

Memorandum

To: Budget Standing Committee

Cc: Shelley Chemnitz, Dave Oakes, Maggie Riopelle

From: Kristine Douglas

Date: November 6, 2019

Subject: Engage STC 2020 Budget Ideas

Here are some shared ideas by the public on the Engage Stc 2020 Budget Platform.

The City launched a new budget engagement page on EngageSTC (www.engagestc.ca/2020budget) in early October.

Since launching the page, which also focuses on educating residents about the budget, there have been 218 visits to the site. Those residents have used some of the different engagement tools – which include a “did you know” survey, an ideas page and a question-and-answer feature, and they have also viewed a variety of different documents, dates of meetings, visited budget-related links to the City’s website, and more.

The Communications department continues to promote the tool through its social media channels, and some residents have selected the option to subscribe for any project updates. This allows the City to send them information when there are any updates, significant changes to the project page, or if there are any new tools to engage with.

Budget Knowledge Survey

One of the features is an educational-based survey on how familiar participants are with the City’s budget process. Formatted in a quiz style, it asks residents how familiar they are with the process, and also provides other facts, including property tax collection, the various budgets and MPAC’s role in tax increases. When they click an answer, they see some of the educational information related to the budget process.

While just a handful of residents have used the tool to date, it does provide some educational insight. For example, the majority of respondents admit they have little to some understanding of the process, but to date none have said they have a full understanding of how municipal budgets are prepared and applied. Other highlights include:

- 42.9% of respondents said they were not aware that while property taxes are collected by the City, they are distributed in three ways

- 71.4% are aware the City is required to balance its budget each year
- 42.9% were unaware that MPAC plays a role in tax increases

Ideas

The ideas tool allows residents to share their feedback on what they would like to see in the community. Users can also select to “like” an idea similar to social media channels.

To date there have been four ideas shared, including:

- Please put more money and energy into actions to address climate change like tree planting, solar wind energy projects for city facilities. Plan and ensure building more affordable housing of various types to help low income and lower homeless numbers.
- The City needs to plan and legislate more affordable housing of different types to assist low income people and lower homeless numbers.
- Establish a permanent sand court volleyball court facility away from the beach. Appease players and beach lovers who oppose a beach league. Sand court volleyball is easy to build and maintain. Leave the beach as a multi-use and unique space; find room elsewhere (Burgoyne Woods, Lancaster??) for volleyball. Slo pitch has McCaffery Park. Find space off the beach for volleyball.
- Look at possibly making city bus transportation more efficient. Especially now that we are looking at climate change. If bus routes were more efficient people might choose to use them more often.

Question-and-Answer

The engagement forum allows residents to ask questions about the draft budget, or the budget process itself. City staff have been providing answers to the questions as they come in.

To date there are three questions posted to the page by residents, including the following:

- Two questions: 1) Why does our city have a Deputy CAO most if not comparable cities do not seem's redundant and very unnecessary. 2) As losses on the Meridian Centre and First Ontario Centre continue to increase what is the city doing to mitigate the cost to the taxpayer?
- Is there anything in the 2020 budget implementing anything in the Fire Master Plan?
- In the 2020 Draft Operating Budget Report, under Social Issues, it is stated that city crews are being required to perform clean-up tasks "related to unsafely disposed needles and individuals living rough" that are beyond the scope of their roles. However there is no money allocated to the creation and development of social programs that would address the root cause of this problem. What is the city doing to properly address "Social Issues"?

These questions have been responded to thoroughly. Answers can be found on the page, www.engagestc.ca/2020budget.

The City also posted two questions, and detailed answers, for educational purposes, including:

- Why does the City have a 1% infrastructure levy?
- What is the hospital levy?

As the budget process continues to evolve, information on the page will continue to be updated to reflect the current status, and will be refreshed and revamped for the 2021 budget process. EngageSTC is a tool which can be used for ongoing engagement, whether it be through the current tools, or others available on the platform – some of which can be found in report number CAO-B029-2019, received by the Budget Standing Committee at its Sept. 16 meeting.