



The Corporation of the City of Stratford Finance and Labour Relations Committee MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2024
Time: 9:00 A.M.
Location: Council Chamber, City Hall

Committee Present: Councillor Hunter - Chair Presiding, Councillor McCabe - Vice Chair, Mayor Ritsma, Councillor Beatty, Councillor Biehn, Councillor Burbach, Councillor Henderson, Councillor Nijjar, Councillor Sebben, Councillor Wordofa

Regrets: Councillor Briscoe

Staff Present: Joan Thomson - Chief Administrative Officer, Tatiana Dafoe - City Clerk, Tim Wolfe - Director of Community Services, Karmen Krueger - Director of Corporate Services, Taylor Crinklaw - Director of Infrastructure Services, Adam Betteridge - Director of Building and Planning Services, Neil Anderson - Director of Emergency Services/Fire Chief, Dave Bush - Director of Human Resources, Audrey Pascual - Deputy Clerk, Shannon Archer - Business Integration Manager, Wendy Partridge - Administrative Assistant to the Director of Corporate Services, Johnny Bowes - Manager of Asset Management, Mike Mousley - Transit Manager, Brent Raycraft - Fleet Supervisor, Mark Hackett - Community Facilities Manager, Emily Skelding - Supervisor of Waste Operations, Darcy Drummond - Manager of Recreation & Marketing, Quin Malott - Cemetery Manager, Parks and Forestry Manager, Miranda Franken - Council Clerk Secretary, Joani Gerber - CAO investStratford, Zac Gribble - Executive Director, Destination Stratford

Also Present: Members of the Media

1. Call to Order

The Chair called the Meeting to Order.

Councillor Briscoe provided regrets for this meeting.

Land Acknowledgment

Moment of Silent Reflection

Respectful Conduct Statement

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest and the General Nature Thereof

The *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* requires any member of Council declaring a pecuniary interest and the general nature thereof, where the interest of a member of Council has not been disclosed by reason of the member's absence from the meeting, to disclose the interest at the first open meeting attended by the member of Council and otherwise comply with the *Act*.

Name, Item and General Nature of Pecuniary Interest

No disclosures of pecuniary interest were made by a Member at the December 3, 2024, Finance and Labour Relations Committee meeting.

3. Public Engagement and Activities Summary Report

3.1 Summary of Public Engagement Initiatives and Outcomes for Budget 2025 (FIN24-036)

Motion by Councillor Burbach

Seconded by Councillor Nijjar

Committee Decision: THAT the report titled, "Summary of Public Engagement Initiatives and Outcomes for Budget 2025 (FIN24-036)" dated December 3, 2024, be received for information.

Carried

4. Open Forum

Motion by Councillor Henderson

Seconded by Councillor Burbach

THAT the rules detailed in sections 14.1 - 14.3 of the Procedure By-law 140-2007, related to delegations be suspended to permit members of

the public in the gallery to provide comments on the draft 2025 budget.

Carried

No members of the public provided comments on the draft 2025 Budget.

5. Draft 2025 Budget Consideration and Discussion

5.1 Draft Capital Program

Committee Discussion: Staff and Members of Committee discussed line items of the Draft Capital Program. Highlights of the discussion included:

- the proposed transit van being available in gas or fully electric with no hybrid options being available;
- the electric option having a \$44,000 fuel savings over the life span of the vehicle, a warranty of 5 years on the car and 7 years on the battery with oil change and tire wear consistent between gas and electric;
- the first electric vehicle having been purchased in 2022, and 23 vehicles procured in 2024 with savings starting to be measurable now and over a 5 year trend, and this being reflected in the annual Climate Change Report;
- fleet service needs being evaluated at time of replacement with sports utility vehicles being more versatile for rural and all seasons travel than compact vehicles;
- vehicle pricing analysis done through the tender process and open to all dealerships or original equipment manufacturers or through Canoe Procurement process;
- Canoe being a cooperative purchasing group through Local Authority Services which completes vetting and ranking to provide competitive pricing and reduce tender process time;
- the John Deere tractor being recommended for replacement as the current tractor is a 2006 unit and underutilized;
- the 2011 Ice Resurfacer, being the primary machine at the William Allman Arena used on regular rotation 10 months of the year,

having issues over the last month as the machine is starting to wear and costs increasing annually for repairs;

- the Resurfacers currently being reserviced for an undiagnosed engine issue;
- by-law expansion vehicles being compact SUV's generally considered for more versatility with staff visiting construction sites, encampments and rural areas; and
- staff having researched leasing or renting a tractor for the cemetery and the cost being higher with a 5 year lease, staff currently relocating equipment to fill this void.

5.2 Draft Operating Budget

Committee Discussion: Staff and Members of Committee discussed line items of the Draft Operating Budget. Highlights of the discussion included:

- regarding the Mayor and Council draft budgets, Interfunctional IT support costs having been distributed to the areas being supported resulting in varying numbers;
- regarding the Committees of Council budgets, \$94,945 being consistent with the 2024 budget which was funded through the Council Committee Reserve and the 2025 budget being funded through the tax levy as the reserve has been depleted;
- the Energy and Environment Committee having spent \$10,000 on shoreline work around the lake and along the river, to increase accessibility and shore up the shoreline with native plants;
- a member asked if there is value in continuing with the advisory committees acknowledging the passion of the members and the value in public engagement;
- Oxford County having discontinued committees and assigning Ad Hoc committees with tasked purposes;
- the Council Administration line for Consultants being an item to cover costs for integrity commissioner services and in-camera investigations;

- regarding the CAO's Office, \$1.9 million having been transferred from the reserve fund for the Grand Trunk Renewal Project with funds not impacting the tax levy;
- the amount for Legal Services under Human Resources being a forecast to address labour relation matters;
- a member asked if there is value in the Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Division, with the DEI Division having been established in 2023 by Council;
- staff advising cuts to services are to be discussed in open session and discussions regarding elimination of employees to occur in closed session and a resolution to move into closed session being required to be adopted;
- staff not being in support of reducing DEI staff numbers;
- asset management having been reallocated under Corporate Services from IT;
- industrial land servicing typically having no levy impact;
- County Road Services being a shared agreement between the City and the County ending December 31, 2024 with discussions regarding renewal underway;
- Huron Perth Health and Paramedics having received better rates since the budget preparation with more reduction expected;

Councillor McCabe assumed the role of Chair at 10:01 a.m.

Councillor Hunter discussed the function of Community Grants regarding the cost on the taxpayer to support the program, the value to community health and the impact to Stratford General Hospital and Hospice. Discussion continued on:

- the increase to IT costs being attributed in part to technology replacements, upgrades to servers and complexity in navigating cyber attacks being costly;
- with technological advances, staff being reallocated with efforts focused in different areas; and

- the Chief Technology and Security Officer exploring AI options and piloting certain types of use ensuring Corporate data is not compromised.

The Finance and Labour Relations Committee recessed at 10:26 a.m. and resumed at 10:36 a.m.

Discussion continued on:

- parking services contracts having increased from 0 to \$28,000 with a change from manual cash handling processes of parking and transit coin to a Brinks System, this being previously captured under Corporate Services and now allocated to parking;
- parking being a revenue positive sector for the City with the parking reserve having been used to offset levy pressures through budget deliberations;
- staff having decreased the flower program and being efficient with locations and use of perennials as well as managing of grass schedule and lengths;
- the Goose Management line including invasive pest management with the current goose strategy being relocation of the birds to a bird sanctuary;
- staff in discussion regarding appropriate areas for naturalization;
- the boathouse washroom wages pertaining to janitorial staff operating hours year round and including repairs and maintenance;
- the Lions Pool revenue numbers having increased seeing \$158,000 in revenue and staff continuing accessibility upgrades with possible epoxy flooring to ensure safe use;
- staff recommending maintenance of the Discovery Center being retained in the budget with discussions on selling the asset in process, to ensure the cost is allocated for if not sold, and if sold this amount to be reallocated;
- the Discovery Center and the Airport being maintained until time of divesting;

- the cost of snow removal being determined by an average with the payment for snow removal being per removal;
- transit not being a cost recovery service and a member noting costs of transit could be lowered through a decrease in service;
- further discussion regarding the role of transit within the community, the cost to return to regular services on Saturdays and the cost to extend transit hours to accommodate a midnight shift to the factories;
- staff seeing an increase in ridership and adding an additional bus to handle peak ridership throughout December;
- a weekend supervisor being required for On-Demand services as well as fleet maintenance, customer support services, staffing, detours and snow removal;
- a report to come to Council early 2025 regarding PC Connect and staff looking for further grant opportunities and in discussion with PC Connect partners to continue the services with the current grant ending;
- the municipality looking to the Provincial government for a sustainable solution and discussion regarding Go Services;
- Fleet budget addressing repairs and vehicle expenses as the fleet ages and purchases or acquisitions for parts with staff better accounting for all repairs and this being reflected by division;
- roads being of continued concern with a backlog of underfunded capital in prior years and the tax rate held below inflation adding to a deficit that now requires additional road maintenance with no support from upper levels of government for infrastructure;
- road maintenance requirements being reviewed by staff under two processes, the first being sewer and water lines requiring construction for replacement and the second being resurfacing
- staff engineers assessing pavement structure every 3 years providing information on how to proceed, looking at collector and

arterial roads, and at planning work for best utilization of road servicing with the available budget;

- 40% of Stratford roads being in poor condition with staff anticipating funding for an additional 24% of 10 year forecast if maintaining infrastructure costs;
- staff note if contributions to the reserve are not maintained, the City will not keep up with inflation resulting in further road issues; and
- members noting this issue being nationwide with pressure being put on the Federal and Provincial Governments to have municipal tax dollars returned to assist.

The Finance and Labour Relations Committee recessed at 11:58 a.m. and reconvened at 12:33 p.m. Discussion continued on the draft budget:

- water and wastewater numbers prepared in September being based on the previous rate study and to be updated after Council has considered the new rates;
- the Conservation Authority levy having increased, with a minimum \$200,000 towards the John Street Weir and work expected on the dam, discussions to be had in 2025 to mitigate the Stratford contribution;
- discussion regarding waste contracts with staff differentiating between contactors and service contracts and the waste budget having decreased from 2024;
- the current waste collection contract expiring October 2026 with staff bringing a report to Council in 2025 to consider an updated recycling program to include public engagement;
- garbage bag tag service recovering \$1.2 million of waste collection costs and no change to the services in 2025, with many municipalities turning to further cost recovery of collection services in the last decade;

- garbage bag tags directly relating to housing and home security and being a barrier with free tags available to lower income households through Social Services; and
- the current Social Services budget being funded through Stratford, with St. Marys and Perth County sharing the cost of recoverables.

Motion by Councillor Wordofa

THAT the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Division be cut and reduced.

There was no seconder for the motion

Motion by Mayor Ritsma

Seconded by Councillor Biehn

Committee Decision: THAT a review of the organizational structure of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Division, including reviewing other municipal organization structures for this division, be referred to staff.

Carried

Motion by Councillor Hunter

Seconded by Councillor Biehn

Committee Recommendation: THAT the Community Grants and Supports be reduced to honour the multi-year commitments;

AND THAT the long-term commitments be ended.

A request was made to refer the program to staff.

Motion by Councillor Henderson

Seconded By Mayor Ritsma

Committee Decision: THAT the Community Grants Program be referred to staff to identify the organizations being supported through the grants program, both annual and multi-year grants.

Carried

Motion by Councillor Sebben

Seconded By Councillor Wordofa

Committee Recommendation: THAT the goose management service be referred to staff to investigate less expensive options.

Defeated

Motion by Councillor Sebben

Seconded by Mayor Ritsma

Committee Decision: THAT a review of the cost per ride for on-demand, weekly, and PC Connect transit services be referred to staff to analyze and report back to the Finance and Labour Relations Committee with information.

Carried

Motion by Councillor Wordofa

Seconded by Councillor Burbach

Committee Decision: THAT the expansion of the transit service to provide additional evening services be referred to staff to review options and financial implications.

Carried

5.3 Expansion Initiatives

Committee Discussion - Staff and Members of Committee discussed the proposed Expansion Initiatives. Highlights of the discussion included:

- the draft budget currently being an increase of 5.8% to municipal taxes with a goal to keep the increase under 5%;
- discussion regarding the Community Improvement Plan being to incentivize residents to add additional housing units including granny flats and above garage suites, to increase available affordable housing units;
- staff looking to the upcoming completion of the Official Plan and other tools for further affordable housing options with the municipal endorsement of this expansion request creating further opportunity for Federal or Provincial programming;
- the funds not being required now but being available for opportunities brought for Council consideration and allocated to this mandate;
- housing being a strategic priority and discussion regarding the use of funds from municipal land sales to be used towards affordable housing;

Motion by Councillor Burbach

Seconded by Councillor Sebben

Committee Decision: THAT the Community Improvement Plan - Attainable Housing Funding Expansion be added to the 2025 Budget and funded using \$150,000 from the Municipal Accommodation Tax Reserve.

Carried

Motion by Councillor Biehn

Seconded by Councillor Burbach

Committee Decision: THAT the Sale and Disposition of Land Policy be referred to staff to review the ability to direct a portion of municipal land sales, excluding industrial land, towards attainable housing initiatives, including Community Improvement Plans.

Carried

Motion by Councillor Burbach

Seconded by Councillor Sebben

Committee Recommendation: THAT the development of an Ad-Hoc Committee to review and develop a draft policy on the use of municipal accommodation tax funds be referred to staff.

Carried

Members discussed the Lights On Stratford funding request:

- Lights On Stratford funding being in the Operating Budget, matched by grants from the Federal and Provincial government with local business support and with matched funds through the Destination Stratford MAT tax amount;
- the event growing and being an anchor moving Stratford towards a year round tourism economy strategy with Stratford seeing events expanding into the winter season with example of two film festivals; and
- the City contributing to Destination Stratford and MAT tax being split with Destination Stratford being an arms length Tourism Division, separated to allow access to not for profit funding in the tourism sector.

Motion by Mayor Ritsma

Seconded by Councillor McCabe

Committee Decision: THAT the Destination Stratford - Lights On Expansion be approved using \$150,000 from the Municipal Accommodation Tax Reserve.

Carried

Members discussed the investStratford Grand Trunk Specialist request which is to be funded from the Grand Trunk Reserves and not contributing to the tax levy.

Motion by Mayor Ritsma

Seconded by Councillor Beatty

Committee Decision: THAT the investStratford - Grand Trunk Project Specialists/Support Expansion be approved and funded from the GTCH Reserve.

Carried

The Finance and Labour Relations Committee recessed at 2:04 p.m. and reconvened at 2:16 p.m.

Members discussed the mobility bus request which is meant to improve service and ensure a complement of 5 buses if one requires maintenance with staff currently seeing a two week wait time for service and hoping to see this shortened. It was questioned and confirmed that the additional bus does not require additional staff.

Motion by Councillor Burbach

Seconded by Councillor Henderson

Committee Decision: THAT the Additional Mobility Bus Expansion be added to the 2025 Budget.

Carried

Members discussed the requests for the in-house plumber and electrician as well as vehicles for these positions. Highlights of the discussion included:

- the requested positions being to serve Community Services, Social Services, Infrastructure Services and the IT Division with contracted services retained for emergencies and to ensure coverage; and

- Community Services having logged 317 electrical workorders and 638 plumbing workorders and Social Services having logged 663 units in Perth and Stratford requiring services in 2024.

Members discussed the Parks and Recreation Masterplan noting:

- the current plan being from 2005; and
- the Sports Tourism plan being more recent and the Parks and Recreation Masterplan effecting decision making in Building and Planning;

Members discussed the cost breakdown of the Human Resources Information System. Highlights included:

- staff outlining a comparison of current staff processing costs compared to implementation the HRIS; and
- the HRIS implementation intention being to reallocate staff and not downsize.

Members discussed the request for Electronic Message Board Trailers.

Motion by Councillor Burbach

Seconded by Councillor Biehn

Committee Decision: THAT the two (2) Electronic Message Board Trailers be added to the 2025 Budget

Carried

Discussion continued on:

- the request for a By-law Enforcement Officer and additional By-law vehicle with staff noting many by-laws being out of date and much work to be done to update and modernize;
- the request from Fire Services for an Emergency Management Coordination Training Exercise;
- the Corporate Communications Coordinator request with staff seeing an increased volume of questions requiring social media engagement and monitoring as well as the Engage Stratford platform;
- the current Communications staff serving all departments and requiring coverage at times;

- there being a responsibility to respond and correct misinformation on social media with members inquiring about tools or methods to offset this need;
- the Financial Services Supervisor being a position to offset manager time served towards day to day approvals and internal controls to refocus manager attention;
- the Enterprise Applications and GIS Supervisor with current capacity for IT staff maximized with limited ability to take on new initiatives;
- the additional By-law Officer position and the Supervisor of By-law position;
- the Backflow Prevention Officer being funded through user fees and environmental services, and currently consuming a lot of staff time with this position being by-law staff dedicated to cross connection back flow;
- the Policy and Placemaking Supervisor to focus on the Official Plan review;
- staff noting missed opportunities with an out of date Official Plan and current staff not having the capacity to dedicate time to the review;
- the position being a Policy Planner with focus on modern progressive policy plans and using the zoning by-law as a regulating tool towards proactivity not reactivity;
- the Maintenance Management Clerk position being reevaluated by staff following a restructuring of facility maintenance operations; and
- the Permanent Part Time Recreation/Facility Operators maintaining all events and facility requirements being cost neutral positions as they offset overtime hours accumulated by call in staff.

The Finance and Labour Relations Committee recessed at 3:23 p.m. and reconvened at 3:33 p.m.

It was questioned and confirmed that there is no levy impact for the Water Meter Technician expansion request as it will be fully funded through water rates.

Motion by Councillor Burbach

Seconded by Councillor Nijjar

Committee Decision: THAT the Water Meter Technician Expansion be added to the 2025 Budget.

Carried

Discussion continued on the draft Expansion Initiatives:

- the Community Energy Liaison being a pilot and contract position, with staff having applied for grant funding to cover 70% and staff recommending the position even without grant success to meet climate objectives and putting the City in a better position for grant funding with shovel ready projects;
- the Ontario Works Caseworker position not being affected by legislative changes;
- staff providing an update that the expansion requests initially being a 2% increase to proposed draft levy, and now being a 1.54% increase with the discussed changes if approved as presented and with the 1.5% increase recurring in 2026 to fund the second half of these expansions;
- with respect to office space for the additional staffing requests, staff noting the Space Utilization Plan is being finalized with a full assessment of the greater need and aiming not to rent space to accommodate additional positions;
- the Chair noting with current expansion requests and operational budget the tax increase being at 7.34% with members aiming to have the increase below 5% equating to finding an additional two million dollars in savings to hit this target;
- to minimize the levy impact members discussed funding options for the Plumber and Electrician positions and supporting vehicles with staff noting contract positions make attracting a workforce difficult; and

- staff noting the positions would have no tax levy impact as the salaries are replacing existing contracted service fees and, while the contracted services will be retained, the work required by contracted services would be minimized through this expansion.

Motion by Councillor Burbach

Seconded by Councillor Beatty

Committee Decision: THAT the Facilities Plumber Expansion be added to the 2025 Budget, subject to no levy impact.

Carried

Motion by Councillor Burbach

Seconded by Councillor Beatty

Committee Decision: THAT the Facilities Electrician Expansion be added to the 2025 Budget, subject to no levy impact.

Carried

Motion by Councillor Nijjar

Seconded by Councillor Biehn

THAT the expansion request for a Maintenance Management Clerk be deferred to the 2026 budget.

The motion was withdrawn.

Motion by Councillor McCabe

Seconded by Councillor Burbach

Committee Decision: THAT the Supervisor, Policy and Placemaking Expansion be added to the 2025 Budget.

Carried

Motion by Councillor Beatty

Seconded by Councillor Nijjar

Committee Decision: THAT the six (6) Permanent Part Time Recreation/Facility Operators Expansion be added to the 2025 Budget.

Carried

Motion by Councillor Hunter

Seconded by Councillor Burbach

THAT the Backflow Prevention Officer Expansion be added to the 2025 Budget.

The motion was withdrawn.

Motion by Councillor Henderson

Seconded by Councillor Biehn

Committee Decision: THAT the Ontario Works Caseworker Expansion be added to the 2025 Budget.

Carried

Motion by Councillor Nijjar

Seconded by Councillor Biehn

Committee Decision: THAT the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Expansion be deferred to the 2026 Budget for consideration.

Carried

Motion by Councillor Beatty

Seconded By Councillor Nijjar

Committee Recommendation: THAT the motion be amended - the Vehicle for Facilities Plumber Expansion be a gasoline powered vehicle.

Defeated

Members discussed possible cost savings related to electric, hybrid or combustion cars.

Motion by Councillor Burbach

Seconded by Councillor Nijjar

Committee Decision: THAT the Vehicle for Facilities Plumber Expansion be added to the 2025 Budget, subject to no levy impact.

Carried

Motion by Councillor Burbach

Seconded by Councillor Nijjar

Committee Decision: THAT the Vehicle for Facilities Electrician Expansion be added to the 2025 Budget, subject to no levy impact.

Carried

Motion by Councillor Henderson

Seconded By Councillor Sebben

Committee Decision: THAT the Community Emergency Management Coordinator (CEMC) Training Exercise Expansion be added to the 2025 Budget.

Carried

Members discussed the impact of the Community Energy Liaison position and the green initiatives saving money over time.

Motion by Councillor Burbach

Seconded by Councillor McCabe

Committee Recommendation: THAT the Community Energy Liaison Expansion (2 year pilot contract) be added to the 2025 Budget.

Defeated

Members discussed the options available to offset the Project Manager Expansion costs and the status of road maintenance.

Motion by Councillor Burbach

Seconded by Councillor Wordofa

Committee Recommendation: THAT the Project Manager Expansion (2 year contract) be added to the 2025 Budget.

Defeated

Motion by Councillor McCabe

Seconded by Councillor Wordofa

Committee Decision: THAT the By-Law Enforcement Officer Expansion be added to the 2025 Budget.

Carried

Members continued discussing the remaining Expansion Initiatives noting:

- the impact of the HRIS Expansion on the current manual process and further investigation into available options;
- interim solutions and long term options to find cost savings and fulfill efficiencies; and
- staff noting the expansion cost being intended to issue an RFP for a comparative search and the request tying into the GIS Supervisor position responsible for setting up the HRIS.

Motion by Councillor Burbach

Seconded by Councillor Nijjar

THAT the Human Resources Information System (HRIS) Expansion be added to the 2025 Budget.

The motion was withdrawn.

Motion by Councillor Hunter

Seconded by Mayor Ritsma

Committee Decision: THAT the Human Resources Information System (HRIS) Expansion be referred to staff to review options for this system and financial implications.

Carried

6. Upcoming Budget Meeting

A Finance and Labour Relations Committee meeting will be held on Monday December 9, 2024, at 4:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers to continue budget deliberations.

7. Adjournment

Motion by Mayor Ritsma

Seconded by Councillor McCabe

Committee Decision: THAT the Finance and Labour Relations Committee meeting adjourn.

Carried

Meeting Start Time: 9:00 A.M.

Meeting End Time: 4:39 P.M.