

2019 BUDGET – Emailed Feedback

Comment #1

The other night I missed the opportunity to ask questions on 2019 city budget. Here are my concerns and comments:

1. Property tax increase of 3.99% is not acceptable and should not be any higher than the rate of inflation. Pensioners on fixed income must cope with inflation and live within their means, and the same should apply to the City of Burlington. The fact that the city can raise revenue by increasing property tax doesn't mean that the city have to use that power every time it needs more revenue. Raising taxes is easy way out but working smarter is more difficult.

2. Synchronization of traffic lights on major long streets (i.e. Appleby, Walker, Guelph Line, etc.) should be a priority. We are spending unnecessary time, wasting fuel and contributing to pollution when most of the time we can drive only from red light to red light. I'm sure you are aware of that. I can tell you from my own experience that we are more than 50 years behind some cities in Europe. In 1968 I was driving in Vienna, Austria where they had already synchronized lights on long city streets. Proper speed was indicated on each traffic light to take advantage of driving on green. All that was accomplished without smart technology we pose today...

3. Looking at the various tables indicating spending increases over the 2018 budget year, the average budget summary increase is 4.7% or much higher than inflation rate.

Human Resources spending increase jumps out at 7.1%. Why? My questions:

How much of this increase, in percentage terms, is due to manpower increase and how many additional personnel the City expect to hire?

What is an average: budgeted salary increases for city labour and staff?

First pass budgets do have always bit of wish list and I'm sure your staff has enough expertise to "sharpen pencils" and bring this budget more in line with the inflation rate.

Comment #2

I liked the forum of your last weeks telephone conference. There was a lot of talk about public transportation. My suggestions are:

- Have a single integrated transit system for Halton region of Burlington, Oakville and Milton.

- Lower the fares specially for Seniors. This is happening in many cities of Canada, Europe and Far East.

This will increase the Ridership, lower cost and lower congestion and pollution of cars.

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Comment #3

Thank You Mayor for allowing Burlington Residents to speak. I did not have an opportunity to be called in the queue this evening. On that note, I wish to express my concerns:

#1. Traffic lights and traffic flow was mentioned earlier... My concern with traffic flow is the time given on advance green to make a left-hand turn going north on any of the lines is too short... allows 2 cars to get thru, then you must run the amber, not safe.

It does not seem to matter what time of day or which line I am on, I seem to wait 2 light changes to go left on Upper Middle Road. If you are going north on Appleby or Walkers or Guelph and you wish to turn left on to Upper Middle, the advance green to make that turn is too short...and then often, there is "no" advance green. depends on the time of day... there should always be and advance green for safety. The same situation if you want to turn left on Harvester, advance green is too short. I have discovered the best route is to go West on Fairview, north on Brant and make a "right" on Upper Middle. Suggestion: add another minute on the advance green?? Your thoughts?

#2. Spending hardworking tax payers' dollars properly.

I am sure you remember the nightmare of the "New Street Diet".. a disaster with traffic and angry residents. The previous counsel made the decision to add a lane for biking when there is a bike path parallel to New Street as well as a paved bike path next to the sidewalk. The point being, not a wise choice of use of tax dollars.

There was never a public meeting held for discussion or resident opinions. The cost of changing the lanes back and forth cost a "lot" of money which could have been well spent on other needs such as Food for Thought or aiding the homeless, help kids who cannot afford to be involved in sports, seniors who are shut in and so many other wise choices.

I am confident this type of spending will not be a decision made by our new counsel without the public being informed first.

#3. Why do residents not use buses more?

Burlington is a very transient city... people work outside of the City – take the Go or drive usually outside of Burlington, ..the Go parking lots are packed/loaded with cars.

The children are in sports, an excellent means of keeping your children grounded. Dance, swim, hockey, baseball, lacrosse, the list goes on and on... I cannot imagine taking my kids to their sport activities on the bus with all that equipment or having them in a performance in the late evenings coming home on the bus. Early morning 5 am practice on the bus... no, we must drive. We take our kids to school for safety, pick them up for safety...

We need our load of groceries... not practical to carry on the bus.

It's Friday night, family dinner out... on the bus? Not really.

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Date night with your husband, on the bus...? nope... we drive.

But, ok... live here, work here, then, absolutely, take a bus.

Just saying... not always practical or convenient for everyone.

Personally, I live within walking distance for practically all my needs. bank, groceries, dentist, optometrist, mall, and must not forget LCBO. However, to do my volunteer or Hamilton market, I drive.

Comment #4

Unfortunately, time ran out last night for my turn to ask a question on the telephone town hall, so I decided to e-mail you my comments on the proposed 2019 budget:

Regarding the City portion of the overall budget, firstly my perspective is since my wife and I are now retired and living on a fixed income, which seems to be a growing segment of the City's population. Therefore, what I would prefer to see is a budget that acknowledges a fixed income population. The city portion of the overall budget proposes a 3.99% increase which is almost double the 2018 CPI rate of around 2% which seems unreasonable the two areas that is driving this significant increase is Human Resources and infrastructure renewal funding. Additional by-law enforcement and transit staff should only be considered if additional revenues will at a minimum offset these costs. I couldn't find any analysis that addressed this. I think a lot of the additional HR cost increases are nice to have but not critical if we want to keep tax increases at a minimal. The one area that I agree needs to be looked at is bus transportation. Our existing bus transportation does nothing to reduce cars on the road and will not until it becomes a reliable 15-minute service whereby you can get around the city in a moderately more time than it would take a car. To get to this level of service would require a significant volume of people to pay for the service. I think the bus system should pay for itself. Another area I have a hard time understanding is why overtime is so high. Shouldn't the city be looking at ways to reduce this? Capital accounts for almost \$60.m which is a lot of money and seems enough to meet the key projects identified. I question the need for an additional \$3.7m. I always thought the Joe Brant fund was temporary until it was built, but now it is being reallocated to other areas in the budget which really amounts to a tax increase (it really should have lowered our tax rate).

Capital projects does not address traffic lights. When I turn north onto Walkers line at Fairview at 8am, I end up stopping at all the traffic lights up to and including Mainway. The volume of traffic on Walkers line is unbelievable and the safety is getting worse because of the frustrations of drivers stopping every two feet. Traffic is bad and getting worse and more capital funds should be focused in this area. I have a keen interest in storm drainage. I live behind Mainway arena and beside the storm water pond. This area and pond could not handle the water resulting in my basement being flooded. To my knowledge this was never addressed, nor do I see it anywhere in the capital plan to be looked at.

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Comment #5

I tried to participate in the townhall phone-in last night but after listening to 15 minutes of non-budget related question I hung up - I think the new colloquialism is "ma bad"

Actually, what really caused me to hang up is the fact that I have too many questions to pose, specifically as it relates to how a business sets a budget vs political bodies who don't have a profit motive.

For instance, and as a retired businessman, our approach to developing our yearly budget was:

1) Review of the previous year budget vs actual - does the city do that? Why is that not part of the open budget process? Are department heads called before the council to answer for overages? / underspent? Are overages tracked? Are peoples' wrists slapped for these?

2) The President based, on a past year budget review, in conjunction with the department heads then sets the budget direction based on sales / profit objectives. Does the city do that? What is the motivation to reduce costs for a bureaucrat? I have not seen any review of actual vs budget reviews for city Sales (i.e. taxes plus other revenue streams). Does the city have a Mission Statement against which the budget can be reviewed for "need to haves vs Nice to haves? Cuz there seems to be a lot of what I see as Mission creep!

3) Sales and profit are vigorously tracked in business, usually quarterly, and adjustments made to balance a budget. City?

4) When times are tough most businesses use zero based budgeting as a starting point - why can't the city do the same?

5) Businesses try to work smarter not harder, so sales and cost actives are always reviewed against "other options" i.e. do we really need speed bumps on Drury Lane -at \$4000 a pop - vs having planned police presence to aggressively tag speeders while generating Other. Revenue. City?

6) Business coordinates activities in weekly meeting so departments don't overlap activities - like digging-up and putting in curbs only to have the whole sideway dug up the following week because is a new building start. City?

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7) In setting business budgets, we always planned for 10% less in Revenue and 20% more in Expenses and what may be left over at the end of the year was part of the dividend structure for the shareholders. The city seems to magically reallocate under-expensed dollars to some other pot and shareholders (taxpayers) never see a dime - the recent reallocation of funds to some 1990's sin that underfunded infrastructure. Why does the city do that without taxpayer input? / justification?

Comment #6

I would very much appreciate the idea of keeping the Burlington budget in line with the cost of living. I am a senior citizen relying on my pension to stay in my home. Over the past few years this has become more difficult. In my opinion it would be advantageous for the city government to try and set this as a goal, especially with the number of seniors in the same position as myself.

Thank you for your time and attempting to connect with the people of Burlington.

Comment #7

Budget Tax Increase: No one likes to pay more in taxes. I think we need to keep in mind that we need taxes to keep our infrastructure up to date. With the number of condo's being built in the city core, it must be placing a real burden on things like sewers, water pressure, etc. So, if it means that we pay a small amount more, I think we need to do it.

Comment #8

If I may, however, please make one suggestion re: the budget this way, I'd be most grateful - thanking you in advance should this be an option.

I cannot take credit for the idea (heard it first from my husband), but I think it brilliant. If the city wishes to support/encourage our citizens to use public transit, why not make the service free. I know this may sound bizarre at first glance, but think about it - while asking a few questions, like:

- do we believe in climate change?
 - how can we prove our commitment to doing all we can to change the impact our way of living has contributed to this global disaster, which needs immediate (if not sooner) attention?
- If people *did* start using transit in lieu of cars, what financial savings would that offer the city? Like:
- less road repair and maintenance, hopefully offsetting the cost of free transit at some point
 - think of how less congested our roads might become for people who need to use their cars, police, ambulances, fire trucks, etc.
 - we would be improving air quality and reduce greenhouse gases
 - admitting it is the right thing to do

As for 'selling' the cost of offering free transit, I would argue hard that taxes - spent in this way - might be something people would be happy to accommodate. I know several people (besides myself) who would be proud of a city that took such responsible action. Our globe needs all the help it can get and shame on us for not doing our part. I realize the cost the city would have to undertake to improve our current transit system, but my bet is the pay-off would ultimately exceed the expense (but then my husband has always referred to me as the insufferable optimist...). And from the economic impact of

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eventually lessening the need for car manufacturing, might it not be replaced by the manufacturing of buses, light rail cars, etc. Time to get creative and honest about what's important, non?

As for overall 'reasonableness' of such an idea as free transit, please allow me to tell you about the excitement I experienced this summer when my hubbie & I went to England when we spent 3 nights in Oxford. I could not believe the city's commitment to transit! Not only were cars discouraged in the downtown area, I could not believe the presence and frequency of buses - and the line ups of citizens waiting/wanting to use them. Almost unbelievable - but I witnessed it with my own eyes!! Equally impressive were the number of cyclists!! It was almost impossible for us to drive to our hotel, thinking we'd never get a chance to cross roads given all the bicycles. Thankfully people were most gracious when they saw me waving my Handi-cap sticker - also explaining why I can't tell you how much it cost to use public transit, given our hotel was within easy walking distance of places we wanted to see, and my husband does not mind pushing me in my wheelchair. We never needed to use our car until our departure. What a delight it was being in this city - and I figure if they can do it, why can't we?!? Do we even question free education, medicare....as examples of what can be done if we put out mind to it...

Guess I'm almost begging you to be brave (as I know you are) in your governance decisions! and trust your citizenship will be behind said sound decisions.