

BUDGET 2019-2021



PLAN



At the start of the engagement process (March 2018) the City committed to involving people in the engagement process early and often. A number of tools were used, including:

- Citizen Satisfaction Survey
- Targeted meetings on the vacancy allowance, properties on unserviced lots and Accessible Transit
- Public engagement sessions
- Drop-in sessions
- Online discussion

In early September, the City sent a proposed budget plan as a brochure to every household - approximately 48,000 - through Canada Post. This is the first time in the City's history that Council has shared its projected plan in advance of the budget announcement in December.

RESPONSE



Public discussion about the budget plan has been lively, with stories in the local media and feedback in the following ways:

engagestjohns.ca

- 1500 unique visitors
- 2800 total visits
- 165 comments, likes, dislikes
- 1368 contributions to the discussion

in-person sessions

- 110 participants, 5 sessions
- 10 participants, Seniors Advisory Committee
- City Business Roundtable

Facebook Live

- 63 peak views, 2 sessions
- 91 comments

58 email submissions

3 calls to 311

5 Strategy and Budget Advisory Committee meetings

KEY THEMES

AFFORDABILITY/ LIVING WITHIN MEANS

Residents are feeling overtaxed from all levels of government; many on fixed incomes are challenged and any increase in tax would be difficult. City needs to live within its means – find efficiencies internally.

REGIONAL/PROVINCIAL ISSUES

Many people feel we are providing services/ infrastructure to other municipalities at a cost to the City taxpayer (ie. roads maintenance); reduce duplication for services amongst municipalities in the region (i.e. snow clearing); seek increase in provincial contributions.

WATER TAX ISSUES

View that many in small homes with fewer people are paying for those in large homes with many people; suggestion to look at water meters to help those who use less to save on total tax bill.

CAPITAL SPENDING

Determine what's essential versus nice to do – we have to build in a sustainable way and manage the debt burden. The City has aging infrastructure and tapping in to cost-shared funding agreements is good. Delay some projects, if possible. Work with private sector to reduce costs. Interest in future engagement opportunities on capital spending.

COST AND SCOPE OF SERVICES PROVIDED

City services may need to be reduced/cut to keep taxes lower. The public are not unified on which services are of more value - for example some people feel snow clearing standards are too high while others feel more should be done.

MANAGEMENT/ STAFF/ COUNCIL

View that salaries are too high and need to be reviewed and reduced; consider staff and Council reductions/ wage freezes; reduce use of City vehicles, training, conferences and other "perks."

REVENUE/ SOURCES OF FUNDING

Increased user fees, downtown parking permits and meters, toll booths, corporate event sponsorships and tipping fees at the RDO/ landfill suggested.

FUNDING ORGANIZATIONS AND SUBSIDIES

There was no consensus on reducing or cutting grants to external organizations. Reduce the subsidies to St. John's Sports & Entertainment and Metrobus; consider selling Mile One.

TRANSIT

Public and accessible transit needs to be more sustainable; reduce the subsidy; service needs to be improved for those who need it; U-Pass and programs to increase ridership are popular.

ELECTRICITY/ ENERGY EFFICIENCY

View that many residents are going to feel the effect of the increase in electricity twice. The public questioned if we need to budget as much for the potential increase, and suggested the City use LED lighting and other more efficient energy sources.

STRATEGIC FOCUS

What are the City's priorities over the long-term? How do we determine the spending priorities? Stay focused on what makes the City a good place to live, avoid "pet" projects, do things right the first time and manage expectations.

APPROACH TO BUDGETING

Start from premise of how much revenue will be collected before determining expenses vs the other way around; zero-based budgeting approach - no year-over-year increases. Tax based on size of home/income; send assessments out earlier.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Some questioned if non-profit housing is a City or provincial responsibility. Need to keep housing affordable to make St. John's a good place to live.

EXPECTATIONS OF COUNCIL

Budget to benefit the whole community. Use good evidence based approach to making decisions; Ensure all forms of feedback are heard and increase efforts to get younger people engaged; consider impact of decisions on the demographics.

BUSINESS IMPACTS AND FEEDBACK

Businesses are feeling the strain of the economy and any additional taxes would be challenging. Business organizations suggested instituting a Municipal Auditor general, contracting out more services such as assessment, reducing or eliminating development fees and improving the process overall, implementing a fairness ratio for residential and commercial taxes, taking advantage of National Housing Strategy funds and finding internal efficiencies.

The City will announce Budget 2019-2021 on December 10, 2018. For a more detailed summary of "What We Heard" go [here](#).

Did we hear you correctly? Is anything missing? Tell us at engagestjohns.ca, email engage@stjohns.ca or call 311 (754-CITY).