

Delegation to Corporate Services committee re: Report F-04-21-1

Mayor, Councillors. I wish to delegate as a private citizen of Burlington. My opinions are mine alone though I believe I speak on behalf of others who are concerned with both the process the City has put before the public on the proposed city Budget, and specific items as noted in the Budget Action Request Forms.

I watched the Council proceedings over the Capital Budget hoping to hear Councillors discuss various items within the proposed budget only to discover that, basically, anything that wasn't discussed essentially meant that no one had objections and therefore met with approval. I listened as Councillors turned to discuss (for some four plus hours) various items on a list of items known as Budget Action Request Forms – items that up until that point were not revealed to the public.

I won't get into detail here with any of the items, some of which have been described as 'a wish list' or goodies for residents of individual wards. It's a moot point as the Capital Budget has been approved. A done deal.

Then there was a Town Hall to discuss the Budget, hosted by the Mayor. My problem with that bit of 'public engagement' is that it occurred after Council approved the Capital Budget and before the proposed Operating Budget had been revealed to the public. What was there to discuss?

So let's move on to the proposed Operating Budget. Again, it appears that Council will not be going through the proposal, line by line to seek out efficiencies or perhaps to respond to questions from the public. We seem to be here today to discuss another list of personal items in a Budget Action Request Form.

Maybe I'm wrong to think that I'm the only one with questions. Maybe the rest of the city are too occupied with just getting through this pandemic, this endless pandemic, to care very much. Perhaps, the thought is that 'we elected these people to take care of the City – let them do it'.

So let's discuss a couple of items that are on my radar when I look at the BAR Forms. And forgive me, I'm no expert at reading these charts. They're nothing like what I ever saw in my professional life. There's no background to explain why different Councillors have proposed, or supported, what is presented. I assume that's what today is all about.

I see the Mayor and Councillor Nisan questioning the need to continue Free Transit to seniors into 2022. I also see Councillors Bentivegna, Galbraith, and Sharman wanting to remove Free Transit to seniors. Thus saving \$116,700 out of a \$5million Transit budget.

The Free Transit for Seniors – restricted to a 4 1/2 hour window each day – was instituted, to great fanfare, as a test pilot with results documented to determine if the plan was successful, appreciated by the public, and helped to increase ridership – which we all know increases transfer payments from senior levels of government. Anecdotally, and by accounts before COVID lockdowns, it appeared to be a success.

We're in the middle of a pandemic. The total ridership of Burlington Transit has been compromised and 'artificially' reduced through no fault of anyone here. How can you cut a pilot program off when you don't have good statistical data to inform you of its success, or failure. I remind Council of the first line of the Staff report before you – under the heading of 'Purpose: Vision to Focus Alignment' – Improve integrated city mobility. I suggest you continue the pilot program for another year, perhaps even once we get out of this COVID cloud we are living under.

I don't know where to begin when I read in the "Follow Up questions" from Councillors – "Can an additional handi-van be put into service without the need for an additional driver?" Perhaps the question could be framed a little differently. I'll leave it up to the Staff response, "The additional van cannot be put into service without an operator."

Continuing on the subject of cutting off a program at the knees. I question the removal of three Full Time positions in the Forestry department after Council's big announcement regarding a Private Tree By-Law (which seems to be a revenue generator for the City, if I'm reading the figures correctly).

If these three staff are not hired, for jobs not related to the Private Tree By-Law, then who will look after this project while the entire department deals with over 2,000 incomplete work orders. And how underfunded is this department that such a backlog can accrue?

I could go on about Leaf pick-up or snow clearing of roads and sidewalks, or a salary increase for Council while others in our community struggle to keep up, but I'm here to talk about the process.

I get it. It's tough to get the public engaged in 436 pages of Budget gobble-gook but when Council cherry-picks its pet projects, or fights amongst each other to dominate the discussion – it serves no one.

When you spend \$2 million dollars to beautify the main lobby of City Hall; when you create a Green Initiatives Reserve Fund but don't put any money into it; when you quibble about cutting \$10,000 from Advisory Committee budgets – out of an Operating Budget of \$183 million – I have to ask, 'What priorities does this Council have?'

I'm also concerned about items such as line 21 of the BAR Form, marked CONFIDENTIAL. What is it that the public doesn't need to hear? At least tell us what is to be discussed behind closed doors.

Please, find a way to better explain to the citizens of Burlington what, and why decisions are being made with taxpayers footing the bill of over \$183 million. Please find a better way to get the public involved in the process. And please don't mistake the lack of delegations to budget meetings as a sign of acceptance. It just might mean the process is lacking.