

January 24, 2013

Your Worship and Members of Council

Re: 2013 City Budget

Preface Please accept my praise for your work on the last two budgets when you kept to a zero increase to the ratepayers. Canadians are already heavily taxed. A local freeze is what is needed. While some won't acknowledge it, we now have home owners (some close to city hall) who would find a tax increase very hurtful. These people get no attention by the media.

Procedures The current budget process which is accepted by your administrators is for departments to build budgets based on traditional operational procedures and then proceed to tell you what would have to be cut to get to zero. Wrong. What needs to be done is for you to stand firm and expect different operational procedures from the service providers.

Same Money - Same Service This is a theme I urge you to accept and enforce with the civic departments. All departments have enough money at the current levels to provide the same standard of service in 2013 as they did in 2012. But, it will mean doing things differently. In the main, although there are lots of options, it will likely mean fewer people and those that remain will have to do more. Since 2008 this style of operation has been prevalent in business. For the most part, though, it has not been embraced by publically funded organizations. Instead, using old models, the leaders, as is the current situation in the budget building process, keep asking for more money and draw attention to "cuts" if they don't get the money. Enough! What leaders should be expected to do is show you how they can maintain services without more money. Read the newspapers - If a C.E.O. can't do it, he/she is replaced (witness what happened to Mr. Brew at C.P.R.).

Police and Fire Services The burgeoning of budgets for these services is a very serious local, national and international issue. Some U.S. communities have already filed for bankruptcy and this could happen in Canada (Globe + Mail, Jan. 17, 2013). To provide the same services at lower costs should be the responsibility of the service leaders. Instead they stick to old models and just keep asking for more money. Knowing that the target is a zero increase and still ask for more money is truly shameful because for them to get more it means others would get less. They should be asked to name those departments that should receive less and make their positions public. I have long been of the opinion that it is wrong to pay firefighters full salary for sleeping. This is the case with the 48-hour shifts. Also, the concept of retention pay incentives is absurd. There are lots of people who would like their jobs (work 2 days and off for 6). If they want to live at the fire halls, have two pay scales - one for when they are working and one for when they are waiting for an alarm. This is a common practice amongst private security companies.

Promotion All of the current hype is about a better London in the future (ReThink London). I've lived in London for 77 years. It is truly a great place to live and work. There has been loads of progress and we need to keep pushing this truism. Consider - as a young man I went to see my brother-in-law play hockey on London's only artificial ice surface. It was in the livestock arena at the Western Fair. To-day there are 4 state-of-the-art rinks at the Western Fair District and arenas in every quadrant of the city, plus the Budweiser Forum. London is now 3 times larger but we have more than 10 times as many arenas. I'm in favour of new initiatives if it means the city doesn't have to borrow more money but I detest the constant attack on present-day London.

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Summary I urge you to stick to your position of a zero tax increase for 2013. Accept and promote the concept of "Same Money-Same Services." Keep the pressure on department leaders to adopt different and less costly models for providing services. Do all that you can to stop your management and department managers from advertising "cuts." Consider giving a prestigious award to the administrators of a department that stays within the 2012 budget numbers and offers the same level of service in 2013 with no cuts.

Kindest Regards,

Al Herrington Ph.D.