

<b>TO:</b>	<b>CHAIR AND MEMBERS STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING ON JANUARY 26, 2012</b>
<b>FROM:</b>	<b>LARRY PALARCHIO DIRECTOR, FINANCIAL PLANNING AND POLICY</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>2012 BUDGET – SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT</b>

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
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That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

<b>BACKGROUND</b>
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Public input on the 2012 Budget was received through the following ways:

- January 14<sup>th</sup> – Public input from Argyle, Masonville, Westmount, White Oaks, and Cherryhill Malls
- January 17<sup>th</sup> – Public participation session to Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee (This was a formal meeting for which minutes were taken and therefore not included in this report.)
- E-mail inquiries and input through [Budget@london.ca](mailto:Budget@london.ca) on the City's website

The Mayor, Councillors and staff were at the malls to answer questions and to listen to the concerns of the public in regards to the 2012 Budget. Surveys were also distributed to the public to obtain feedback on the level of service the City provides.

Approximately 250 people visited the City of London's input session at the malls (see table below). This was consistent with last year. Only five surveys were received to date but a number of surveys were distributed with the expectation that they will be mailed back to the City.

<b>Mall</b>	<b>Councillors Attending</b>	<b>Approximate Attendance</b>	<b>Surveys Completed</b>	<b>Surveys Distributed *</b>
Argyle	C. Armstrong C. Polhill C. Orser	35	4	10
Cherryhill	C. Bryant C. Branscombe M. Fontana	70	1	48
Masonville	C. M. Brown C. Baechler C. Hubert	75	0	15
Westmount	C. D. Brown C. Henderson C. Van Meerbergen	25	0	5
White Oaks	C. Usher C. White	50	0	50
<b>Total for 2012</b>		<b>255</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>128</b>
Total for 2011		247	21	N/A

\* provided with postage paid envelope to be mailed to City Hall

Please note that number of survey's distributed and the number people in attendance is not a statistically significant representation of London's population. A copy of the survey is included in **APPENDIX A** of this report.

## **Public Comments/Concerns Mall Sessions**

There were a wide variety of comments and concerns brought forward by the public at the mall sessions. This report does not reflect every comment or concern received by the public at the mall sessions however it summarizes the issues or comments that came up the most.

### ***0% Property Tax Increase***

Most people at Masonville and White Oaks malls were not in favour of a 0% tax increase if it meant cutting services, but wanted assurance that resources were used as efficiently as possible. People at Argyle and Westmount malls were in favour of the 0% tax increase.

### ***1% Special Economic Development Levy***

Many people expressed opposition to the 1% Special Economic Development Levy.

### ***Water and Wastewater Rates***

There was concern over the increase in water and sewer rates. Some accepted the increase with the understanding that decreasing personal consumption could offset these bills.

### ***Cultural***

Public comments were mixed in regards to Cultural Services. Several residents felt that services should be maintained at the current level; however some felt that funding should decrease with those using the services paying for them. It was suggested that a user fee or partnerships with schools should be implemented in the library system, in order to help defray costs. It was also mentioned that Heritage services may stand in the way of growth in the downtown area.

### ***Economic Prosperity***

The importance of job creation was a common theme with regards to Economic Prosperity. Funding new projects to attract tourists was criticized by some; however the public saw the benefit of making London attractive to new businesses. It was also noted that residents were cautious of providing too many incentives to new business due to the economic climate.

### ***Environmental Services***

Environmental consciousness is important to the residents of London. Some felt wary about funding the Green Bin Program as composting is already a common practice amongst homeowners. It was suggested that funding for this service only be provided to those living in apartment buildings. It was also suggested that residents take over the cost of picking up oversized garbage items, and be fined for going over limits.

### ***Parks, Recreation, & Neighbourhood Services***

The public felt that funding should reflect economic times and cut in areas, such as Aquatics, Golf and Storybook Garden services; however many said they would not be willing to reduce the service level of Parks, Arenas, Children Services and Community Development & Funding in order to achieve 0% tax increase. One resident felt that the number of parks should be increased in order to improve tourism.

### ***Protective Services***

Many acknowledged that it is important to fund Protective Services; however most felt this could be done within the budget target. Common themes included: the need for increased foot patrol downtown and other core areas, concern over the wage level of fire and police, and the need to re-evaluate standards.

### ***Social and Health Services***

The public was opposed to decreasing the level of service in order to achieve 0% in this area, expressing that service growth should reflect population growth. Concerns included: increasing the standard of living for those using services, providing services for the aging population, and the issue of bed bugs.

### ***Transportation Services***

There was some support of increased funding to improve public transportation and roadways; however some questioned the efficiency and felt funding should be maintained at current level or decreased. Comments included: improving road maintenance including sidewalks and curbs, making public transportation more affordable and accessible to seniors, increasing bus routes to industrial areas, and decreasing funding for bike lanes.

### **Corporate, Operational & Council Services**

Some felt that funding should increase in this area in order to improve community solutions; however others felt there was a lack of transparency and knowledgeable dialogue. The most important thing to residents is keeping this City safe, affordable and accessible to all Londoners.

### **General Comments**

- Promote volunteerism in the community
- Look for new revenue sources other than property taxes
- Increase revenue from upper levels of government
- Opposed to spending money on lights for skating show
- Support vacancy management (gapping) to save money
- Thought the presentation (package) of information was informative and well written, especially the analogies to personal life, example cost of flushing toilet
- Stop giving money to UWO and Fanshawe for incentives
- Stop trying to force people downtown, eliminate focus on core
- Political concerns may be superseding good planning and infrastructure programs
- Time to stop funding the things that are nice to have and focus on things we need to have

### **Public Comments/Concerns Emails**

In addition to receiving input from the public at the mall sessions, the City also received 15 e-mails. A summary of these email comments have been organized below into either general budget comments or specific comments regarding the Adds & Cuts List. The reference numbers under the Adds & Cuts comment section refer to the project list as seen in the 2012 Draft Budget. Full written submissions are available in **APPENDIX B** of this report. The Urban League also submitted a number of email comments which are included in **APPENDIX C** of this report.

### **General Comments**

- Most of the e-mail respondents, it being noted that the City received 15 e-mails in total, were in favour of a 0% tax increase and did not want a 1% special economic development levy. Some residents commented on their fears of high unemployment and the burden that a tax increase would put on our economy.
- The budget surplus should be put towards paying off City debts and job creation
- Increase funding to the Sports Field Management Program. Particular emphasis should be placed on baseball fields in order to support London's strong baseball community.
- Increase Civic Administration cuts in areas such as building maintenance, car mileage, and employee perks
- Implement a program in which Civic Administrators, Police and Fire-fighters take a day off once a month with no pay
- Decrease total protective services budget by eliminating personnel time spent on educational lectures and traffic control
- Increase LTC efficiency and ridership
- Increase funding to Merrymount and specifically the All Kids Belong Program.

### **Adds & Cuts List Comments**

#### *1. Library Services to Seniors*

- Hold the London Libraries Board to zero increase.

#### *5. The Veteran Memorial Parkway*

- To avoid maintenance costs, adopt principles of permaculture. Build guilds around fruit and nut trees and donate the harvest to various food banks. Green horticulture businesses in London can provide information about these principles.
- Veteran's Memorial Parkway is not a frequently used corridor. It is already receiving significant funding in tree planting initiatives. It should not be a priority.

6. *Thames Valley Corridor Plan*

- In the current economic climate, the Thames Valley Corridor plan should be a lower priority for tax dollars.

9. *Protective Services*

- Cut all "Retention Pay" for both Police and Fire Departments.

11. *Community Development and Housing (Social Housing)*

- "Facilitates a process to develop" is a vague initiative. A neighbourhood "action" plan is necessary.

12. *Pest Control*

- Continue funding the bed bug control program.

18. *Sidewalk Snow Plowing*

- This is a valuable funding cut. Sidewalks should be cleared by home owners and businesses. Frequently accessed pedestrian walkways/sidewalks should be provided with snow removal in the event that there is no other home owner or business that will take responsibility.

19. *Downtown On-Street Pay & Display*

- This funding initiative contradicts downtown revitalization funding. The increased parking expense will discourage people from visiting downtown or may limit the amount of time spent there.

28. *Re-Forest London*

- Engage area elementary schools in this project. Give every child over a certain age the responsibility of starting a tree from seed or rescue/adopt a seedling. This could build community, ownership, increase environmental knowledge and avoid the high costs of buying saplings.
- Cut \$100,000/year for Re-Forest London- instead, insert a message with each property tax bill encouraging citizens to plant trees on their own properties.
- Reforestation efforts are important; however this is an aggressive program of tree planting that does not balance the consideration of the costs of long-term tree maintenance or management. New trees require regular watering for the first 3-5 years after transplanting as they establish a new root system. There should be a long term care strategy that will ensure this is a proper investment of resources.

30. *Green Bin & Companion Waste*

- The Green Bin will dramatically reduce curb-side volume; however the trash removal schedule is already sporadic and the proposed frequency of Green Bin collection is unclear. In order for this program to work the Green Bin and other recycling should be collected once per week with collection of the remaining garbage every two weeks.
- The Blue Box recycling pickup should be changed to every 2 weeks or more.

31. *Urban Civic Spaces*

- The public was both supportive and unsupportive of this program.

33. *Transit Growth and Development*

- Priority issues such as ridership and the expansion of bus routes and times are not mentioned in this proposal. The measures that are mentioned seem to come with a very heavy price tag. The focus of this program is not in the right place.

## Process improvements

Overall the public input sessions at the malls was a success. The public appreciated that the Mayor and the Councillors were available for questions and that they had an opportunity to express their concerns. To make next year even more successful, the following suggestions were brought forward from the public, staff and elected officials:

- Bring hand sanitizer
- Bring tablecloths
- Calendars to give to public
- Add the Members of Council page to the package
- For the survey, separate the services in Parks, Recreations & Neighbourhood Services
- Post survey on website at the beginning of the public input process
- Incorporate Citizen Engagement Task Force recommendations

Thank you to the Mayor and the Councillors for making the public input sessions at the malls a success!

Financial Planning and Policy would also like to thank Communications for their input on the public input process.

<b>Prepared By:</b>	<b>Recommended By:</b>
<b>Alan Dunbar Manager – Financial Planning and Policy</b>	<b>Larry Palarchio Director – Financial Planning and Policy</b>

cc. Elaine Gamble, Communications