

Hi Shawn

As usual, I hope things are going well and that you enjoyed a relaxing Christmas and New Year holiday.

We just received your January newsletter in the mail and I thought I would respond to your request for comments regarding the upcoming budget deliberations. Upon reading your newsletter, I only hope that other council members share your thoughts regarding the upcoming budget. The numbers which you quoted are shocking and clearly highlight the ongoing inflation of costs which are negatively impacting cities across Canada and the world. The City of London and its taxpayers are at a crucial point where tough decisions must be made. As a city, we cannot afford to fund every request that is presented and like any household if we cannot afford it, we don't buy it!

1. Essentials only

1. I encourage you and council to pursue a path of austerity and restraint throughout your budget deliberations. Resources are limited and council cannot continue to tap London taxpayers with constantly growing funding requests and budgets. As such, I encourage you and council to only consider funding essential services and projects which provide front-line services and have a direct and measurable impact on our community. As part of this, requests by groups for increased funding support should be limited to a modest increase only, providing the service is essential and that appropriate evidence is provided to support and warrant the increase.

2. Policing

1. Recognizing that policing is a core essential for our community, I certainly would support funding which will place more constables on our streets. Unfortunately, I cannot support at this time additional funding for a second armoured vehicle. Nice to have, but not now.
2. With regard to improving the 911 phone service, I am sure that there is an overlap between jurisdictions regarding funding for this project. Unfortunately, I was unable to find how the funding breaks down, but given the importance of this system for our city and area there will undoubtedly be a need for some form of funding from the city. Given the importance of this service, I would support this project providing it is supported with a long-term plan for service growth and regular upkeep.

3. Library

1. The library has faced a couple of costly incidents over the past couple of months related to Cyber security and water damage. To me, water damage to the interior and contents should be covered by insurance. Given that the library owns the building, I would support one time additional funding to repair the roof along with the requirement that the library present a plan to mitigate and address future issues of this type.
2. With regard to the Cyber attack, I do feel that some latitude be given to providing some one time additional funding related to the Cyber attack. Having said this, given the number of high profile attacks in recent years to other libraries, hospitals and business, the library should have been better prepared to address an attack and recover from one. Given the scope of the attack along with the slow recovery time, this was clearly not the case. I have not heard whether the library had conducted a Cyber security audit prior to the attack, but it appears that lessons were not learned from the recent attack on the Toronto area library system. Essentially points of access were left open and opportunities were exploited. It would be interesting to know if the library performs routine security testing for it's network which includes any software which is connected to the library infra structure? To me, this should be a routine part of library activities and allocated for within its own yearly budget. Considering the above, I would be in support of a modest one time funding request for the library to help them recover from the attack. As part of the funding support, I would like to see the library submit a detailed and long-term Cyber security plan to the city to ensure that our tax dollars are allocated effectively. This breach and theft of employee info needs to be considered as a significant issue as I can only imagine the extended costs the library and city might incur had the personal information of library patrons also been stolen.

4. Non-profits

1. With regard to non-profit groups, I am in favour of supporting front line non-profit groups who work directly with clients and have a transparent history and record of success. Having said this, we cannot afford to continuously entertain increased funding requests without burdening London taxpayers beyond their means. As such, I would encourage council members to consider each non-profits prior years funding requests as a baseline starting point for funding non-profits during this year's round of budget talks. Modest funding support is the key, just because they ask for it (and may need it), does not mean we can afford to give it to them.
2. Considering the PILLAR group and their inflated ask for approximately \$250,000 which I understand is 5 times their previous funding allotment, I say **NO**. To me, this is an excessive ask which simply represents another hand in the pot asking for funding which could be put to better use supporting other front line services. From what I understand, PILLAR is not a front line service delivery agent and London tax dollars should not be used to grow this non-profit's business model. If PILLAR wishes to grow their organization, they should be out convincing corporate and private donors to support their project. Perhaps PILLAR should explore a pay for use service model to address their funding needs. Entertaining PILLAR's grossly inflated request is a big **NO** for me.

5. Homeless Hubs

1. Given the lack of measurable action on the Hubs project combined with the fact that only 2 of the 15 hubs are currently being implemented, our Mayor is now stating that we actually need fewer hubs. Given this turn around and lack of concrete action, I would like to see funding for the Hubs project reduced significantly. To me, \$90 million a year to support this project is an unrealistic burden to level on taxpayers be they Municipal, Provincial or Federal. As well, given the lack of interest by property owners to provide sites along with the public's concern over safety and costs, restructuring and reducing this project to a more modest framework would not only provide some financial relief for taxpayers, but it would also provide the public with reassurance that council is listening. To be honest, given the costs and with so many groups involved and no single governing body to manage activities or provide day to day oversight, this project was going to be a hard sell from the start let alone a huge challenge to deploy and manage. Personally, with any funding requests related to homelessness, I would like to see a greater emphasis and responsibility placed upon the homeless recipients to actively engage with available programs and services to help uplift their lives and get them back into safe and independent living. As such, I encourage you and council to support those groups who have a track history of success and the public data to prove it. Targeted, responsible support is important, but I feel it is also time to reduce costs, regroup and take a different approach.

6. The BRT

1. First off, I cannot understand how those who worked on the planning and budgeting for the BRT could have misc-calculated so badly. Not planning for inflation and overruns on a project of this size and expense is in my mind seriously incompetent. Simply saying that "we had already ordered the meal" is a very condescending statement for a taxpayer to hear and totally inappropriate for someone in city admin to say. Given this along with other past issues, I am seriously concerned with the competency and quality of our city admin staff as well as their interaction and support for council as I am no longer confident that council is getting the full details or accurate reports it needs to make appropriate and informed decisions.

Considering the above and not knowing the current financial details of this project, I wonder if these additional expenses, could be implemented over an extended period of time to help off-set the cost to taxpayers. This additional BRT expense should never have happened.

In closing, I don't envy you and council at budget time. It is a difficult and challenging task which never pleases everyone. Unfortunately, this year is far more difficult than past years and if not handled aggressively will be far worse in years to come. Serious fiscal restraint and cuts now, although painful will help to stabilize London's finances for the future. In short, we can't continue on the path we are now on. If we continue on this path, we run the risk of ending up like Toronto and declaring that we are broke. As such, I encourage you and council to choose a new path, one which focuses on reduced spending across the board, while supporting core essentials and non-profits with a publicly proven track record of success. Be aggressive, demonstrate restraint and reposition our city for a bright and financially sustainable future. It can be done!

As always, thank you for all the hard work you do for our area. It is greatly appreciated!

Gary