



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

Date: Thursday, December 14, 2023
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: Joan Thomson - Chief Administrative Officer, Tatiana Dafoe - City Clerk, Tim Wolfe - Director of Community Services, Karmen Krueger - Director of Corporate 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, Chris Bantock - Deputy Clerk, Danielle Clayton - Recording Secretary, Shannon Archer - Business Integration Manager, Dave Buck - Health and Safety Manager, Lindsay Wells - Human Resources Coordinator, Wendy Partridge - Administrative Assistant to the Director of Corporate Services, Krista Robinson – Chief Executive Officer of Stratford Public Library, Nancy Roulston - Manager of Engineering, Zac Gribble - Executive Director of Destination Stratford, Greg Skinner – Police Chief of Stratford Police Services, Gerry Foster – Deputy Police Chief of Stratford Police Services, Joani Gerber – Chief Executive Officer of investStratford

Also Present: Members of the Media

1. Call to Order

The Chair called the Finance and Labour Relations Committee meeting to Order.

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 declarations of pecuniary interest were made by a member at the December 14, 2023, Finance and Labour Relations Committee.

Motion by Councillor McCabe

Seconded by Councillor Biehn

Committee Decision: THAT the Addendum to the Finance and Labour Relations Committee dated December 14, 2023, be added to the agenda as printed to include the 2024 Budget Survey Results to Item 5.

Carried

3. Opening Remarks

Mayor Ritsma thanked the Director of Corporate Services and staff for their work in preparing the draft 2024 budget. The Mayor acknowledged that Council has accomplished a lot in the past year. The investment into the City's infrastructure and services were the result of courageous and forward-thinking decisions. These investments were funded through a required tax levy in 2023 and important reserves that were purposely accumulated to fund these initiatives.

In addition to investment in infrastructure and provision of services, the draft 2024 budget acknowledges the urgency around providing support for those experiencing homelessness, the need for supportive and affordable housing, along with accessibility. Attention must also be given to the City's commitment to the climate change action plan. The Mayor noted the City is grateful for provincial and federal grant funding but that it must be mindful that due to some grants no longer being available there may be an impact to budget or the level of service the City can provide. The Mayor encouraged Council to enter budget discussions with an open mind.

The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) thanked staff for their work in preparing the draft 2024 budget. The CAO noted that the Corporate Leadership Team has carefully considered what has been included in the draft budget and the impact on expenditures, future expenditures, and funding sources in order to continue to provide municipal services. The Director of Corporate Services and the Administrative Assistant to the Director of Corporate Services were thanked for compiling the budget binders which is a great resource. The CAO noted the fiscal challenges facing municipalities can be seen through a variety of lenses. The City's infrastructure continues to age and needs to be replaced which requires capital reserves to continued to be funded. Climate change initiatives and embedding these in service delivery will require strategic decision making by Council. Key financial pressures are reflected in the draft 2024 budget which are needed to maintain core services and infrastructure. Key pressures include the rate of inflation, an increased demand for services and supports, and rising interest rates. The CAO asked Council to consider during budget deliberations the need for financial strategies that reflect new or expanded revenues along with long term planning and changing provincial mandates for municipalities.

Councillor Hunter thanked the Director of Corporate Services and staff for all the work that was put into the draft budget. He noted that there will be presentations from each department and opportunities to ask questions.

4. Treasurer Overview

The Director of Corporate Services provided an overview of the draft 2024 budget, highlighting the following:

- there being time after each departmental presentation to ask questions and seek clarification;
- motions being required to amend or add items to the draft budget;
- interfunctional transfers between departments being outlined;
- the IT division budget being divided across various departments;
- Council not having the authority to make operating decisions for the Stratford Library and Stratford Police Services Boards;
- the impact of Bill 23 and costs downloaded to taxpayers being noted;
- significant impacts to the budget including wages, collective agreements, CPI, WSIB claims (employer costs), employee benefits, shifts in CPP or EI premiums;

- changes to fire dispatching services being reflected in the draft budget as a purchase service cost and having first year set up costs following transfer to a third party;
- there being an increase in insurance premiums and risk management costs;
- there being increases to community supports to reflect the impact of Bill 23 and a phasing in effect of development charges;
- the City being required to demonstrate to the province that it has a sustainable and viable financial plan for asset management;
- there being post employment benefit liability for certain employee groups;
- costs for IT having increased across all departments and being reflected through interfunctional allocations;
- there being a net increase to Community Grants due to reduced applications and an increase in the hospital pledge as the hospice pledge has been completed;
- following gapping of approved 2023 staff positions, there being an increase in costs in 2024 to reflect the full cost for those positions;
- there being a slight decrease in anticipated dividend revenue from Festival Hydro;
- revenues and reserves being reallocated;
- parking division revenues will be transferred to the capital reserve in 2024 due to there being sufficient amounts in the reserve and utilizing those funds to lower the tax levy;
- the assumptions and estimates in the draft operating budget requiring adjustments such as insurance, recurring grant funding that has not been confirmed and any new direction from Council; and
- the draft budget not including expansion requests, funds for future year site development for the Cooper Site, consideration of disposition of land or other assets for future projects, and the potential revenue from the municipal accommodation tax having not been proposed as a funding source for any proposed projects.

The Director advised that at this time the increase, after being blended with the education tax rates and growth considerations, is estimated at 8.2% which would be about \$435.00 on a home assessed at \$350,000.00. The home assessed value is based on MPAC's value and not the real estate market value. The Director advised that Stratford will be going through an assessment period with MPAC in the next couple of years. The assessment period will affect the tax rates but should not affect the proportionate amount of taxes that people will pay. The Director advised that the MPAC assessed value depends on a variety of factors.

The Director referred to a spreadsheet detailing the tax levy increase for the past 10 years. The past three years having seen larger increases but that the overall increase over the 10 year period being 16%.

The Director advised the proposed budget puts the City in a positive position to focus on asset management renewal and capital investments while prioritizing infrastructure. The Director stated that with the proposed levy increase, Stratford's tax rates do remain in the middle range compared to similar sized cities that have a similar assessment base. With the draft 2024 budget, there needs to be a balance between affordability and strategic advancement.

The Director provided clarification on what purchase services are and provided examples including the PC Connect service through Voyago.

5. 2024 Budget Survey Results

The Director of Corporate Services highlighted the results of the 2024 budget survey.

Councillor Wordofa left the meeting at 9:39 a.m.

Highlights from the budget survey included:

- over 100 responses to the survey having been received which was a lower response rate than last year;
- paper copies having been hand delivered to locations throughout the City including the library and the foodbank; and
- reoccurring themes included frustrations, members of the public not wanting to see an increase in taxes, and a majority of respondents understanding the rising costs of services.

Councillor Wordofa returned to the meeting at 9:40 a.m.

Members noted the encouraging response to the survey and that there seems to be a few common misunderstandings that the public has regarding services. It was noted by members of Committee that it will be a challenge to increase services but not increase the tax levy.

Motion by Councillor Burbach

Seconded by Councillor Nijjar

Committee Recommendation: THAT the report titled, "2024 Budget Survey Results" dated December 14, 2023 (FIN23-036), be received for information.

Carried

6. Department Presentations

6.1 Chief Administrative Office

The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) referring to a PowerPoint presentation, provided an overview of the opportunities and challenges facing the department and the Grand Trunk project.

Discussion was held around the Grand Trunk site, the YMCA and the City of Stratford's Memorandum of Understanding and the possibility of future partnerships.

The CAO provided an overview of the opportunities and challenges of the Mayor and Council budget, along with upcoming projects.

Discussion was held around the strategic priorities sessions and clarification around using consultants for certain projects.

The CAO presented the draft 2024 budget for Advisory Committees of Council. The following was highlighted:

- the funds having been requested by individual advisory committees;
- the funds being used to carry out their activities; and
- there being funds for recording secretary services to support these committees.

The Director of Corporate Services advised that advisory committees operate within their allocated amounts and that there is a reserve set up.

6.2 Human Resources

The CAO, referring to a PowerPoint presentation, reviewed the opportunities, challenges, and highlights of the Human Resources' proposed budget.

Discussions were held around becoming fully AODA compliant by 2025.

6.3 Corporate Services

The Director of Corporate Services, referring to a PowerPoint presentation, reviewed the opportunities and challenges for the department along with the draft capital and operating budget.

Discussion took place between staff and Council regarding the Queen Street parking lot lease extension and the Heritage Facade Program.

The Finance and Labour Relations Committee meeting took a break at 10:26 a.m. and resumed at 10:36 a.m.

Councillor Beatty left the meeting at 10:36 a.m.

6.4 Social Services

Councillor Wordofa left the meeting at 10:38 a.m.

The Director of Social Services, referring to a PowerPoint presentation, reviewed the opportunities and challenges for the department along with the draft capital and operating budget and expansion requests.

Councillor Wordofa returned to the meeting at 10:41 a.m.

The Director confirmed that the department will be applying for any funding opportunities that become available throughout the year.

6.5 Fire Services / Municipal Airport

The Director of Emergency Services/Fire Chief, referring to a PowerPoint presentation, reviewed the opportunities and challenges for the department along with the draft capital and operating budget.

Discussion took place between staff and Committee regarding office equipment requirements and the number of staff required to be on shift.

The Director, referring to a PowerPoint presentation, reviewed the opportunities and challenges for the Airport and the draft capital and operating budget.

6.6 Infrastructure Services

The Director of Infrastructure Services, referring to a PowerPoint presentation, reviewed the opportunities and challenges for the department, along with the draft capital and operating budget.

6.7 Community Services

Councillor Beatty returned to the meeting at 11:01 a.m.

The Director of Community Services, referring to a PowerPoint presentation, reviewed the opportunities and challenges for the department, along with the draft capital and operating budget.

Discussion was held on the renovations required for the Justice Building. With respect to summer programming, the Director indicated that the City will be utilizing local schools to provide additional programming.

6.8 Building and Planning Services

The Director of Building and Planning Services, referring to a PowerPoint presentation, reviewed the opportunities and challenges for the department. The expansion requests, and draft capital and operating budget were reviewed.

Discussion was held on training activities for new staff. The Director advised that discussions have been had with the consultants regarding the Official Plan and the Secondary Plan review.

7. Outside Board Presentations

7.1 InvestStratford

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO), referring to a PowerPoint presentation, reviewed the opportunities and challenges for the Board, along with the draft capital and operating budget.

Discussion was held regarding the expansion request for the Stratford Housing Concierge position. The CEO of InvestStratford advised that it would be a contract position that would work closely with the Social Services Department and the Building and Planning Department.

7.2 Stratford Police Services

The Police Chief and Deputy Chief of Stratford Police Services, referring to a PowerPoint presentation, reviewed the opportunities and challenges for

Stratford Police Services. The draft capital and operating budgets were also reviewed. The Police Chief noted that the budget was approved in October 2023 by the Police Service's Board as legislated under the Police Services Act. The role of Council is to either approve the overall budget as submitted by the Board or refer it back to the Board for further review. It was noted that Council does not have the authority to approve or remove specific line items in the draft budget.

Discussion was held between staff and Committee regarding the implementation of red-light cameras and staff indicated that they are looking at what other municipalities are doing to increase traffic safety and public safety. The CAO indicated that Stratford Police Services are also able to apply for grants when they become available. The Police Chief stated that from his understanding, the front entrance to 17 George Street will comply by the AODA deadline.

The Finance and Labour Relations Committee took a break at 12:05 p.m. and resumed at 12:36 p.m.

Councillor Burbach no longer present at the meeting at 12:36 p.m.

7.3 Stratford Public Library

The Chief Executive Officer of the Stratford Public Library, referring to a PowerPoint presentation, provided an overview of the services that the Library offers, their partnerships and the 2024 capital program.

The options for the library's physical expansion were discussed as the lack of space has been an ongoing issue for many years.

7.4 Destination Stratford

Destination Stratford's Executive Director provided an overview of the 2024 opportunities for the organization, including Lights on Stratford, Stratford Al Fresco expansion and the development of a Winter City Strategy.

Councillor Burbach returned to the meeting at 12:53 p.m.

The Executive Director provided an overview of challenges facing the organization and proposed expansion initiative's for 2024.

Discussion was held between staff and Committee on Destination Stratford's budget and costs for Lights On Stratford, staffing for Lights On Stratford, and ways to bring in more tourism opportunities.

The Executive Director indicated that Light's On Stratford will always be free to the public and that there will be a charitable component. An overview of the application process to use Market Square and the park system was provided.

The Finance and Labour Relations Committee took a break at 1:13 p.m. and resumed at 1:42 p.m.

8. Draft 2024 Budget Consideration and Discussion

8.1 Draft Capital Budget

The Director of Corporate Services, referring to a PowerPoint presentation, provided an overview of the draft capital budget, highlighting the following:

- in 2024 there are 105 proposed projects compared to 2023 where there were 109 proposed projects;
- there being a need to consider the replacement and rehabilitation of existing assets that are used in the delivery of the City's services; and
- the following items not having been included in the draft budget: requirements for the Cooper Site beyond 2024, industrial land expansion, road rehabilitation work identified in the asset management plan, long term debt requirements for capital proposed in the 2024 expansions and other strategic initiatives.

Discussion was held between staff and members of Committee about the impact of the proposed budget to the tax levy. It was noted that staff are constantly looking for grant opportunities. It was noted that many grants apply to shovel ready projects and that grants will not always be able to cover 100% of a project.

Councillor Wordofa left the meeting at 2:06 p.m.

Members of Committee noted that hard choices are going to have to be made to be able to balance service delivery levels. It was noted that budgets that were provided were to maintain current service levels.

Beginning with the draft Capital Budget for the Corporate Services Department, discussion was held between staff and members of Committee on the initiatives related to parking. The Director of Corporate Services noted the initiatives related to parking are funding from the parking reserve and therefore there is no impact to the tax levy. Project A.1.5, Queen Street Parking Lot, has also been removed from 2024 following a decision by Council to lease the facility. This project will be added into the 10 year capital budget.

Councillor Wordofa returned to the meeting at 2:18 p.m.

With respect to project A.1.1, Erie Lot Improvements, it was noted that a report is forthcoming on the Erie Street parking lot to outline all options for the reconstruction of the lot. The improvements for the lot would be to bring it up to today's standards and add new features.

Project A.1.3, EV Charging Stations, was discussed, specifically the amount of grant funding received and the City's contributed to the project.

A request was made to defer Project A.1.2, Smart Parking Project.

Motion by Councillor Sebben

Seconded by Councillor Wordofa

Committee Recommendation: THAT project A.1.2, Smart Parking Project, be deferred to the 2025 budget deliberations.

Discussion was held between staff and members of Committee on the project and the deferral.

The Chair called the question on the motion.

Defeated

Discussion took place regarding project A.1.3, EV Charging Stations project. A request was made to defer the project. As there was no seconder for this motion it was not put on the floor for discussion.

Motion by Councillor Sebben

Seconded by Councillor Biehn

Committee Recommendation: THAT project A.1.4, Comprehensive Parking Management System, be deferred to the 2025 budget deliberations.

Discussion was held between staff and members of Committee regarding the proposed parking management system. It was noted that this system would replace multiple systems that are already in place and reduce the number of service agreements and fees.

The Chair called the question on the motion.

Defeated

On the draft capital budget for the IT Division, it was noted that for project A.2.1, Personal Computers, the computers are rotated for replacement so that not all are replaced at the same time to help with the cost.

Motion by Councillor Sebben

Seconded by Councillor Biehn

Committee Recommendation: THAT project A.2.3, Video Surveillance Equipment, be deferred to the 2025 budget deliberations.

Staff noted that the current video surveillance system is at the end of its life and there are challenges when it comes to new software releases. Discussion was held around the requirements for cyber insurance.

The Chair called the question on the motion.

Defeated

On project B.1.1, Fire Station 2 Façade Repair, in the draft Fire Department capital budget, it was noted the proposed amount for the replacement of the siding is an estimate as the full scope of the work is not known at this time.

Members and staff discussed the draft Community Services capital budget. Items discussed included:

- there being an increased need for accessible playgrounds;
- an indoor pool not being considered as there are plans for one to be located on the Cooper Site at the YMCA facility;
- the proposed replacement of the cemetery garage doors;
- updating the National Stadium washrooms to bring them into compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005;

- updating of the Justice Building; and
- upgrading the railing on the terrace at the Agriplex.

Motion by Councillor Biehn
Seconded by Councillor Sebben

Committee Recommendation: THAT project C.3.8, Agriplex Guardrail Replacement, be deferred to the 2025 budget deliberations.

Discussion was held around the condition of the railing, along with the options available and requirements to update the railing.

A request was made by the mover and supported by the seconder to amend the motion to include that staff be directed to review and prepare a report on options available for refurbishing the guardrail at the Agriplex.

Discussion continued regarding the need to replace the guardrail and whether alternatives, such as adding concrete, could be considered. Concern was expressed with deferring projects and the implications for future budgets. Discussion continued on the conditions of the railing and the options of renting out the space to obtain an additional revenue source

The Chair called the question on the motion.

Defeated

A member requested that alternatives to repair the guardrail be explored and staff advised they would review and present the additional information when the project proceeds forward to Council.

Members discussed the draft capital budget for the Transit Division. Highlights of the discussion included:

- the purchase of hybrid buses;
- the automatic bus wash being replaced; and
- there being a bus storage facility upgrade for mobility buses.

Discussion was held around the draft Infrastructure Services Department capital budget. Items discussed included the following:

- removal of item D.1.12 as this has been completed; and
- pedestrian crossing improvements and locations.

Discussion between staff and members of Committee took place regarding item D.1.10, Lakeside Drive Design and TIS. Staff clarified that funds have been included to undertake a complete traffic study which will look at the impact on traffic lights, traffic flow and the affects on surrounding streets.

Motion by Councillor Sebben

Seconded by Councillor Biehn

Committee Recommendation: THAT project D.1.10, Lakeside Drive Design and TIS, be filed.

It was noted by the Director of Infrastructure Services that the department does currently have traffic counts in the Lakeside Drive area. The Director confirmed that a motion was defeated at a previous Council meeting to reduce the lanes of traffic on Lakeside Drive during the month of August.

The Chair called the question on the motion.

Defeated

Discussion was held between staff and members of Committee regarding project D.1.11, Erie Street Active Transportation. The Director noted that the active transportation piece of the project will be included with the resurfacing project. The Manager of Engineering stated that Erie Street will be updated to have the correct size of lanes and will be able to have protected bicycle lanes.

The remaining draft capital budget items and those listed on the agenda were deferred for consideration to the December 15th Finance and Labour Relations Committee meeting.

8.2 DEFERRED - Draft Operating Budget

8.3 DEFERRED - Expansion Requests

9. Upcoming Budget Meeting

A Finance and Labour Relations Committee meeting will be held on Friday, December 15, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. in the Council Chambers to continue budget deliberations.

10. Adjournment

Motion by Mayor Ritsma

Seconded by Councillor Sebben

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

Carried

Meeting Start Time: 9:01 A.M.

Meeting End Time: 3:56 P.M.