

# 2014 Operating Budget - Public Engagement

## Recommendation:

That the September 18, 2013, Financial Services and Utilities report CR\_450, be received for information.

## Report Summary

**This is an information report on public engagement being explored in relation to the 2014 budget process.**

## Previous Council/Committee Action

At the July 16, 2013, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration prepare a report for the September 18, 2013, City Council meeting, outlining a public engagement process for the 2014 Operating Budget.

## Report

### Public input before the October 21 municipal election

- In election years, Administration reduces public engagement activity during the campaign period and generally does not initiate new public projects in order to avoid creating a perception of favouring incumbent candidates and their previous decisions on Council.
- Election campaigns by individual candidates and in candidate forums generally serve as a useful process for collecting input on City projects,

citizen values and spending priorities.

- City-managed public engagement activity in the period leading up to the election is either focused on the candidate forums or to continue projects that were initiated before the campaign season.

### Public engagement on budget after the October 21 municipal election

- Public attendance at meetings and in online forums has been low when it occurs BEFORE a proposed budget is presented to Council.
- Public attendance at meetings on the budget AFTER a proposed budget is presented to Council has been higher in some years, however, after an election, public may have fatigue for consultation activities such as town halls and forums.
- Public input received after a proposed budget is tabled can not be incorporated into the proposed budget, but can be compiled and presented to Council as part of Budget deliberations in November and December. However, public input may be seen as redundant to newly appointed Councillors who have gained considerable input during the election campaigns.

### Year-round consultation

- Public consultation continues to be used by departments each year to evaluate a range of City services over varying operational cycles. Public input is used by operating units to help inform decisions about service levels, change in demand and change in types of service.

- This input is factored into each department's development of proposed budgets.

### **Additional public engagement options being developed**

- Deliver a public awareness campaign on the 2014 budget process, services delivered, limitations on revenue/funding following the election.
- Promotion of the non-statutory public hearings held over a few days in Council Chamber following the release of the proposed budget on November 1, 2013.
- Improved information on the City website on services and projects in recent budgets to provide a foundation for understanding.

### **Online Consultation**

- The City is growing an online community panel to gather input on public perceptions about a range of service areas and issues, over several months. The recruitment to the forum started with the 2012 budget consultation process. For the 2013 budget process, the online participation grew to more than 1,570 volunteer participants.
- The panelists provide demographic information such as age, gender, Ward and income level to allow weighting of input to reflect the city's actual demographics. Recruitment is continuing in 2013.
- For the 2014 budget process, the online community panel and the City's website will be used to support the information about the budget process and services, and seek input about what would Edmontonians suggest to improve services, and input on

preferred approach to balancing the budget.

- The results from this online community panel consultation will be aggregated and presented in "raw" format based on respondents' direct input, as well as weighted to reflect Edmonton's actual demographics.
- Administration is exploring capacity to engage Edmontonians in consultation following the presentation of the proposed 2013 budget, using an interactive online tool that advances education efforts while generating input. The tool would demonstrate trade-off options, such as adding or reducing hours of a specific service, and the impact on tax dollars in the budget. Participants would be asked to balance the budget by considering several subject areas and service levels. The input would be aggregated to show budget priorities over all participants.

### **Telephone polling**

- A phone poll of a large, random sampling of Edmontonians shortly after the presentation of the proposed budget on November 1, 2013, would compile statistically representative data to gauge Edmontonians' perception of the budget priorities, ideas for improving existing services and preferred approaches to balancing the budget.

### 2014 public engagement

- The online panel would have a greater role in the spring of 2014 in providing feedback about the City's performance for the past year related to achieving intended goals, as well as reviewing priorities and values in the year ahead.
- Administration is developing an approach to spring public engagement, following work with the new City Council, to review and validation objectives of *The Way Ahead* and the associated goals and intended outcomes in *The Ways* plans.
- This input would be used in developing the 2015 budget.

### Corporate Outcomes

- The City has well-managed and sustainable assets and services
- The City has balanced revenue streams that are sustainable
- The City delivers valued, quality, cost-effective services to its citizens
- Citizens are connected to their diverse communities and have pride in their city

### Others Reviewing this Report

- T. Webb, Office of the City Manager