

City of St. Albert

Town Hall Meeting – November 9, 2009 - 6:30 p.m.
 Cornerstone Pentecostal Fellowship - Grandin Mall

An overview of the 2010-2012 Business Plan/Budget for the public with a question and answer period.

In attendance

City Council: Mayor Crouse; Councillor Lemieux; Councillor Bracko; Councillor Burrows; Councillor Garritty; Councillor Jones; and, Councillor Watamaniuk

Staff: B. Holtby, City Manager; Neil Jamieson, General Manager, Planning & Engineering; C. Jardine, General Manager, Community & Protective Services; D. Screpnek, General Manager, Corporate Services; B. Treidler, General Manager, Business & Strategic Services; M. Kluttig, Director of Communications; J. Jennax, Corporate Planner; B. Purdon, EA, City Manager's Office; S. Yates, EA, Business and Strategic Services; L. Hodge, Legislative Services

Public Seventeen (17) residents

Media St. Albert Gazette (1); Saint City News (2)

Welcome and Opening Remarks	Mayor Crouse welcomed everyone present, introduced staff in attendance and turned the meeting over to the City Manager who, together with the General Manager of Corporate Services, provided background information supporting the budget position City Administration has provided to Council. The Mayor opened the floor to questions.
Elke Blodgett	On Snow and Ice Control – The City is reducing services in areas west, including Grandin and Heritage Lakes – no trails/pedestrian walkways are being cleared as Priority 3s – Riel Park Trail does not get cleaned in winter, though Erin Ridge and Oakmont get cleared – Why are we lowering our [St. Albert's] standards? The budget indicates no reduction in services – this is not true as areas west of St. Albert Trail are not cleared.
Mayor Crouse	<u>Information Request</u> What would the cost be for snow clearing to move from Priority 3 to Priority 2 in the stated areas (Riel Park Trail, Grandin and Heritage Lakes)? The service levels brought forward by the Snow and Ice Control Policy are those that have been in place up to the present.
Elke Blodgett	Historic levels of service have been eroded; last year (2008/9) was the first year trails were not passable to Big Lake and the BLESS Platform.
Councillor Burrows	There are two positions proposed for snow and ice control for 2010 that are currently "Unfunded."
Councillor Bracko	Walks trails daily and feels they are better maintained than previous years.
Lynda Flannery	Regarding staffing, the Fire Department is currently manned at the same level as when the City operated the ambulances. Standards indicate manning at 4 per Pumper is sufficient whereas St. Albert has 6 resulting in an expenditure 50% over recommended standards. Why does the City allow this over-expenditure? (Note: NFPA Standards quoted)
GM, C&PS	When ambulance services were moved to the provincial semi-integrated system, the City was required to split the Fire and Ambulance service such that dedicated staffing was necessary. The City's former practice of having trained

	staff for both was changed and additional Ambulance personnel were hired while Fire levels remained. It was also noted that Fire Services personnel are not merely required to man pumpers but also the City's ladder trucks and other specialized equipment.
Mayor Crouse	There is also new funding from the province in excess of \$1Million for ambulance services.
Lynda Flannery	Are the four recommended by Standards not for Fire and Rescue, not only Pumper trucks?
GM, C&PS	The standard is for Pumper trucks.
Lynda Flannery	Ambulance and Fire personnel are necessary?
GM, C&PS	The City now needs dedicated ambulance personnel and dedicated Fire and Rescue personnel.
Lynda Flannery	Why is the same manpower needed with the provincial semi-integrated service as prior to?
Andy Keller	Regarding tax increases, hopes that Council targets a 0-percent increase given falling fuel costs, falling material costs. The Edmonton-area cost of living price dropped to 1.8%; the \$3Million planned for Riel Park in 2010 and the escalation of costs for the project is a concern – the “World Class BMX Track” needs to be scaled back as the course is not well-used – Will millions be spent for another under-used facility? Also, could Administration verify the 1.06cents/cu m ³ ? Is this a cost per litre or cost per cu m ³ ? (Later verified as \$1.06/ cu m ³)
Councillor Garritty	Regarding Riel Park, the City is required by the Federal Government to remediate the area. What is the portion of the amount to be spent in 2010 that is required (remediation) and what is proposed new development?
City Manager	Of the proposed capital expenditures, \$2.175M is for required remediation and the balance is new development; of the \$10M to be spent over the next three years, approximately 50% is required for remediation.
Andy Keller	Regarding the proposed utility rate increase, why 9.5% for the next few years and when does it flatten?
GM, Corporate Services	The City is building a reserve to rehabilitate existing infrastructure. The 100-Year model recommends a 9.5% increase in each of the next three years after which it will flatten. In 2020, one of the water reservoirs will be require rebuilding (at a \$50M cost)
Andy Keller	When do increases level off to “cost of doing business”?
GM, Corporate Services	The 9.5% increases are proposed for 2010, 2011, and 2012 according to the 100 year model. In Year 4 (2013), rates will stabilize.
Patrick Collins	Thanks for the opportunity – important process. Regarding utilities and offsite levies – Why look at a 100 Year Model? Does this mean previous Councils neglected infrastructure?
Mayor Crouse	No. Infrastructure is intended to last 100 years, as such, rates are intended to cover this 100 years. The proposed increases of 9.5% over the next 3 years and leveling off in Year 4 are needed in 2020 or 2022 for a \$50M to upgrade a piece of infrastructure.
Councillor Bracko	Council began to consider the 100 Year Model in 2001.
Mayor Crouse	The oldest underground infrastructure is 50 or 60 years old and will need rehabilitation – so the City is building a reserve for this eventuality.
Patrick Collins	Is this the best time to do this (raise utility rates this amount) in these recessionary times?
Councillor Bracko	(Asking Administration) What is Epcor's increase (2cents per cu m ³)
Patrick Collins	Regarding the ASP (Erin Ridge proposed) – Should Landrex not have to pay – is this the normal process?
City Manager	Regarding this subdivision - Council must first address a philosophical position: Is something like a replacement water reservoir required for Erin Ridge and

	other growth areas the responsibility of the developer/subdivision or the entire City, given the infrastructure will service growth and benefits the entire City?
Patrick Collins	Do other municipalities use provincial and federal [grant] funds to help growth? (Yes.)
City Manager	Strathcona County pays for some growth infrastructure with rates not levies.
Patrick Collins	It's not fair for taxpayers to pay for residents not yet here.
Councillor Burrows	In 1998, Calgary lobbied for a process that required developers to pay for new development resulting in changes to the MGA.
Councillor Bracko	Provincial MSI funding can be used for maintenance and for growth projects.
Lilo Engler	Regarding snow clearing of sidewalks and trails especially along Grandin Village (public walkways) - Why is there such a different between service in Erin Ridge/Oakmont and Grandin?
	<u>Action Item</u> Mail Miss Engler a copy of the density information compiled by the City (residents per acre by neighbourhood).
Mayor Crouse	(Asking Administration) What is the service in Grandin?
City Manager	Service is, or should be, the same throughout the City. Trails do have a two-tiered standard with downtown trails a having a higher priority than the "spokes" (adjoining trails) into neighbourhoods.
Lilo Engler	Note the sidewalk on Gainsborough. Regarding salaries – the last seven years salaries have grown, staffing has increased by 50%. Taxes are up and services are down despite the number of staff.
Mayor Crouse	Have reviewed this at length as it is a concern for Council as well; St. Albert is average among similar municipalities at 9 per 1000. Edmonton and Calgary have a higher number of staff per 1000 population.
Lilo Engler	Why do we hire (expensive) consultants when there are so many smart and motivated people in the City.
George Valan	Regarding City comparators – Some confusion as the comparator cities have different service levels and different service offerings as St. Albert. We are comparing apples to oranges, not apples to apples.
Patrick Collins	Regarding Satisfaction Survey – was there a question about tax increases?
Mayor Crouse	Yes – the response was as expected – same service, no increases <u>Action Item</u> Email copy of slide with tax comparators
Linda Moser	Regarding housing/residential taxes costs - Young adults are leaving in droves; having spoken with realtor in Edmonton, the main purchasing group currently is the 25-35 age group who are buying at \$180K; in St. Albert, the price point is nearly double. Will anyone build for young adults for which an appropriate price point is <\$200K?
Mayor Crouse	If levies – or the cost of developing – is too high, developers won't build; if levies are too low and effectively subsidized by the City, taxpayers complain.
Councillor Bracko	City Council is currently looking at Smart Growth – growing up instead of out infill style of development.
George Coon	Regarding cost of living in St. Albert – growth is stagnant; in 1962, the City was encouraging businesses to move to St. Albert as a means of keeping housing costs down, current practice is the same. In 1962, the cost of a house and land was \$16,500; in 1981, it was \$250,000 and in 2009, it's \$400,000. 20% of gross income is spent on housing costs – taxes are \$5200/yr – Pensioners cannot afford to live in St. Albert.
Lynda Flannery	The City depends on grants from the province that are being reduced; MSI

	<p>being cut – the province is requiring 10% budget cuts along department, including personnel. How can the City not consider budget cuts? Cut extras such as Founders' Walk, 150th Anniversary, heritage projects such as the Elevator, growth spending, Riel Park.</p> <p>\$5M is budgeted for new garbage trucks despite Council not yet approving the recycling/garbage model proposed. If the new trucks were proposed as part of a new contract requiring garbage to be trucked considerable distances, why do we now need the same trucks for Roseridge? Will Roseridge save money?</p> <p>Will Council consider plebiscites for expenditures over \$10M?</p>
Councillor Garritty	Opposed to plebiscites which, he believes, are divisive.
Lynda Flannerty	Consider the U.S. model that has questions on every ballot.
Paul Stocker	Regarding revenue – Why can't the City issue bonds?
GM, Corporate Services	Only the two major cities (Edmonton and Calgary) can issue bonds, according to the MGA and the bonds are treated as debt.
Paul Stocker	Regarding transit – why are articulated buses in subdivisions in the morning? Seems an inefficient use of these large buses.
City Manager	Cost analysis done and it is more cost-effective to move articulated buses through some neighbourhoods than to run smaller buses to a collection point – although counterintuitive, it does save money.
Lilo Engler	Regarding the small print on bus schedule posters – Can the City display bus schedules that are legible?
	(Administration to address.)

As no more speakers came forward to the microphone, Mayor Crouse adjourned the Town Hall meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.