

City Watch Meeting – December 12, 2019

Post-Meeting Debrief: City Budget

Venue: Social Planning Council of Winnipeg (432 Ellice)

Chair: Kate Kehler

Agenda:

- Introductions
- Budget presentation debrief
- Next steps

General Debrief Notes:

- Important to have an answer as to where the revenue for a particular ask should come from as that is a question mayor and council ask. Please see the attached asks from the Alternative Municipal Budget as good examples and the full report available at - <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba%20Office/2018/06/Alt%20Municipal%20Budget%202018.pdf>. An op-ed is in the works that highlights the cost of the breaks that the City continues to give to the Jets and True North. Grants in the Budget are listed in Appendix 2 of volume 2, Capital and operating. Last year, True North got \$8.349 million. This is part of a multi-year agreement. Plans for a cut to True North would have been part of the presentation of the Taxation and Assessment department: https://www.winnipeg.ca/interhom/Budget/2020Budget/pdfs/2020-Multi-year-Budget-Presentation_Assessment-and-Taxation_20191120.pdf. There was nothing mentioned about a cut to True North.
- Consider a commuter fee through an employment tax for people who travel in every day for work but live outside the perimeter. Since this will involve the provincial government it will be a longer term strategy but for more information check out CCPA's report: https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba%20Office/2019/10/The_high_cost_of_free_riding.pdf
- The need to increase business taxes can actually be bolstered by the Manitoba Police Commission's report on downtown safety: http://www.manitoba.ca/asset_library/en/proactive/winnipeg-downtown-safety-report-2019.pdf. Some businesses are keen to pay private security but not pay taxes so that public priorities can be better met and the public can hold officials to account.
- If using urban sprawl as part of your argument, the maps that the city created and were used in Brent Bellamy's piece (<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/analysis/citys-expanding-footprint-has-high-cost-564840752.html>) are not accurate according to Brian Mayes and new ones are being developed.
- Consider impact of property tax increase on seniors with large houses/properties but significantly reduced sources of income presently. Maybe propose a tax deferral plan that can help these seniors along with other low income folks. Please see the attached table as an example.

- How can we answer mayor and some councillors: “I ran on 2.33% maximum tax increase. I have to stick to that.”
 - Two articles from 2019 budget process have potential:

Winnipeg mayor says 9.4% property tax increase possible as provincial funding dispute continues | CBC News <<http://cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/pc-government-city-winnipeg-budget-taxes-bowman-fielding-1.5035916>>

“Just days before a municipal budget is tabled, Winnipeg Mayor Brian Bowman says a higher-than-expected tax hike, increased debt or cuts to infrastructure projects are the three options available because of provincial a funding freeze.”

Go to article <<http://cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/pc-government-city-winnipeg-budget-taxes-bowman-fielding-1.5035916>>

- Note that the Provincial government has frozen funding to city since 2016.
- Point out that economic conditions of our city has now changed
- Cite the costs of the social deficit created given that Winnipeg Centre is the federal riding with the third highest and highest rate of child poverty in the country as per Campaign 2000 child poverty by federal riding (<https://campaign2000.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Campaign-2000-Riding-by-Riding-Child-Poverty-Report.pdf>) and the latest WRHA health outcomes report (<https://www.wrha.mb.ca/research/cha2019/community-health-assessment-2019-full.pdf>) that demonstrates that those who live in high poverty areas have higher rates of diabetes, hypertension and mental health issues and can have as much as an 18 year difference in life expectancy than more affluent neighbourhoods. The ‘take-away’ from the Community Services budget presentation was that due to previous under-funding much used, loved and needed facilities have become so rundown that the City can longer afford and/or they are not worth fixing. Current messaging from the budget process is that Council will continue this trend except when it comes to a brand new mega-facility
- For other interesting statistics and maps, please check out <http://www.mbcdp.ca/> for clear pictures on how the areas with the highest poverty are also the most racialized
- Crime statistics available at <https://www.winnipeg.ca/police/crimestat/viewMap.stm>
- For information/alternatives on meth please check out CCPA’s latest State of Inner City https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/2019/12/State_of_the_Inner_City_2019.pdf
- Start campaign to try to get majority of the public on board with property tax increase
 - Engage with different audiences, neighbourhoods and the private sector
 - Engage progressive seniors to start advocating for higher taxes (Kate will connect with some Fred Douglas folks)
 - Pictorial explanations or infographics with simple relationships (a Netflix monthly compared to ? will help)
 - SPCW and CCPA have some funds to engage AYO! for social media campaign materials. One focus can be on the \$40,000 shortfall from the province – Molly will pull together #s on this. Kate will follow-up with AYO!

- Some departments like the public library can be motivated to raise points like their capacity to build revenue for sustainability
- Orly mentioned that the Real Estate board will say that Winnipeg pays amongst the highest property taxes but they include education taxes in their calculations. Here is their article: <https://www.winnipegrealestatenews.com/publications/real-estate-news/3861/winnipeg-property-tax-among-highest-in-canada>
- This blog by Michael Durand-Wood has all the necessary city graphs re property taxes and per-capita spending. Please consider emphasizing that by spending so little, we have contributed to our city's decline as truly affordable and sustainable <https://www.dearwinnipeg.com/2019/11/25/waverley-wexit/>
- Orly also sent this Strong Towns work on financing development: <https://www.strongtowns.org/the-growth-ponzi-scheme>
- Useful comparison piece to Regina: <https://globalnews.ca/news/6303013/regina-eliminating-crime-boost-recreation-culture-fund/>
- Cuts to community organizations, including Assiniboine Park were discussed in the Community Services Budget Presentation (attached)

Next steps in the City's process:

All recommendations brought forward from the Standing Policy Committees will be forwarded to Executive Policy Committee to consider when preparing the draft operating and capital budgets.

It is expected the draft operating and capital budgets will be tabled in February 2020 and discussed at Standing Policy Committee meetings through March 2020. The multi-year budget will be voted on by Council before March 31, 2020, as required by law.