



The Corporation of the City of Stratford
Finance and Labour Relations Committee
Open Session
AGENDA

Date: Thursday, November 27, 2025
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

Staff Present: André Morin - Chief Administrative Officer, Tatiana Dafoe - City Clerk, Karmen Krueger - Director of Corporate Services, Audrey Pascual - Deputy Clerk, Tim Wolfe - Director of Community Services, Kim McElroy - Director of Social Services, Taylor Crinklaw - Director of Infrastructure Services, Adam Betteridge - Director of Building and Planning Services, Neil Anderson - Director of Emergency Services/Fire Chief, Miranda Franken - Council Clerk Secretary

To watch the Committee meeting live, please click the following link:

<https://video.isilive.ca/stratford/live.html>

A video recording of the meeting will also be available through a link on the City's website

<https://calendar.stratford.ca/meetings> following the meeting.

Pages

1. Call to Order

The Chair to call the Meeting to Order.

Land Acknowledgement

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

3. Opening Remarks

Opening Remarks to be provided by:

- Mayor Ritsma
- Councillor Hunter, Chair of the Finance and Labour Relations Committee
- André Morin, Chief Administrative Officer

4. 2026 Mayor's Budget Overview

5. Report of the Director of Corporate Services

5.1 Summary of Public Engagement Initiatives for the 2026 Draft Budget (FIN25-041)

4 - 11

Motion by

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Summary of Public Engagement Initiatives for the 2026 Draft Budget" (FIN25-041) dated November 27, 2025, be received for information.

6. Department Presentations

6.1 Mayor and Council, Chief Administrative Officer, Human Resources

6.2 Corporate Services

6.3 Social Services

6.4 Fire Services/Municipal Airport

6.5 Infrastructure Services

6.6 Community Services

6.7 Building and Planning Services

7. Outside Board Presentations

7.1 Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

7.2 investStratford

7.3 Stratford Public Library

7.4 Destination Stratford

7.5 Stratford Police Services

8. Delegations

9. 2026 Mayor's Budget Discussion and Proposed Amendments

10. Upcoming Budget Meetings

Finance and Labour Relations Committee meetings will be held to continue budget discussions (as necessary) at 9:00 a.m. in Council Chambers on:

- Monday, December 1, 2025
- Tuesday, December 2, 2025
- Monday, December 15, 2025

11. Adjournment

Meeting Start Time:

Meeting End Time:

Motion by

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



MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: November 27, 2025
To: Finance and Labour Relations Committee
From: Karmen Krueger, CPA, CA, Director of Corporate Services/Treasurer
Report Number: FIN25-041
Attachments: None

Title: Summary of Public Engagement Initiatives for the 2026 Draft Budget

Objective: To provide the Finance and Labour Relations Committee and Council with summarized results from the 2026 Budget Engagement activities.

Background: To take a slightly different approach this year, staff wanted to create more opportunities for meeting people where they go, as well as try a different approach to the traditional survey.

Using the Engage Stratford platform, departmental staff worked together with the Corporate Communication Specialist to devise some poll questions. These are typically multiple choice and very quick for people to answer, rather than a longer survey.

There were 7 quick polls released over the span of a few days, and social media was used to urge residents to answer the poll questions, as well as reach out to staff with any specific questions or comments. As of November 10, 2025, the polls were closed, and the results are summarized below.

In addition to the online forum, three different pop-ups were arranged along with an Open House. At these events, staff and Councillors were available to talk with residents about concerns, assist them with providing written comments on the boards, and in general to listen.

Analysis:

Polls

The questions below were asked with several multiple-choice options for the response. The full summary document does not meet accessibility standards, so the top answer only is noted below.

1. Inflation and rising costs make it challenging to maintain or enhance municipal services without raising taxes each year. Given that reality, which of the statements below best describes your view?

Seventy-six respondents; 45 selected "I think the City should be able to find a way to limit or reduce tax hikes without affecting service levels".

2. To maintain quality public services while accommodating growth, which of the following approaches do you most support?

Twenty respondents; 10 selected "Encourage more housing density (e.g. apartments, townhouses, secondary units) in existing neighborhoods".

3. Which of the following uses would most likely draw you to a redeveloped Grand Trunk site?

Nineteen respondents; 11 selected "Community facilities for recreation, gathering and culture".

4. When it comes to climate action, which one of the following sustainability initiatives is most important for the City of Stratford to prioritize?

Seventeen respondents; 7 selected "waste reduction programs".

5. What do you consider the most critical area to develop in the Social Housing program within the City of Stratford, Town of St. Marys, and Perth County?

Seventeen respondents; 10 selected "Availability: increasing the number of housing units that are affordable and/or a part of community (rent-geared-to-income) housing"

6. Of the options below, which one are you most likely to use to stay informed about the budget?

Seventeen respondents; 11 selected "social media".

7. Which of the following by-law enforcement issues should be a higher priority?

Sixteen respondents; 10 selected "Property maintenance (e.g. tall grass, derelict buildings)".

One takeaway for future years is consideration be given to the timing of the release of the questions. Based on the number of responses to the first question compared to the others, it does not appear that many respondents returned to provide feedback on the remaining questions.

There were three emails received from the Engage Stratford site responded to individually that were about where to find information in the budget document, and under which line item a specific initiative might be located.

Pop-Ups

- Saturday, November 1, 2025, Stratford Farmer’s Market
- Monday, November 3, 2025, The Local Community Food Centre (‘The Local’)
- Saturday, November 7, 2025. The Stratford Mall

At each of these locations, staff and/or members of Council were available to talk with interested residents regarding the City’s budget, long-term and short-term initiatives and hear concerns around services – existing and those that people may feel are missing.

In addition to one-on-one conversations, residents had the opportunity to provide written notes or comments on the white-boards, and place markers where they felt the City should continue to prioritize investment the most.

Themes from these are summarized below.

Pop-up – Farmer’s Market – Saturday, November 1, 7am-11:30am

Approximately sixty people spoke with staff and Council representatives. The responses focused on the following:

- Transit
 - More shelters at bus stops
 - Return to regular service on weekends (end on-demand)
- Other
 - Consider how everything affects seniors
 - Senior space
 - Where is our revenue stream?
 - Bicycling infrastructure (bike lanes)
 - I am pleased to hear the city is financing the warming centre (Thank you!)

Pop-up – The Local – Monday, November 3, 4pm-6pm

Approximately fifty people spoke with staff and/or participated in the interactive activities. The responses focused on attainable/affordable housing and transit including the following:

- Transit
 - Smaller buses
 - Increased weekend service (2)
 - Heated bus shelters
 - More transit routes
 - Increased mobility bus access
 - Benches at transit stops (2)

- Housing
 - Create portable housing while waiting for units to be built
 - Create smaller housing units (1-2 people)

- Other
 - Keep taxes low
 - Cut back on 'nice to have' items
 - More crosswalks on Downie Street (2)
 - Clear sidewalks better in winter
 - Need better transit system and affordable housing

Pop-up – The Mall – Saturday, November 7, 10am-1:30pm

This location was the least attended with only 2 comments.

- Add music venues
- Put (full) Police budget back in the final budget document

Summary

At each of the engagement events, the board listing several financial priorities was provided and residents were encouraged to put a sticker under the items they felt should be a priority for 2026. The results were as follows:

Priorities	Farmers Market	The Local	Stratford Mall	Total
Affordable Housing	19	15	0	34
Grand Trunk Site	14	2	0	16
Accessibility	4	1	0	5
Road Maintenance	13	1	0	14
Climate Change	9	1	0	10
Public/Community Transit	4	11	0	15
Location Total	63	31	0	94

Open House – City Hall Auditorium – Monday, November 3, 4pm-7pm

All departments were represented, along with various members of Council. Over the course of the evening approximately twenty members of the public and media attended the event.

Verbal conversations captured were around topics including:

- Comment received regarding the City's Organization Chart – believes the City is top heavy
- Comment that it would be nice to see comparison of property tax vs user fees historically
- Comment that City should consider more partnerships with healthcare sector on public transportation – previous LHIN example
- Customer service in Clerks department is fantastic and should be replicated across the City
- On demand transit is difficult for seniors on the weekend if they do not have a phone
 - Explained that they can book in advance, but this is challenging if they do not know the exact time of their return
- Battershall Park – City should make the trail crossing the park from Glastonbury to Hesson St. a more permanent active trail, and maintained in winter
- New Riverside Park – ensure connectivity with current trails and sidewalks
- Senior Services – the space is cold and not best for seniors, transportation is difficult to the site
- Fleet optimization – seems like we have too many vehicles

The interactive boards received many comments noted below:

Affordable Housing

- stop giving city land to developers to build market housing
- there are alternatives to spend and build to get people housed

Grand Trunk Site

- Forward momentum on site must be reinstated. Less ambition on vision. More focus on low-hanging fruit. Even the low-end estimate of third-party consultant is too high

- put on pause
- Library and the Y
- bulldoze it and be done
- what really is the plan?

Accessibility

- incentives for small business in old buildings
- involve OneCare for on-demand service on weekends

Road Maintenance

- a must. Roads are an embarrassment to everyone

Climate Change

- beet juice. Not salt

Public/Community Transit

- on-demand is terrible
- supply cell phones for seniors for on-demand services on weekends
- extend hours for afternoon and midnight shifts

Other

- municipal governments should be shrinking by 25%
- bring in a hybrid fire department (permanent and volunteer)
- contract the OPP to police Stratford. Savings \$6 million a year
- Arts and Culture needs increased funding in this social environment

While not the intent of the boards to solicit questions, the following were posed, so staff have prepared responses for members of Council and public to review.

1. Wage increases are 2%. Benefits increases are 3%. Insurance premiums increases are 5%. Why so high?

Staff Response: wage and benefit increases are estimates derived using averages in the market and comparable municipalities. Actual outcomes will be driven largely by collective agreements that expire in 2025.

Insurance premiums are estimated based on the number and type of claims made against the City and reflect the City's cost to protect assets. This estimated increase is lower than in previous years.

2. Operating costs set to rise by \$18 million but with a \$14 million bump in revenue, means the levy increase is \$4 million. Why the rise?

Staff response: operating costs increasing by \$18 million is due in part to inflation, collective agreement (wage and benefit impacts noted earlier), and investment in capital infrastructure with some additional spending that is linked to operational services funded by grants.

Non-taxation revenue increases are a mix of grant funding, increased contributions from our shared-services partners, user fees and revenues from leases, rents, and investment income.

3. Start with inflation level first! What does this mean for service impacts?

Staff response: the 2026 draft budget as presented captures inflationary estimates without impacting service delivery.

4. Why such a big change to waste management and recycling? Delay it!

Staff response: the main impact relates to the increase in contracted services and the changes to the blue-box program. More information is available on the City's website here www.stratford.ca/recycling

5. Total impacts within Council's control \$2,274,240. What can be cut or delayed?

Staff response: the draft budget was prepared with direction from the Mayor to minimize cuts to services. For more information on the direction provided by the Mayor under strong Mayor legislation, please see our website here: [Mayoral-Direction---2026-Budget](#).

6. The City needs to determine what constitutes level of service. What is poor, fair, adequate, good, exceptional.

Staff response: this is something Council and staff are consistently evaluating and balancing. The level of service (the degree to which the service is provided, whether it is provided at all, and community expectations) are all factors.

7. Police: Why such a big increase to outside boards?

Staff response: the Police increase specifically was a 5.72% increase over the 2025 costs. This reflects inflation, staffing pressures to maintain service levels during absences and ongoing investment in equipment requirements.

8. Draft Budget \$90,109,773 = levy change of 4.73% and impact on tax rate of 3.09%.

Staff response: yes, this is from the budget package.

Council and staff sincerely appreciate the residents who took the time to engage to better understand the City's budget, share their challenges and concerns and provide

thoughtful and constructive feedback. We hope to continue to build upon these methods of engagement and gain community insights.

The Engage Stratford platform appears to be one of the more effective methods to gather feedback and disseminate the considerable volume of information contained in the budget packages compared to other traditional methods. However, using the past two years as an indicator, the responses from residents at the in-person pop-ups has been encouraging as it provides opportunities for those who do not attend City Hall events to be heard.

Financial Implications:

Not applicable:

There are no financial implications because of this report.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities:

Intentionally Change to Support the Future

This report aligns with this priority as increasing engagement with residents is intended to inform Council decision-making.

Alignment with One Planet Principles:

Not applicable: This report does not specifically align with One Planet Principles.

Staff Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "Summary of Public Engagement Initiatives for the 2026 Draft Budget" (FIN25-041) dated November 27, 2025, be received for information.

Prepared by: Karmen Krueger, CPA, CA, Director of Corporate Services/Treasurer
Recommended by: Karmen Krueger, CPA, CA, Director of Corporate Services/Treasurer
 André Morin, Chief Administrative Officer