

Public Consultation Policy



Section	Date	By-law Number	Page	Of
Administration & Finance	August 13, 2013	80-2013	1	5
Subsection	Repeals By-Law Number		Policy Number	
Municipal Budget	153-2009		AF-2-1	

Purpose

The goal of the City municipal budget public consultation policy shall be to identify concerns, needs and priorities for both citizens and community stakeholders. This shall include ensuring that citizens and stakeholders are both informed and actively involved during the annual budget process. Involvement shall be facilitated through the provision of appropriate mechanisms that will provide the opportunity for both input to and feedback on the annual budget before it is approved by Council.

Application

This policy shall apply to the annual municipal budget process, whether operating or capital. The City's water and sewer and solid waste utilities are considered part of the municipal budget process.

Guiding Principles

The City shall adhere to the following guiding principles throughout the municipal budget public consultation process:

- a) Promote Community Involvement & Input
- b) Ensure Process is Meaningful & Responsive
- c) Provide for Continuous Improvement
- d) Facilitate & Build Capacity for a Collaborative Community

Promote Community Involvement & Input

To the greatest extent possible, the City will involve both citizens and community stakeholders and ensure information is shared in an equitable and transparent manner. The City will encourage input from its citizens and stakeholders, and will actively listen to that input. The City will involve stakeholders in the decision making process where their input may impact the decision.

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Ensure Process is Meaningful & Responsive

The City will ensure that each consultation is meaningful and valid. The City will provide meaningful, easy to understand information to the public to increase budget transparency and help stakeholders understand and participate in the annual budget consultation process. Budget consultation will be conducted in a timely manner, and participants will receive appropriate feedback on the impact of their input.

Provide for Continuous Improvement

The City will constantly evaluate and measure the success of the annual budget public consultation process to ensure that the public participation is both effective and relevant. An annual review of the policy will be undertaken, and evaluation mechanisms for each consultation initiative will be used.

Facilitate & Build Capacity for a Collaborative Community

The annual budget public consultation process is intended to help strengthen the links between the City and its citizens / community stakeholders, and to ensure that a two-way communication process exists to involve citizens and community stakeholders in the annual budget process. It should help build and maintain a positive and cooperative relationship between the City and its stakeholders, as well as increase the potential for engagement.

Benefits of the Public Consultation Process

The following are the benefits of a consistent, standardized and meaningful annual budget public consultation process:

- a) Informs citizens and community stakeholders about the budget process, including related issues and pressures, ensuring they are provided with balanced and objective information about the challenges and realities of the budget.
- b) Gauges the public appetite for a property tax rate required to fund municipal programs and service levels.
- c) Solicits general community priorities related to services and issues – creates a forum for sharing ideas and concerns.
- d) Provides information to members of City Council about the values, feelings and priorities of those who participate in the consultation.

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Benefits of the Public Consultation Process (Continued)

- e) Increases two-way communication, which builds trust and fosters relationships.
- f) Provides a means to better incorporate the public's values in local government initiatives and decisions.
- g) Helps secure understanding and support for the City's goals.

Objectives

The main objectives of the municipal budget consultation process are:

- a) To ensure that citizens and community stakeholders can provide input into the annual budget process.
- b) To ensure that a two-way communication process exists to involve citizens and community stakeholders in the annual budget process.

Process

In an effort to provide an opportunity for citizens / community stakeholders to provide input to the annual budget process in a manner that allow alternatives to help encourage individual participation, several mechanisms will be implemented. These mechanisms may include:

- a) Budget Outlook Presentation
- b) Community Handbook
- c) Public Consultation Sessions
- d) Written Submissions
- e) On-Line Survey

Budget Outlook Presentation

In a public forum, the City will present an overview of the preliminary budget, as well as known budget challenges, pressures and opportunities. To help better inform the public in this process, the overview will include key restraints on the City's budget decisions, such as mandated services and programs. Information will also be provided on longer term financial impacts to the City. This presentation will be made available on-line on the City's portal.

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Community Handbook

The City will develop a Community Handbook for distribution to citizens / community stakeholders. This handbook will be made available on-line on the City's portal, at a variety of City facilities, to Council for distribution to constituents, as well as distributed where available at budget consultation meetings. This handbook will include meaningful, easy to understand and balanced / objective information about the challenges and realities of the budget, intended to inform the reader and elicit feedback, including:

- a) High-level overview of the current budget
- b) Overview of major impacts for the current budget
- c) Historic trends
- d) Potential options, as appropriate, for:
 - i. Service reductions / eliminations
 - ii. Service enhancements
 - iii. User fees
 - iv. Capital spending

Budget Survey

The City may develop a survey eliciting public response in the following areas:

- a) Service levels, including
 - i. Service reductions / eliminations
 - ii. Service improvements / additions
- b) Service provision funded through user fees as opposed to taxation
- c) Borrowing, and its use related to maintaining capital facilities, infrastructure and equipment
- d) Feedback on the Community Handbook as well as the annual budget public consultation process

Public Consultation Sessions

The City will hold a minimum of two public consultation sessions to give citizens and community stakeholders an opportunity to speak on matters of concern relating to the budget. Each deputation would be limited to ten minutes to give as many people as possible the opportunity to speak. Written submissions may be given to the committee secretary when the deputation is made, although it is not necessary.

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Written Submissions

Written submissions may also be sent or given without speaking at the Public Consultation Sessions.

On-Line Survey

The survey contained in the Community Handbook will be made available for completion on-line on the City's portal.

Report on Public Consultation Process

The City will prepare a summary of the public input for Council for review and consideration during the decision making process.