

What we Heard (More Detailed Version)

Budget 2019-21

Public Engagement



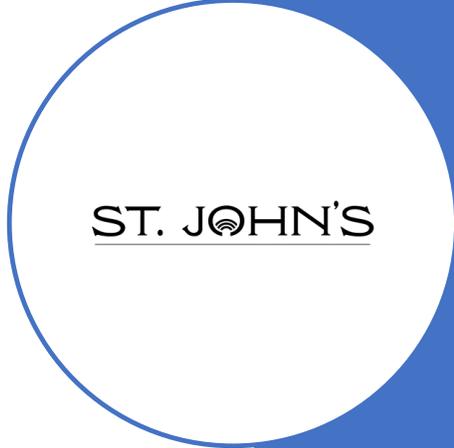
ST. JOHN'S

Level of Engagement

- At the start of the engagement process the city committed to involving stakeholders in the engagement process early and often.
- The commitment was to seek input into the new strategic plan and then obtain public feedback on the proposed budget plan for 2019 which was outlined in the mail out of Sept. 24 and take that feedback into consideration as the 2019-21 budget is being developed.

Engagement Process

- City began gathering data and feedback to inform both strategic plan and budget in March 2018
- [Statistically Valid Citizen Satisfaction Survey](#) undertaken and results released to public in May 2018
- Began engagement process around [strategic plan](#) in May 2018 and [What we Heard](#) released in August 2018.
- Targeted meetings around vacancy allowance, owners of properties on un-serviced lots, Accessible Transit, May-June 2018
- Budget Engagement kicked off Sept. 24, 2018 – direct mail to every household.

The logo for St. John's is a white circle with a blue border, containing the text "ST. JOHN'S" in a serif font. The letter "O" in "JOHN'S" has a small circular icon inside it. The logo is positioned on the right side of the slide, overlapping a blue vertical bar that runs down the right edge of the page.

ST. JOHN'S

Scope and Reach of Budget Engagement

Engagestjohns.ca	In-person	Facebook live	Email	Calls to 311	Budget Committee	Commercial Property Owners	City Business Roundtable	Households on un-serviced lots
<p>1500 visitors 2800 total visits 165 engaged by leaving comments or liking/disliking comments There were 1368 contributions to the discussion.</p>	<p>110 people across five in-person evening sessions 10 people at Seniors' Advisory Committee</p>	<p>2 events Peak views – 63 with 91 comments</p>	<p>58 submissions</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>5 meetings between April and Oct.</p>	<p>10 including business organizations</p>	<p>Board of Trade; Canadian Home Builders' Association-NL; Canadian Federation of Independent Business; Heavy Civil Association of NL</p>	<p>300+</p>

Key Themes

- Affordability/living within means
- Regional/Provincial implications
- Water tax/water metres and fairness
- Capital spending
- Cost and scope of services being provided
- Management, staff, Council
- Revenue/sources of funding
- Funding other organizations/subsidies
- Transit
- Electricity/energy efficiency
- Strategic focus
- Business community impacts
- Approach to budget/assessment
- Affordable/not for profit housing
- What the public expects from Council and engagement outcomes

Affordability/Living within Means

- Residents are feeling overtaxed from all levels of government
- Many who are on fixed incomes are challenged with keeping up and any increase in tax would be difficult
- Many have not received any income increases in years but their cost of living continues to rise- food, gas, etc..
- Cost of living has to stay low and keeping taxes low helps keep people here/attracts people, for example students after graduation
- Feeling that taxes keep going up, but there is no service improvement
- City needs to live within its means – find efficiencies internally

Regional/Provincial Issues

- Many people feel the city is providing services/infrastructure to other municipalities at a cost to the City of St. John's taxpayer
- Those who live outside city should pay more for services, i.e. programs at Paul Reynolds
- A lot of wear and tear on city roads from those who don't live or pay taxes in city
- Need to reduce duplication for services among municipalities in the region to reduce cost, i.e. snow clearing
- Need to get fair share from province and provincial entities who don't pay property tax but benefit from services

Water Tax and Fairness

- View that many in small homes with less people are paying for those in large homes with many people
- Time to look at water meters to address the unfairness in this tax – this would 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
- Need to have working infrastructure
- Recognition of aging of some assets
- Consider impact of capital investments to ongoing operating budget
- Delay some projects and reduce scope – build what we can afford for the future, consider cost to delay
- It's good to tap into the cost-shared funding agreements while they are available
- No new non-essential infrastructure investments
- Recognize that some capital investments improve quality of life and some people would consider these essential
- Reduce the amount of investment in fleet
- Technology upgrades only if they save money
- Cancel any plans to upgrade bike lanes
- Work with private sector as a way to save money on future projects
- Residents interested in future engagement about capital spending

Cost and Scope of Services Provided

- City services may need to be reduced/cut to keep taxes lower
- Can't develop and deliver "Cadillac" programs and services and pass on cost to tax payers
- View that some city services competing with private industry or not-for profit, i.e. recreation, Humane Services
- Maintain parks/reduce cost of maintenance; plant fewer flowers, perennials instead of annuals
- Divergent views on whether every neighbourhood needs a park/community centre
- Address issues that impact cleanliness of city
- Look at what can be outsourced to save money, i.e. grind and patch, 311, inspections,
- Snow clearing, some felt the city was overdelivering to get to bare pavement; others felt this was an essential service; mixed views on sidewalk clearing (those who value it, do so strongly)
- Change schedule for garbage collection to reduce costs
- More promotion and enforcement of recycling (mandatory) which cost the city less to drop at landfill than garbage
- Reduce amount of street cleaning in suburbs
- Lack of service in some areas, i.e. sidewalks, water and sewer

Management, Staff, Council

- View that salaries are too high and need to be reviewed and reduced
- Reduce # of staff
- Wage freezes
- Hiring freezes
- Reduce number of Councillors
- Reduce use of city vehicles for staff
- Reduce training/travel/conferences
- Reduce city staff and Council “perks”
- Consider four-day work week
- Increase productivity

Revenue and Sources of Funding

- The City has a revenue challenge and it should not be passed on to taxpayer
- Increase user fees for people who use the services
- Increase parking permit costs for downtown residents
- Tax those whose buildings are in disrepair/vacant more
- Fix the parking meter issue to address lost revenue
- Need to do more to increase revenue from enforcement, i.e. business, residential litter, parking, cameras for speeding
- Suggestion of municipal police force
- Tax residential property owners more if they are operating the home as a business, i.e. rental only and not living there
- Look at taxing vacant land
- Put in toll booths
- Corporate sponsorship for events to offset costs
- Air B & B and similar services should pay business tax
- Charge people a fee who go to Robin Hood Bay directly to dump waste
- Increase tipping fees for commercial haulers, promote wood recycling
- Incentives to pay fines sooner – charge more if later

Funding Other Organizations/Subsidies

- Reduce/cut grants to external organizations – some felt this should not happen. In times of fiscal challenge we need to reduce these costs.
- Reduce subsidy to St. John's Sports and Entertainment and Metrobus
- Sell Mile One – some felt this should not happen at all or should only happen with good value to citizens
 - Various views on the economic impact of Mile One to the city

Transit

- Public transit needs to be a more sustainable service, subsidy needs to be reduced
- Service needs to be improved for those who need the service, having a good transit system impacts whether people stay here
- Need smaller buses, faster, efficient routes
- We need to address the question of what level of service we can afford
- More cost effective Go Bus System
- Get the U pass up and running
- Need to increase ridership
- Get school students on buses –work with School Board

Electricity/Energy Efficiency

- View that many residents are going to feel the effect of the increase in electricity twice
- The premise of the proposed increase in costs for electricity to the City over the next three years is a “best guess” – do we need to budget this amount?
- Make City buildings more energy efficient
- Use LED lights
- Consider impact to the City from carbon tax in future

Strategic focus

- What are the city's priorities over the long-term? How do we determine the spending priorities?
- Too many "pet" projects
- Need to stay focused on making the city a good place to live for young people so they want to stay
- Focus on policies that make the city a good place to live, i.e. development,
- Increase opportunities for active transportation and decreased dependence on cars
- We need to learn from others who have tapped into their uniqueness to attract businesses and residents
- Continue to invest in what keeps the city unique, i.e, arts, /some felt some investments may be extravagant
- Focus on doing things right the first time, reduce cost this way too
- Use continuous improvement practices to be efficient and set smart goals
- Stop urban sprawl
- Manage expectations of new services – can't do everything for everyone, too many traffic changes, for example
- Think of impact of investments in things such as tourism, sport tourism to the economy

Businesses are feeling the strain of the economy and additional tax burden would be challenging

Those who manage large properties are already giving concessions to keep businesses in their properties

Need to be more business friendly and tax rate contributes to this

Business organizations suggested instituting a Municipal Auditor General

Suggestions to contract out more services

Reduce or eliminate development fees and improve the process overall

Implement a fairness ratio for residential and commercial taxes

Take advantage of National Housing Strategy funds

Find internal efficiencies

Business Impacts and Feedback

Approach to budgeting/assessment

- Use zero-based budgeting process
- No year-over-year increases
- Start from premise of how much revenue will be collected before determining expenses vs the other way around
- Tax based on size of home/income
- Cost to service debt is increasing and not sustainable
- Assessments need to be available earlier in the process

Affordable Housing/Not for profit Housing

- Affordable housing is important but some feel not the City's responsibility.
- Many suggested the City put responsibility for housing to the province.
- Some suggested focusing on housing and keeping it affordable is key to making St. John's a good place to live

What the
public
expects
from
Council &
Engagement
Outcomes

Council have to make practical, tough decisions;
money spent has to benefit the entire community

Use good evidence-based approach to making
decisions

Consider impact on the demographics of the choices
that are going to be made

Ensure all forms of feedback are heard and increase
efforts to get younger people engaged in the future

Listen to what is being said – how meaningful is the
feedback being provided?

More opportunities to engage throughout the year
to learn more about the budget process