastructure.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- The City has an existing contract with Ethelo for using the Citizen Budget platform this year so there are no additional costs associated with the survey.
- Advertising will be covered within the existing communications budget at \$3,000 - \$4,000.
- Venue costs will depend on the venues chosen. The Civic Centre will be approximately \$2,000.
- Audio Visual costs will be approximately \$5,000 per event.
- Live streaming will be approximately \$1,500 per event.
- Staff overtime costs will vary depending on the time, format, and length of the event.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

With the budget survey, five satisfaction surveys, and a community open house event, this budget consultation is intended to be the most robust in several years. Community feedback will be presented to Council in late November prior to budget deliberations.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Eric Depenau, Director of Administrative Services

PREPARED BY: Julie Rogers, Communications Manager

APPROVED:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting Date: August 28, 2024