

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 20, 2015

Item 1, Report No. 2, of the Finance, Administration and Audit Committee, which was adopted without amendment by the Council of the City of Vaughan on January 20, 2015.

1 2015 BUDGET PROCESS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

The Finance, Administration and Audit Committee recommends:

- 1) That the recommendation contained in the following report of the Commissioner of Finance & City Treasurer, the Director of Financial Planning and Analytics, and the Director of Corporate Communications, dated January 12, 2015, be approved;**
- 2) That one of the morning Finance, Administration and Audit Committee meetings be rescheduled to an evening meeting to provide an opportunity for wider community participation in the budget process; and**
- 3) That the presentation by the Director of Corporate Communications be received.**

Recommendation

The Commissioner of Finance & City Treasurer, the Director of Financial Planning and Analytics, and the Director of Corporate Communications recommend:

1. That this report on the communications plan in support of the 2015 Budget Process be received.

Contribution to Sustainability

Not applicable.

Economic Impact

There is no economic impact associated with this report, as all costs are included in existing operating budgets.

Communications Plan

Public consultation is integral to building the budget

As part of the budget process, there will be a number of opportunities for the public to be informed and engaged. These will be outlined in the remainder of this report.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to outline for the Finance, Administration and Audit Committee the details of the communications plan to support the 2015 budget process.

Background – Analysis and Options

Every year, the City of Vaughan presents a budget to Council and creates a communications plan to engage the public in the process. The communications plan sets out several opportunities for public engagement throughout the budget process.

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 20, 2015

Item 1, Finance Report No. 2 – Page 2

The implementation of this communications plan is designed to meet the following objectives:

- Increase awareness of City services that are funded by tax dollars
- Promote the different ways the public can get involved in the budget process
- Educate the public about the decision-making process involved with the budget

Key Messages

1. To balance the pressures of maintaining existing services and growth requirements against available future City funding/resources necessary to undertake and manage operations and corporate initiatives.
2. The City continues to demonstrate financial leadership and discipline to ensure residents receive value for their tax dollars.
3. Public engagement is a key priority in the budget process.
4. There are many ways residents can get engaged, including attending public meetings, joining the conversation on social media, learning about the budget on the City's website, participating in Vaughan's online budget challenge and completing an interactive budget quiz.
5. Council will need to make some difficult choices during the 2015 budget process to ensure that the 2015 Budget and 2016-18 Plan balance the need to maintain service levels while moving forward with City-building initiatives.

Communication Tools

The departments of Financial Planning and Analytics and Corporate Communications have implemented several communications tools that are interactive, engaging and offered in a variety of formats to ensure residents are able to receive them through the channels they prefer. Communications are written in plain language to ensure they can be understood by a broad audience that includes residents, businesses, Council, City employees and the media.

These tools include:

- Dedicated Finance, Administration and Audit Committee meetings
- Enhanced website content on vaughan.ca
- A new online, interactive application to help educate stakeholders on budget-related issues and decisions
- Social media posts/outreach on the corporate Facebook and Twitter accounts
- "Ask the Expert" feature on Twitter that will give the public the opportunity to have their budget questions answered by City staff
- Blog posts and newsletter updates throughout the process
- Vaughan TV ads and media advisory/releases
- Posters in City facilities
- Print advertising

Budget Page on vaughan.ca

The City's website, vaughan.ca, is the primary communications vehicle for the City with an average of 100,000 visits per month. The budget section **vaughan.ca/budget** will be the primary source for the public to access budget-related information. The site has links to budget-related agendas, reports, communications and minutes. It also has links to past budget books, frequently asked questions and the City of Vaughan's interactive budget tool.

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 20, 2015

Item 1, Finance Report No. 2 – Page 3

New this Year – The City of Vaughan's Interactive Budget Tool

Working with Corporate Communications, SMT and City departments, the department of Financial Planning and Analytics developed and launched an online, interactive application that helps the community:

- Learn how their residential property tax bill is split between the City of Vaughan, York Region and the Province
- Learn which services are provided by the City of Vaughan, York Region and the Province
- Get a breakdown of how the City of Vaughan is spending their 2014 tax dollars based on their home's assessed value
- Learn how changes in funding levels for services would affect the level of service that the City of Vaughan can provide

The City of Vaughan's interactive budget tool can be found on the City's budget webpage at vaughan.ca/budget. The interactive budget tool is an educational application to help demonstrate the tough choices that Council must make to balance the priorities of maintaining service levels with moving City-building initiatives forward. The information on the budget tool site is for educational purposes only. No information will be collected. The scenarios and potential impacts are an example of the kinds of decisions that staff and Council face when developing a budget. Visitors are encouraged to explore as many "what if" scenarios as they would like and to test their learning by completing a quiz.

Open to the Public - Dedicated Finance, Administration and Audit Committee Meetings

There are five Finance, Administration and Audit Committee meetings currently scheduled for budget deliberations — two evening and three daytime dates. These meetings, which are hosted at City Hall, are opportunities for the public to learn more about the budget. Community comments and input regarding the budget are encouraged and considered by Members of Council to inform their choices. These meetings have been scheduled for the following dates:

- Jan. 12 at 7 p.m.
- Feb. 2 at 9:30 a.m.
- Feb. 9 at 7 p.m.
- March 2 at 9:30 a.m.
- March 9 at 9:30 a.m.

Final Opportunity for Community Input

In addition to the meetings of the Finance, Administration and Audit Committee, a Special Council Meeting will also be held before budget approval to provide the public with a final opportunity to comment on the proposed 2015 Budget and 2016-18 Plan. This meeting is anticipated to be held in late March and will be advertised in advance, consistent with the City's public notification by-law, once a date has been set.

Post Budget Approval Communication

Following approval of a budget, the City will communicate budget highlights by employing a variety of tactics, including a media release, website content, social media messages, a blog, an eNewsletter post and an internal message to staff.

CITY OF VAUGHAN

EXTRACT FROM COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 20, 2015

Item 1, Finance Report No. 2 – Page 4

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan

This communications plan is consistent with the strategic initiative to achieve organizational excellence by implementing citizen-focused communication initiatives that will establish a more effective model for community engagement and enhance our Public Consultation Strategy.

Regional Implications

Not applicable.

Conclusion

The implementation of this communications plan will increase awareness increase awareness of City services that are funded by tax dollars, promote the different ways the public can get involved in the budget process, and educate the public about the decision-making process involved with the budget.

Attachments

Not applicable.

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