

BUDGET COMMITTEE - DECEMBER 1, 2009

2010 BUDGET FORUM & RESULTS

Recommendation

The City Manager in consultation with the Director of Budgeting & Financial Planning recommends:

That the following report be received for information purposes.

Contribution to Sustainability

Sustainability by definition focuses on the ability to maintain a function over a period of time. Responsible budgeting allocates resources in a responsible way to sustain the City's operations and aspirations, balancing both current and future requirements. The process of obtaining public input into the budget process is essential to validate the needs of the community and balance them within available resources. The 2010 budget approach seeks to minimize the current year requirements, while continuing to meet the requirements of the future.

Economic Impact

There are no direct implications of this report.

Communications Plan

Not applicable

Purpose

The purpose of this item is to report on the input received from the Public Budget Forum, held at the Civic Centre on November 16, 2009, for the benefit of the members of the Budget Committee and Council.

Background – Analysis & Options

Public consultation and input is an important element of the 2010 budget process. As part of the City's approved 2010 budget process and consistent with the previous year's process, a budget forum was held to educate and inform the public and to receive public input into the 2010 budget process. The forum was held at the following location and time:

- Civic Centre – Monday November 16 – 7:00 pm

Early Promotion

To ensure the community was aware of this event, a very aggressive communication/promotion plan for the City's 2010 Budget Forum was followed and consisted of:

- 1) Access Vaughan phone promotion, registration, and reminders
- 2) Event promotion on the City's website
- 3) Local media advertisements and news releases
- 4) Mobile signs
- 5) Poster advertising in city facilities (civic centre, libraries, community centres)
- 6) Electronic bulletins

Our Message to the Community - Value for your Property Tax Dollar

A focal point of the 2010 Budget Forum was to communicate key messages and highlights on the draft budget and process. The information provided was intended to educate residents on the draft 2010 budget and also generate discussion and feedback. Listed below are the main topics presented.

- ***City services and facilities the resident receives***
In order to put local tax dollars into context for discussion purposes, it was necessary to highlight the vast quantity of City services and facilities that are provided and available to residents for their local property tax dollars; approximately \$1,161 for the average home in Vaughan based on the draft 2010 budget.
- ***Service improvements / expansions in the 2010 Budget***
Included in the draft budget are proposed improvements and the expansions necessary to support the needs of a growing community. The following examples were provided.

Community Facilities

- Opening a North Thornhill Community Centre
- Combining services for residents in a new Civic Centre

Community Safety

- Hiring firefighters for a new fire station
- Major road repairs throughout Vaughan

Environmental Stewardship

- Implementing green direction strategies
- Building environmentally sustainable facilities

Job Creation

- Renewing our economic development strategy
- Creating jobs through economic stimulus projects

- ***The minimal cost to the average tax payer***
For the average residential property in Vaughan, the local property tax increase associated with the draft 2010 budget is \$38. This increase is necessary to sustain current service levels and the improvements noted above. Community service improvements and growth account for 80% of the increase. Based on the above, the average residential property in Vaughan will pay \$1,161 for local city services.
- ***Sound financial management & value for property tax dollars***
As a result of sound financial management practices at the City over the years, residents are offered good value for their local property tax dollars. A founding principle of the 2010 budget was to sustain and, in a number of instances, improve service with a minimum tax increase. The 2010 budget achieves this objective. Listed below are a few examples of Vaughan's successes:
 - One of the lowest tax rates in the GTA
 - The recession had minimal impact on Vaughan
 - Recognized by the Province for good management

Engaging our Citizens

The 2010 Budget Forum was open to all citizens and the intent was to acquire feedback with respect to the services provided by the City and whether or not residents believe they are getting value for their property tax dollar. To achieve the maximum benefit from the forum, residents were engaged using two methods:

1. Audience Response Technology

This method allows large groups of residents to simultaneously and anonymously answer multiple choice questions and graphically displays the aggregate result for all to see. The use of this tool creates an interactive and fun environment increasing attentiveness and knowledge retention. It also helps to immediately confirm the audiences understanding of key points or topics.

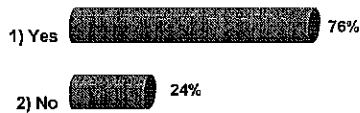
2. Deputations

In addition to the audience response technology, the attendees were provided an opportunity to provide comments or ask questions. This method assisted the City in obtaining more specific detail on the needs of citizens attending.

Forum Results & Community Feedback

Approximately 50 residents attended the forum. Of the residents participating in the event, the majority responded that Vaughan is focusing on the right improvements, providing the right local services, and that they are getting value for their tax dollars. Illustrated below are the results of these topic questions:

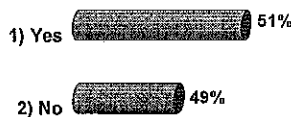
Is the City focusing on the right improvements?



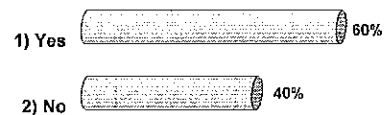
Are we providing the right local services?



Is the City taking the right approach?



Overall are you getting value for your local tax dollars?



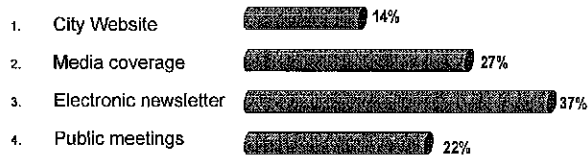
In addition to the above questions, the audience was asked questions to better gauge their understanding on selected topics. These questions were intended to create a fun environment, increase attentiveness, and increase knowledge retention. Nevertheless, the responses to these questions are interesting and summarized below:

- The majority, approximately 55% of the audience, overestimated the percentage of local tax dollars that remain in Vaughan.
- Over 80% of the audience were not aware of the significant cost to operate a fire station 24/7
- Half the audience believed that their local property taxes would be higher than their car insurance premium. This however, is contrary to information that indicates property taxes for the average home (\$1,161) is less than the average car insurance premium (\$1,500).

The above responses suggest there is a continuing need to educate residents on the cost of municipal services provided, how much of the property tax dollar stays in Vaughan, and the perspective of local tax dollars when compared to other household items.

At the end of the forum a final question was asked to better understand which method of communication the audience found most effective. Surprisingly, 37% of the audience indicated electronic news letters to be the most effective. When the City's website is added (+14%) the percentage of residents who prefer electronic communication jumps to 51%. These results will be useful in planning future events. Detailed below are the results.

Which method of communication do you find most effective?



Deputations and Resident Comments

In addition to the above interactive questions the audience was encouraged to provide comments or ask questions. In total, 15 residents or 30% of the audience stepped up to the podium to provide their comments (deputations). A complete set of notes on the 2010 Budget Forum, recorded and prepared by the Clerks department, is provided as Attachment 1 for Budget Committee consideration. Listed below are the main deputation topics related to the draft 2010 budget.

Reoccurring Themes (mentioned by more than one resident):

- Road repairs
 - Woodbridge road repairs
 - Conley street road repairs (Thornhill/Concord)
 - Thornhill woods traffic calming measures
 - The need for a sidewalk on Rutherford Rd. (between Dufferin & Bathurst)
- Trail & pathway expansions to link parks and neighborhoods
 - Angelina Avenue to Martin Grove Fields
 - Woodbridge/Kleinberg areas

Individual Requests were also presented:

- Bindertwine Park - tennis court resurfacing
- Bindertwine Park - artificial soccer turf
- Funding for a judicial review
- Funding for a multicultural youth talent presentation
- Etc.

Continuing Opportunities for Public Engagement

Two-way communication is important. Continuing opportunities for public input will be provided through a mixture of public engagement activities, which are further expanded below.

The Budget Forum On-line

The City website is the City's primary communication vehicle. For citizens unable to attend the Budget Forum, a video of the presentation, a copy of the hand-out and a brief survey (based on the forum questions) are available on the City's website until Dec. 6th. This event was promoted through news releases, e-newsletters, and listed as a featured project on the City's website home page. The survey results will be provided to the Budget Committee at a later date, unless participation is poor.

Chamber of Commerce Event

A budget overview will be presented at a Chamber of Commerce event by the Budget Chair/City Manager to inform and engage Chamber members. This event is scheduled for December 4th.

Council/Budget Committee Meetings

Throughout the budget process, scheduled Budget Committee meetings are open to the public. Vaughan residents have an opportunity to participate in any of the Budget Committee meetings scheduled over the next few months, including an opportunity to provide input at a Special Council meeting anticipated in January, to obtain public input before the budget is approved. These dates are as follows:

Scheduled Budget Committee Meetings

- Dec 1 – 9:00 – 10:30
- Dec 15 – 9:00 – 11:30
- Dec 22 – 9:00 – 11:30

Special Council Public Input Session

- Anticipated in January (TBD)

In addition, the City of Vaughan is undertaking a number of strategic initiatives which incorporate significant public engagement. Although separate processes, public feedback obtained at these events will migrate into recommendations and the budget decision-making process.

Further Opportunities for Public Input

The City will be communicating key messages on the draft budget through various communication vehicles. They will be used to inform residents, businesses and the media on budget developments, successes, and key highlights.

Editorial coverage – The budget process will be featured in several stories for publication, including Council columns in local newspapers. As the budget process unfolds, editorials and updates will be added to the City's website to keep the public informed.

E-newsletter – The corporate e-newsletter list, with its current circulation of approximately 6,000, will be used to issue e-blasts or bulletins on budget successes and developments. E-newsletter content may also be included in newsletters from Council.

Media Relations - The media will be informed of any related events through media advisories and news releases will be issued for all major milestones of the budget process.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020 / Strategic Plan

The process of obtaining public input into the budget process is critical. The budget process is where Council allocates resources and establishes priorities to achieve its vision.

Regional Implications

There are no regional implications as a result of this report.

Conclusion

As part of the City's approved 2010 budget process and consistent with the previous year's process, a Budget Forum was held to educate and inform the public and to receive public input into the 2010 budget process. A focal point of the 2010 Budget Forum was to communicate the following key messages:

- City services and facilities the resident receives
- Service improvements / expansions in the 2010 budget
- The minimal cost to the average tax payer
- Sound financial management
- Value for property tax dollars

The Forum was open to all citizens and the intent was to get feedback with respect to the services provided by the City and whether or not residents believe they are getting value for their property tax dollar. Citizens were engaged through the use of audience response technology and deputations. Overall, the majority of residents participating in the event responded that:

- Vaughan is focusing on the right improvements
- Vaughan is providing the right local services
- Residents are getting value for their tax dollars

The resident feedback indicates a high degree of satisfaction with the City's operations and the efforts of Council and staff. However, there were a number of deputations and specific items identified, which are further detailed in the attachment provided.

Public engagement is an important and vital component of the budget process. Continuing opportunities for public input will be provided through a mixture of activities, including but not limited to website content, budget committee meetings, a chamber of commerce event, editorial coverage, etc.

Attachments

Attachment 1– 2010 Budget Forum Notes (resident comments)

Report prepared by:

John Henry, CMA,
Director of Budgeting & Financial Planning
Ext. 8348

Respectfully submitted,

Clayton D. Harris
City Manager



CITY OF VAUGHAN
2010 BUDGET
INFORMATION / CONSULTATION
FORUM
NOTES

Vaughan Civic Centre
Monday, November 16, 2009
7:00 p.m.

Members of Council Present:

Mayor Linda D. Jackson
Regional Councillor Mario F. Ferri
Councillor Peter Meffe
Councillor Tony Carella
Councillor Bernie DiVona
Councillor Sandra Yeung Racco
Councillor Alan Shefman

The 2010 Budget Information/Consultation Forum was held to provide information to the public with respect to what residents receive, service improvements/enhancements, what it costs, sound financial management practices, and the service value provided. The Forum was held to receive public input on the 2010 Budget regarding the City's provision of local services.

The Mayor welcomed everyone in attendance and introduced those Members of Council present. The Mayor introduced Councillor Shefman, Chair of the Budget Committee, who encouraged on-going public participation. Councillor Shefman introduced the City Manager who acknowledged Staff who was involved in the preparation of the Budget and the background information. The City Manager reviewed the 2010 budget process. He reviewed the use of the Audience Response Units that were provided to the members of the public to enable them to vote on various interactive questions that will be presented during the powerpoint presentation.

A total of 15 residents from the audience stepped to the podium to provide their comments. The following is a summary of those comments.

- Resident 1 - Peter Pallotta, 254 Maria Antonia Road, Woodbridge, L4H 2Z4*
- Feels that he is receiving fair value for the tax dollars being spent;
 - Requested that in the future, comparative information with the previous budget year be made available;
 - Requested further detail on "account budgets" as outlined on Page 19;
 - Suggested free meeting space in City-owned facilities to be used by Vaughan groups;
 - Requested additional information with respect to safeguarding City investments as referred to on Page 17.

The City Manager clarified the reference to "accounts budgets" and confirmed that safeguarding City investments refers to funding that the City invests in, and cash flow.

- Resident 2 Lyn D'Orio, 35 Dalmato Court, Woodbridge*
- In support of the pathway between Angelina Avenue and the Martin Grove recreational fields;
 - Questioned the priority process for budget items;
 - Wants green spaces to be opened up to pathways to link neighbourhoods;

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- Need to develop bicycle and pedestrian pathways.

The City Manager advised that the next Budget Committee meeting is December 1 and details of where the pathway between Angelina Avenue and the Martin Grove fields sits on the list will be provided at that meeting and highlighted for additional consideration.

Resident 3 Leo Snowbell, 19 Honeywood Road, Thornhill, L4J 9C2

- Expressed the need for a sidewalk on Rutherford Road between Dufferin Street and Bathurst Avenue as this poses a traffic concern and pedestrian safety concern in this area;
- Wants tax revenue to be allocated to the construction of this sidewalk and not wait until someone gets hurt.

The Commissioner of Engineering and Public Works confirmed that sidewalks in this area are being planned for 2015. Staff is looking at various options with the Region to make this area safer for pedestrians.

Resident 4 Jane Hunter, Box 920, Kleinburg, L0J 1C0, Executive Committee Member of the Kleinburg National Tennis Club

- Tennis courts in the Bindertwine area are in need of re-surfacing;
- Have met with City of Vaughan Staff and the Kleinburg Area Ratepayers Association and have submitted a letter in support of this request to Councillor Meffe.

Resident 5 Claudio Tersigni, 451 Westridge Drive, Kleinburg, L0J 1C0, President of the Kleinburg Nobleton Soccer Club

- A proposal was recently submitted between the City of Vaughan and the Kleinburg Nobleton Soccer Club to build a soccer field in Bindertwine Park to allow a field to be used for longer periods of time during the soccer season;
- Kleinburg has been under-serviced with sporting facilities.

Resident 6 Maxine Povering, 48 Ohr Menachem Way, Thornhill, L4J 8X7

- The traffic calming features in the Thornhill Woods area were over budgeted in the 2009 Budget;
- There was not enough public input into the traffic calming measures and if there was, they would have been designed differently;
- Questioned whether funds have been allocated to implement traffic calming measures that were not implemented properly.

The Commissioner of Engineering and Public Works advised that Staff is looking at operational issues and improvements and will be reporting back to the next Budget Committee meeting of December 1.

Resident 7 Tony Carr, Resident of Woodbridge

- Questioned how the budget process was developed;
- Concerned about monies not being spent in an efficient manner;
- Questioned how the budget process incorporates the financial audit and whether funds have been set aside for an audit/auditor.

The City Manager reviewed the budget process. He confirmed that an internal auditor has specific resources. He also confirmed that there is an external auditor for the municipality.

Resident 8 Erlinda Insigne, 581 Conley Street, Thornhill, L4J 6V2

- Requested that the southwest corner of Conley Street (Ward 5 portion) be included in this year's budget for road repairs.

The Commissioner of Engineering and Public Works confirmed that there is a 5-year program for road repairs. A report will be brought back to Council for the next 5-years.

Resident 9 Rick Galbraith, 52 Park Drive, Woodbridge, L4L 2H3

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- Questioned whether the new hospital in Vaughan is being included in this year's budget;
- Requested clarification as to whether the job creation for overall stimulus package are long-term jobs or just during the current economic times;
- Questioned whether costs have increased or decreased since the Greening Vaughan initiative was implemented and whether there has been savings from this program.

The City Manager confirmed that the new hospital allocation of funds represents a small percentage in the taxes. He confirmed that the job creation stimulus represents long-term jobs.

Resident 10 Nick Pinto, President of West Woodbridge Ratepayers Association

- The process/rating by which roads are determined to be repaired needs to be changed so that an employee physically attends on site to determine whether a road needs to be repaired as many roads are being repaired that do not need to be completely paved which results in unnecessary costs being incurred by the Municipality;
- Some roads in the West Woodbridge area are in need of repair;
- On behalf of the Woodbridge Air Cadets (283 Squadron), he requested that a permanent area in a City facility in the West Woodbridge area be designated for use by the Air Cadets for training purposes. This request will be formally brought forward to the Budget Committee meeting of December 1, 2009, and information will be provided to Council ahead of the Budget Committee meeting.

Resident 11 Richard Lorello, 235 Treelawn Boulevard, Vaughan

- Requested that consideration be given to allocating funds for judicial review for the City;
- Requested that the quarterly reports for the new Civic Centre be released to the public.

Resident 12 Debbie Schulte, 76 Mira Vista Place, Woodbridge, L4H 1K8

- Requested tax increase information with respect to the hospital levy that spans over a 4-year period to cover the cost of the hospital land purchase;
- Questioned why some roads were being resurfaced when they were not in need of repair while other roads were in dire need of repair and were not being resurfaced;
- The City should continue expanding on the trail networks in Vaughan and link up the Woodbridge and Kleinburg communities;
- Expressed concern with trees being destroyed and/or damaged by City staff operating lawn mower equipment near the trees and suggested the placement of mulch at the base of the trees and ensuring that outside Staff is advised to not clip the trees while cutting the grass in the vicinity of the trees.

The City Manager advised that the 2011 and 2012 tax increase for the hospital levy is 1.36%.

Resident 13 Perry Brock, 10 Ventura Way, Thornhill, L4J 7S8

- Questioned what the increase in user fees will be for 2010;
- Questioned what the impact of the harmonized tax will have on user fees.

The City Manager advised that Staff is currently looking into the effects of the harmonized tax on user fees.

Resident 14 Rino Ianone, Resident of Castlemill Drive

- Congratulated the City on the Communities in Bloom conference as well as the success of the Multicultural Festival;
- Requested that consideration be given to an additional budget commitment in the amount of \$10,000 for a youth talent presentation (youth singers between the ages of 4 and 12 reflecting their heritage/culture) and approval in principle of this initiative.

Resident 15 Frank Greco, Resident of Kleinburg

- Questioned whether there were any other anticipated increases in the Regional and educational portion of the tax bill;

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- Congratulated the City on the organization of the Multicultural Festival and suggested that more focus be placed on arts and cultural events as a means of raising money for capital projects;
- Expressed concern with the proposed tax increase which incorporates the increased residential tax rate as well as the hospital levy and suggested that the tax increase be in keeping with the current rate of inflation.

The City Manager advised that the anticipated increases in the Regional and educational portion of the tax bill is unknown at this time.

Recognizing that there were no other speakers, Councillor Shefman thanked City Staff and members of the public for their attendance and their comments/suggestions. He encouraged the public to attend the next Budget Committee meeting scheduled for December 1, 2009, and provide information ahead of time if they wish to submit information.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.