

Summary of What Administration Heard: Subsequent Motion 4

The following is a summary of what Administration heard regarding subsequent motion 4 from the 2024 Fall Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment.

What Council Wants to See

A foundational budget that allows a full understanding of where all dollars are going and how they are being spent.

A focus on efficiencies and prioritization to put money in the right areas, not necessarily to find savings.

A budget based on the service level desired, what it takes to deliver the work, and a series of service packages.

Service packages that include the base level, current level and enhanced level of service.

A collaborative process between council, administration and the public.

Branch-by-branch presentations that show service packaging and allow council to ask questions.

A review of each program to determine if it is achieving its outcomes and if it should be continued.

A process that is council-led, with support from administration.

Benchmark comparisons with other municipalities for costs, kilometers of roads, hectares of green space, number of civic buildings, etc.

A one-time exercise leading up to the creation of the 2027-2030 operating budget.

A process that creates a long-term culture focused on efficiency and prioritization.

A process that is a reset for the budget and not just a continuation of the previous year's budget.

A process to determine service levels and standards, recognizing that there are minimum standards for some services such as snow removal.

Inclusion of all ABCs (Agencies, Boards and Commissions), especially the Police Commission.

Consideration of a hybrid approach combining zero-based budgeting with other methodologies.

What Council Does Not Want to See

A rushed process that does not allow for a methodical and collaborative approach.

Cost-saving motions that only look for savings that can be returned rather than re-invested.

A process that is not transparent or does not include all relevant stakeholders, such as ABCs (Agencies, Boards and Commissions).

Assumptions on the continuation of service.

A process that does not improve or change the existing system.

A process that is not collaborative with unions and other stakeholders.

A process that does not consider legal requirements or minimum standards for certain services.

A process that does not address equity concerns or that favours organized groups over others.

A process that is resource intensive without a clear understanding of the scope and time commitment.

A process that is a cost-cutting exercise rather than a prioritization exercise.

A process that does not consider the subjective nature of some services and how to measure success.

A process that leads to privatization of public services.

A process that does not align service levels with what council is looking for or their priorities.

A process that interferes with the delivery of core services.

A process that involves hiring a team and consultants without a clear direction.

Summary

Council is proposing a move towards zero-based budgeting for the 2027-2030 budget cycle. This initiative aims to create a foundational budget that provides a clear understanding of how resources are allocated, shifting from a focus on cost-cutting to one of prioritization and efficiency. Key elements include branch-by-branch presentations, consideration of various service levels, and a collaborative approach with stakeholders including unions and the public.

Council does not want the process to simply carry forward previous budgets or to become a cost-cutting measure that ignores the need to re-invest in critical services. Concerns were raised about equity, the potential for privatization, and the resource-intensive nature of the undertaking, as well as the timeline for completion. There is a desire to create a long-term culture of efficiency rather than a one-time exercise with no lasting impact.

Council recognizes that some service standards are legally mandated, and the process should be designed to avoid unnecessary delays in areas that are not up for debate. While some Councilors expressed concerns about the depth of this budget process, most see it as an opportunity to ensure resources are allocated strategically, and that services are aligned with the community's needs and values. The process will require clear terms of reference, and ongoing input from a dedicated Committee of Council.