



SUBJECT: Budget telephone town hall results

TO: Committee of the Whole - Budget

FROM: Finance Department

Report Number: F-48-17

Wards Affected: All

File Numbers: 435-03

Date to Committee: December 1, 2017

Date to Council: December 11, 2017

Recommendation:

Receive and file finance department report F-48-17 providing the budget telephone town hall results.

Purpose:

An Engaging City

- Good Governance
-

Background and Discussion:

Open and transparent government remains a priority for the city. To continue to build on the momentum created by the public's involvement in the strategic plan, staff has enhanced the public engagement process during the development of the 2018 Proposed Budget.

On Wednesday October 18, 2017, the City hosted a Telephone Town Hall on the 2018 Proposed Budget for residents, businesses and community partners. Participants learned about and discussed the proposed 2018 budget priorities with Mayor Rick Goldring and senior staff.

In this live, call-in session, residents, organizations and business owners were able to ask questions about the upcoming budget and respond to polling questions. There was an emphasis placed on resident satisfaction with value for service, increased funding for transit, and support for city infrastructure renewal funding.

The following report outlines the efforts and results of the budget engagement process used this year, as well as provides an outline of the feedback received from the public to date.

Traditional Budget Engagement Process

The traditional approach to budget public engagement in Burlington was to host an annual Public Open House session shortly after the proposed budget documents were provided to members of Council. The intent of the meeting was to engage and inform residents on the proposed budget. The general format of the meeting included an overview presentation from Finance staff followed by the public completing an interactive workbook in small groups led by facilitators. In addition, Finance staff have also presented budget information to the Chamber of Commerce and ward meetings. Online surveys which cover similar information have also been available for residents who were unable to attend the session in person.

These public meetings experienced very low attendance in recent years (less than 10 participants for each meeting). Traditionally the meetings were held after the proposed budget had undergone extensive internal review at the staff level and an overview presented to Committee. Residents stated that the timing was late for them to have meaningful input into the process.

Budget Telephone Town Hall

Staff continue to look for new ways and forums to engage the public in the budget process. For the proposed 2018 budget, the public engagement process was changed with the use of a telephone town hall.

The one-hour event was facilitated by an external company who called close to 20,000 phone numbers in the city. In addition, a phone number was advertised to residents who were not randomly selected to phone in if they wished to participate.

The City also increased promotion efforts on social media for this event.

Results

In total over 800 residents participated in the event with an average listening time of 12 minutes. Of these participants 60 people indicated they wished to ask a question. During the one hour event, 19 of these questions were able to be responded to live on the air. Written responses are provided on the city's website for those questions which could not be answered during the event. These questions and responses can be found in Appendix A to this report.

In addition to responding to resident questions there were 4 polling questions asked of the audience. The following is a summary of the results:

Question 1:

Overall, are you satisfied with the services provided by the City of Burlington?

Answer	# of Responses	%
Yes	74	67.3%
No	11	10.0%
Unsure or Undecided	25	22.7%

Question 2:

Have you seen a positive difference in the infrastructure such as road maintenance, recreation facilities, etc?

Answer	# of Responses	%
Yes	106	57.9%
No	38	20.8%
Unsure or Undecided	39	21.3%

Question 3:

Do you support the transfer of the current money being raised for the redevelopment of the hospital to be put towards the renewal of city infrastructure?

Answer	# of Responses	%
Yes	70	49.0%
No	41	28.7%
Unsure or Undecided	32	22.4%

Question 4:

Do you support investing in “Complete Streets”, which includes public transit?

Answer	# of Responses	%
Yes	85	65.9%
No	30	23.3%
Unsure or Undecided	14	10.9%

Note that these polling results are not statistically valid

Financial Matters:

The telephone town hall was facilitated by an external company at a cost of \$4,600. Advertising costs were comparable to previous years (approximately \$400 for an ad in the Burlington Post).

Public Engagement Matters:

A revised version of Burlington Open Budget, on the city's website, will be available to the public to allow residents to view the city's 2018 budget data in an intuitive and illustrative form similar to the past 3 years. Over these budgets cycles, there have been over 15,000 page views (hits), with an average time viewing the program of 3.5 minutes. Utilizing the website and online mechanisms appear to be a good communication medium to inform the public and staff will continue to use this platform for 2018 and future budgets.

The city's website is used as a communication medium through videos, webcast and online surveys and different forms of social media are used to promote the upcoming committee meetings for the review of the proposed 2018 capital and operating budgets.

Conclusion:

Staff continue to look for ways to engage the public in the budget process using various communication approaches. The telephone townhall reached significantly more residents than the former face to face meetings and was provided earlier in the process.

Respectfully submitted,

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Appendices:

A. Telephone Town Hall Responses

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, Director of Finance and Director of Legal. Final approval is by the City Manager.