

DELEGATE NOV. 4 2024

Good morning. My name is Jim Barnett, I have lived in Ward 4 for 55 years and am a retired business executive.

Regularly, the mayor and others read into the record the standard that should be used in communication with council and staff. My mother would agree. Her direction was shorter. Be polite.

I agree with both the mayor and my mother. Part of politeness is listening attentively and responding to the dialog in a polite manner. When there is no or limited response the politeness stops which can lead to acrimony.

I have a case in point. On Sept. 11 and again on September 25 I attended budget meetings hosted by the mayor. In both cases I pointed out a number items that I needed answers to. After the meeting I emailed my questions and comments to the mayor with a copy to councilors Stolte and Sharman. I heard nothing back even though I had been told by the mayor after the September meeting that I would hear back in three or four days. I also know that she made notes on some of my questions.

On Oct 11, a month later, I followed up with mayor's office. The response was "The mayor is aware of your email and asked me to let you know that we are gathering the needed answers. Once we have feedback completed; we will respond to you with those answers" On October 16th I received a reply. Some of the questions were answered, some were ignored and many said the answers would be available on October 25 in an online document some 600 plus pages long with no indication where in the document I might find the answers.

I felt politeness slipping away.

I will come back to this.

I tried to get my hands around all of the information on Burlington Transit. Its budget, its plan for the future, what will the service look like. I reached out to Burlington Transit for the information on Oct. 7 and was told that I would need to get that kind of information from my councilor.

This I tried to do. I contacted councilor Stolte's office and followed up with a list of questions. On October 15 I received a response that I would hear from Catherine Baldelli. I have not heard back.

Again, I felt politeness slipping away.

In the summer of 2024 I contacted Service Burlington to find the job descriptions of the councilors assistants and what steps were necessary to impeach a councilor. The response was that information could only be obtained through a freedom of information request along with a payment of five dollars. This I did. The response was the assistants do not have Job descriptions and there is nothing on record on how to impeach a councilor. I subsequently learned that is not standard practice to have at least yearly performance reviews for city employees.

Again, I felt politeness slipping away.

Allow me to point out that two monologues do not make a dialogue.

The proposed budget is an extensive document. In general it appears to me that it was written by staff thinking the future was going to be a continuation of the past. I think that assumption is incorrect resulting in increases that are not needed. The federal government has already signaled a cut to immigration and Provinces are cutting back places for offshore students with some centers for higher learning closing some campuses. Domestic birth rates continue to fall.

My biggest disappointment in the budget is the extensive use of word salads, examples such as pages 487,498,501 and 502, and the lack of numbers supporting the forecasted improvements. In my experience if you can't measure the activity, you cannot manage the activity. You don't know if the plan is on target, if you need to take corrective action or in some cases start over. Just saying that you are going to make it better without having measurement of the progress to the plan is not a plan. It's a wish and should not be in a budget.

There are a number of mathematical errors such as shown on page 21 that I am sure staff will correct when they incorporate the amendments. There may be a typo error on Page 102 where it shows a salary increase in financial services of 18.7 %

Three general concerns.

1. Proposed city tax increase percentages are higher than population growth.
2. Wages are up 7.2 percent, at least 2% higher than in the private sector.
3. Budget growth at 7.5 percent when asset growth is only 0.67 %.

I am not in a position to know all of the deliberations that have gone into the budget. I can only share with you my observations of where the costs can be reduced.

1. Stop all capital expenditures at Burlington Transit and staff increases at Burlington Transit until a business plan is put together showing funding options, bus sizes, routes.
2. A business plan for IT for the city. It appears a lot of nice to have rather than needs.
3. A thorough review of the Bateman project.
4. Close Service Burlington. It is just another level of bureaucracy.
5. An in dept capital spending review. 103.5 million in 2025 and only 90 million on average over the following three years suggest the costs can be spread out. I am willing to put up with few more pot holes if this keeps my less fortunate neighbors from have to change their lifestyles in order to pay the proposed tax increases.

6. Every line item should be reevaluated and judged as to need, want and nice to have. Some wants should go and all the nice to have should disappear.

7. Slow the forestry program for two years.

8. A careful study of Page 167. Contract services up 40%, salaries up 11.3 % and a transfer from the reserve fund to pay for this.

The initiatives the city is making on housing is commendable. In the vision statement, it has a goal of housing for all incomes. Taxes and Hydro are a significant part of housing costs. The proposed tax increases are going to make it more difficult for lower income people to house themselves in Burlington and make it more likely that they will have to change their eating habits and use food banks. As you know food banks already are at record use and shortages are increasing.

Back to my questions

1. I asked for a list of the efficiencies that they have implemented and still do not have an answer.

2. Burlington is a relatively wealthy community. I am not sure that we need to raise taxes now to prevent higher taxes in the future if and when they need to go up. In fact I don't think our credit rating would go down if we only had 5 percent in reserves.

3. A number of changes have been made reducing employment land area into mixed use. People come to an area to work. If work is not there, they then have to travel to their jobs. The action seems to be recipe for increasing grid lock. Why is this policy being pursued?

4. What is being done to reduce traffic congestion? Bike lanes and busses will not do it. Thirty thousand new people coming to Burlington. Twenty thousand more cars. Is there a plan?

On page 9 the survey shows that 25 percent of the citizens are not happy with city services. On page 10 it states that only 37.6 percent of the taxpayers think they get good value for their tax dollars. A business could not stay in business if these results came from customers.

I regret that it appears to me that when the council is approached the response is the Marie Antonette reply when she was told that the people have no bread. "Let them eat cake." An example is in councilor Sharman's November news letter where he states the average increase for a median valued house is only \$22.83 per month. It may be okay with a family income of \$200,000.00 but not so good for people with a family income of \$60,000, with maxed out credit cards and going to food banks. Maybe the people on the sunshine list putting the budget together do not have empathy with the less fortunate citizens.

Following this meeting, I understand that work will be done to mitigate the proposed increase and amendments will be made by councilors. I suggest that your report card will show an A if the increase in the city portion is 3.5 percent, a pass at 5.5 percent and failure if the increase is more than this for 2025.

My grandchildren cannot afford to live in Burlington. Taxes and Hydro are a significant part of the cost of living in Burlington. It is time for a more frugal approach to Burlington city's portion of the taxes for 2025. Otherwise, I see politeness slipping away again and none of us want that.

Thank you