



**SUBJECT:** 2021 budget engagement process

**TO:** Corporate Services, Strategy, Risk & Accountability Cttee.

**FROM:** Finance Department

Report Number: F-05-21

Wards Affected: All

File Numbers: 435-03

Date to Committee: February 3, 2021

Date to Council: February 16, 2021

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**Recommendation:**

Receive and file finance department report F-05-21 providing details about the 2021 budget engagement process.

**PURPOSE:**

**Vision to Focus Alignment:**

- Building more citizen engagement, community health and culture
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**Background and Discussion:**

Open and transparent government remains a priority for the city. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted in-person public engagement for the 2021 budget process. In response to ongoing restrictions for in-person gatherings, this year's engagement approach shifted to mostly virtual options. Staff have continued to enhance the online public engagement process for the 2021 proposed budget using existing and new digital engagement tools.

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.

**City of Burlington Website and Social Media**

Staff continue to use the city’s website as a communication medium through videos, webcast and online surveys.

There are two videos available on the city’s website. The “Budget to Basics” video continues to be available on the website which explains how the city develops its budget. In addition, this year a new “2021 Budget” video has been developed to outline the pressures the City is facing with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic and to encourage the public to provide feedback on the budget.

A revised version of Burlington Open Budget, on the City’s website, is available to the public to allow residents to view the City’s 2021 budget data in an intuitive and illustrative form.

In addition, to the City of Burlington’s website, the city’s social media platform on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube are utilized to help share messaging. The City’s social media platform between December 2, 2020 and January 19, 2021 had 21 posts, 63,174 impressions, 154 engagements and 172 link clicks related to the 2021 budget.

The following is a summary of social media activity within the above noted timeframe:

<p>Twitter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posts: 18</li> <li>• Impressions: 53,318</li> <li>• Retweets: 23</li> <li>• Likes: 19</li> <li>• Post Link Clicks: 139</li> </ul>	<p>Facebook</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posts: 2</li> <li>• Impressions: 5,437</li> <li>• Average Reach per Post: 2,514</li> <li>• Reactions: 6</li> <li>• Comments: 0</li> <li>• Shares: 9</li> <li>• Post Clicks: 48</li> </ul>
<p>Instagram</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posts: 1</li> <li>• Impressions: 4,419</li> <li>• Likes: 48</li> <li>• Comments: 0</li> <li>• Saves: 1</li> </ul>	<p>Facebook Event – 2021 Budget Town Hall</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users Reached: 2,100</li> <li>• Event Page Views: 219</li> <li>• Event Responses: 83</li> <li>• Video Views: 413</li> </ul>
<p>YouTube Video</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Views: 31 (via website only)</li> </ul>	

### **Get Involved Burlington Website**

The Get Involved Burlington website is the City's online engagement site that allows residents and business owners to contribute their ideas and feedback related to the City of Burlington.

On this website, with respect to the 2021 proposed budget, residents can:

- Take a Survey
- Post a question and receive an answer related to the 2021 proposed budget
- Provide their feedback
- View the 2021 budget timeline
- View the “Budget Basics” video
- View the “2021 Budget” video
- Access Burlington Open Budget
- Access the Budget Simulator (Balancing Act)
- Access budget reports

Statistics for the Get Involved Burlington budget page are:

- 606 unique visitors to the budget page
- 24 new registrations to the site as a result of the 2021 Budget
- 17 people downloaded documents, for a total of 49 downloaded documents
- 179 started with the Budget page and visited multiple project pages

For more information on the results of the Budget Survey please reference Appendix A.

### **Mayor’s 2021 Budget – Virtual Budget Town Hall**

On Wednesday January 20, 2021, the City of Burlington hosted a Virtual Budget Town Hall using TEAMS live format. This event allowed residents, organizations and business owners to learn more about the 2021 budget priorities with Mayor Marianne Meed Ward and senior staff.

### **Ward Meetings**

In addition to the Virtual Budget Town Hall, finance staff attended a virtual Ward 4 meeting on November 24 to provide a budget presentation and answer questions.

### **Balancing Act**

This year, the City is piloting a budget simulation tool called Balancing Act, to educate the public on different elements of the City’s budget and highlight the challenge of maintaining and improving services to the public with limited sources of revenue.

Using the 2020 Budget as a baseline, the public can simulate where they would recommend either increasing or decreasing overall spending and revenues in City Service budgets. Spending and revenues should be as close to balanced as possible, as the City is required by law to maintain a balanced budget.

The primary objective of this tool is to raise awareness of the challenges and trade-offs involved in balancing the City budget. It was also an opportunity for the public to provide input about areas of the budget in which they would prefer the City increase or decrease funding.

To date there has been limited response to the Balancing Act tool, however we will continue to promote this budget simulation on social media and Get Involved Burlington.

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### **Financial Matters:**

The new “2021 Budget” video outlining the pressures the City is facing with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic and to encourage the public to provide feedback on the budget was approximately \$2,486. Approximately, \$2,463 in advertising costs was spent on Metroland (online), Burlington Post, postcard mailouts and increased social media reach (boost). There was no additional cost for the new budget simulation tool Balancing Act because it is included in our overall engagement platform subscription. The Virtual Budget Town Hall was facilitated internally using Microsoft TEAMS at no additional cost.

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### **Engagement Matters:**

Utilizing the City’s website and online platforms appear to be good communication vehicles to inform the public through videos, webcasts, e-newsletters and surveys of upcoming committee meetings for the review of the 2021 proposed capital and operating budgets. Staff will continue to use this platform for 2021 and future budgets.

In addition, a ward meeting and the Mayor’s Virtual Budget Town Hall allowed residents to ask 2021 proposed budget related questions and receive feedback.

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### **Conclusion:**

Staff continue to look for ways to engage the public in the budget process using various communication and engagement approaches. Responses from the recent online budget engagement surveys are consolidated and attached in Appendix A of this report.

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Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Hagley

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**Appendices:**

- A. Get Involved Burlington - 2021 Budget Survey Results

**Report Approval:**

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.