



2021 MUNICIPAL BUDGET

Synthesized Results of Budget Engagement

Updated October 28, 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The major challenge faced by the City of Wetaskiwin for this year's annual budget engagement was civic participation. Public engagement rates are below average, which has been a reality throughout the province this year. No one reason exists to definitively explain why engagement rates are significantly lower this year across the board.

STAFF HOURS AND TOTAL COST

As requested by City Council, the following statistics were collected and represent the total cost and staff hours that went into this year's municipal budget engagement:

- Total staff time: 75 hours (amounting to approx. \$3,392)
- Cost of Balancing Act tool: \$3,000
- **Estimated cost of entire budget engagement (including staff hours): \$ 6,392**

RESULTS (HIGH-LEVEL)

Fifty-four (54) submissions were received in total for the 2021 municipal budget engagement (43 online; 11 paper surveys). The majority of participants were female (70%), and the two largest age categories represented were 30 to 49, followed by 50 to 69. The breakdown of each category by overall increase or decrease is captured below.

Areas where participants indicated an increase in spending overall:

- Fire services (increased by \$202,730)
While a slight majority expressed support for adding both the Daytime Response Firefighter and the Fire Prevention Officer positions, the remainder shared their support in getting at least one of the positions filled.
- RCMP (increased by \$149,358)
While the majority of respondents indicated they were satisfied with the current number of RCMP members locally, there were others who expressed a desire for additional members.
- Management and support (increased by \$21,641)
This was largely centered around the question about updating our LUB and MDP following the results of the 50-year community vision.

- Sales (increased by \$41,980)
This item included the question about Manluk Centre user fees. There was an even split between those who indicated they would support a small increase to user fees at the Manluk Centre to receive more services, and those who wanted the fee structure to remain the same.

Areas where participants indicated a decrease in spending overall:

- Airport (decreased by \$14,916)
This decrease speaks to the cost difference between hiring a part-time employee to perform maintenance services at the airport—saving \$16,000—and continuing to contract that service out. The majority of respondents indicated a preference to save money by hiring a part time City employee.
- Parks maintenance (decreased by \$12,823)
This item focused on the City’s grass cutting service, and asked respondents if the City should continue to contract out this service or utilize seasonal City employees. A large majority of respondents opted for the City to carry out grass maintenance using seasonal City staff.
- Recreation (decreased by \$44,365)
This focused on the City’s recreation programs, opportunities, and facilities. Overall participants indicated there are adequate recreation opportunities and facilities within the City of Wetaskiwin. Participants also felt that there was adequate recreation programming within Wetaskiwin.
- Snow Removal / Street Maintenance and Cleaning (decreased by \$1,612)
There were a variety of options presented for this budget item, with the majority choosing to either keep the snow removal service the same, or only utilize City assets during normal work hours to provide snow removal services.

Comments from all engagement sessions

The following comments were received over the course of both online budget simulations. One comment was removed due to inappropriate content.

Category (and Question)	Comments
Business & Residential Property Taxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This should be the very last option to add revenue. I know many people who are trying to sell their homes because of the high property taxes that we have. • Decrease residential tax rate. • Lower ALL SERVICE levels and lower our taxes. • At this time I am finding value for my tax dollars.
Sales of Goods & Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The City should look at more full cost recovery fees and new fees such as annual animal licensing fees, partnerships with user groups (i.e. schools), downtown parking meters, higher fees for tickets, and take away the 50% discount if paid in a week option.

Salaries, Wages, Benefits & Expenses - Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, continue to keep council costs as low as possible. • This is excessively high for a small community. I would be interested to see how this compares to other similar sized communities. Other than the Mayor these are part-time positions. Amount should be reduced to \$400,000. • Council should be paid more so they can focus more on fixing issues.
Salaries, Wages, Benefits & Expenses – City Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term staff (high paid) should be removed, bringing in less expensive, new people. • I wonder if you could get volunteers to help offset staff costs by offering them free use at the facilities.
Enforcement Services (Bylaw)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adding more bylaw officers can help reduce the non-emergent RCMP calls (loitering, dogs at large, property compliance and accident scenes).
Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once Wetaskiwin is cleaned up we will get more businesses. Stop tossing \$\$ until our negative attitude changes.
Planning & Engineering (cost of updating Municipal Development Plan and Land Use Bylaw)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is not the right time to be going through this process. Elected officials are there to do this for us. The impending financial issues faced by our country and province need to be our top concern as a City. • Does this actually help attract business to our city? Because if it doesn't then you need to justify it a bit more. • 50 years... not sure what the point of that is... let's focus on now.
Transferring money to reserves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So we are putting millions of dollars into reserves, but roads can't be paid by the City in full and have to be partly paid by the homeowner? Something is off here. • Does this transfer to reserves include a replacement of the recent funds used from reserves? • Let's fix the current issues and then worry about the future.
RCMP member wages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 RCMP and 2 more bylaw officers would help our current issues • I think we need to do a better job of calling in complaints vs. turning a blind eye.
Fire Services staffing (addition of daytime response / fire prevention officer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'd have to see what value one single daytime firefighter would add. Perhaps one daytime crew but the way this is worded sounds like one single person. Fire prevention officer duties should be absorbed and distributed between the chief/deputy chief and health and safety guy. • We need to staff a full-time crew of 3 or 4 for daytime calls. Some cost savings can be had by reducing the callouts to paid-on-call members for those same daytime calls. This way we can rely on the additional support of on-call members when needed for large scale events. • Have we had issues in the past? If not keep the same.
Manluk Centre Level of Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If we want the gym facility to compete locally, we will need to change to 24-hour access. Anything less, and it is a pretend gym. There is no way a punch card system and cameras will cost an additional \$100,000.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would want the same hours of operation for the Manluk Centre (assuming these are the hours the facility was open pre-covid). • Look at one night offering public skating. Maybe consider 24hr access to the workout facilities.
Snow Removal / Street Maintenance & Cleaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We live in a snow belt region. Our vehicles should be equipped accordingly. We need to start enforcing the rule that says we cannot shove snow onto city road. That alone will help many residential areas. • We only get one sweep of our area anyway. • We need road repairs. Badly. It's embarrassing when family or friends from out of town visit and we have to ask them to go the back way to our house so they don't hit the potholes and ruin their cars. • There are a few roads in the city that need to be re-paved—specifically the one on the west side of Queen Elizabeth school. I would like to assume that the potholes have not been repaired because it's already slated to be redone, but I'm truly not that optimistic. • I support the initiatives that support the creation of local jobs. Unexpected adjustments may need to be made if we experience a high level of snow fall. • I support increasing the threshold from 5cm to 8cm and also support having city performing residential snow removal during normal hours.
Water/Wastewater/Storm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would hope that by now you've figured out how to pay for the water treatment plant that's being required by AEP. But it also needs to be acknowledged that the fees to residents are starting to get too high. An average family home now has a water bill of \$130-200/month which is \$260-400 per billing cycle. I would urge the city to ensure that these costs do not increase further if there is a projected surplus.
Solid Waste / Recycling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you truly want to extend the life of the landfill, then the City needs to make recycling mandatory with weekly pickups. There are several cities that do this. Sherwood Park is one of them.
Grass Cutting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This year the grass service was a disaster. Maybe try having some 'natural spaces' to save costs but for the major parks and areas use the teenagers who always did a great job. • Let's shop local and hire local – be an example! The Edmonton company certainly didn't maintain trees and planted beds in Ashoro Friendship Park! • Keep the contracted company local as best as possible. • You have not provided any information to residents about the grass cutting contracts as to whether or not it actually saved the city money. I do know that service standards appeared to be below par. Yes we had a wet spring, but there were still things that could have been done. Did we actually save any money when compared to the actual hours of manpower that were put in?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The City cannot urge citizens to SHOP LOCALLY as I have been told that an out of city business was contracted to complete this task this year and I don't feel that they did as good as the university/college students. • If it costs more to contract a company out of Edmonton than it would to hire at minimum wage, you are doing it wrong. • Sheep would keep the grass down – benefit to City. Pay for grazing rights on exchanges, pasture & the services for the sheep. Barter system. • Do what is going to save us the most money.
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QUESTIONS

Questions submitted during the budget engagements are as follows:

- **Why can't we seem to get a handle on all the crime?**
Increased crime is an unfortunate reality for many communities right now. We hear your concern and continue to liaise with our RCMP members and other protective/enforcement services partners in finding solutions. The City is also developing a community policing plan which will assist us in targeting and reducing crime.
- **Can you break out the sales section in 'Revenue' and highlight what is included?**
\$573,000 Sales to Other Gov't (includes County contributions for City services).
\$12,182,400 Sales of Goods & Services (includes Utility rates revenue, recreation facilities and program user fees, tax certificates, and cemetery plot sales).
\$5,511,876 Revenue from Own Sources (includes fine revenue, Utility franchise fees, penalties, interest on investments, business license fees, facilities and property leases, and permit fees).
- **Do we know what the income is from the Manluk Centre annually?**
The 2021 Annual revenue budget for the Manluk Centre is \$1,140,000.
- **What costs were included in the Archives budget?**
\$82,200 - Salaries, Wages & Benefits
\$600 - General Services (includes printing, binding, and public relations)
\$4,000 - Materials, Goods & Supplies (includes stationery and program supplies)
\$27,600 - Inter-city Transfers (includes transfer for building overhead).
- **Can the updating of policies be included in the 2022 budget year, following the visioning project?**
Unfortunately, the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) and Land Use Bylaw (LUB) are so outdated that they are not serving the community well. While Council can certainly consider this for a subsequent year, Administration is recommending this be done in 2021 to ensure new development rules are in place to deal with current development trends and best practices. Updating these essential documents will also reduce barriers to the City's growth.

- Can you explain the cost difference for each of the grass cutting options?
Answer coming soon.
- What is going to be done with some of these low priority areas for snow removal? Many residential areas only get cleared once per season.
Answer coming soon.

City staff are currently working on answering them remaining questions and the results will be shared with City Council and the community-at-large—via budget page on the website—as each becomes available.