



TO: Budget and Corporate Services Committee

SUBJECT: 2011 Budget Process Debriefing

Report Number: F-38-11

File Number(s): 435-01

Report Date: June 8, 2011

Ward(s) Affected: 1 2 3 4 5 6 All

Date to Committee: July 12, 2011

Date to Council: July 18, 2011

Recommendation: For information only

Purpose:

- Address goal, action or initiative in strategic plan
 - Establish new or revised policy or service standard
 - Respond to legislation
 - Respond to staff direction
 - Address other area of responsibility
-

Reference to Strategic Plan:

N/A

Background:

At the Budget & Corporate Services Committee of April 19, 2011 Council passed the following staff direction;

Direct the Executive Director of Finance to conduct a budget debrief with members of Council and staff for the purpose of identifying levels of satisfaction and areas of improvement for 2012 and report back to Council in June 2011.

As part of the budget process Finance staff annually conducts budget debriefings with staff to receive their feedback on the process, and ideas for improvement. As part of the staff direction, Finance staff also conducted meetings with members of Council to debrief the budget process.

Discussion:

COUNCIL DEBRIEFING

The Acting Executive Director of Finance, Joan Ford and Reena Bajwa, the Acting Manager of Budgets & Policy, held individual meetings with each member of Council over a one week period in order to obtain feedback on the 2011 budget process. A short questionnaire was provided (Appendix A) to each member of Council in order to provide a format for discussion, and provide them with the opportunity to provide their comments on each key area of the budget process. The questionnaire was divided into the areas listed below, with the results and a summary of the key comments from each member of Council to each of those areas provided for your information.

Budget Directions

The optimal time for Council to consider the budget directions;

Summer	Fall
5	3

**Note: total is greater than 7, as one councillor suggested both options are doable based on staff's preference*

The 2012 budget cycle presents a challenge as Council is fully engaged in preparing the City's next strategic plan. Consensus by all members of Council is to have a shortened budget process, with timelier budget approvals. Most of Council has expressed that ideally they would like budget directions to be completed in the summer, however, given the strategic plan, this may difficult to attain in order to ensure that 2012 budget directions are in line with the organizations objective and goals. Annual fall budget directions have the potential to delay the budget review and deliberations further into the following year.

Public Engagement

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
The content (presentation & workbook) provided to the public is presented in a meaningful, and easy to understand manner that allows for public engagement.	1	1		5	
There is adequate representation from city staff to facilitate the workbook exercises and answer questions.				6	1
Two dates for city-wide public meetings are sufficient.		1		3	3

The best time for city-wide public budget meetings is;

Fall	Winter
6	3

**Note: total is greater than 7, as two councillors suggested both times of the year is preferable*

Overall, Council agrees that the city budget is a complex issue and communicating the information back to the public in a meaningful way is a difficult undertaking, taking into consideration both the subject matter and the limited attendance. Overall, most of Council was pleased with the format of the public meetings and indicated that two public meetings are sufficient in order to provide the opportunity for the public to provide input into the process. Many councillors also expressed that ward specific meetings should continue to be held in addition to the two public meetings. During the 2011 budget process, staff was requested to attend 3 specific ward meetings.

In terms of content, Council has generally indicated that the public input into the budget process should be sooner, closer to delivering budget directions; as such the Fall is an appropriate time for public engagement. The content should be more educational, and inform debate and group discussion.

Public engagement is a dynamic process and one that has been changing over the last few years with more public input through workshop sessions and the introduction of social media. Many additional opportunities for improvement were provided by members of Council which are listed as follows;

- Two public meetings – one in the fall before/after budget directions and one in the winter after budget development
- Provide more information on the internet (city website, Facebook) in ways of surveys to get continuous feedback from the public as opposed to once a year
- Council should be more involved in the public meetings and should be delivering the budget presentations
- Public meetings should be similar to ‘town hall’ meetings, more debate and discussion, no formal presentations
- Two public meetings prior to budget directions to focus on key emerging issues and two public meetings following directions to receive public input
- Educational workshops throughout the year to engage the public as opposed to specific budget meetings
- Public meetings should be by invitation only - through a random draw to residents, in order to garner attention for the public meeting. Current process gets a greater number of stakeholders who are not necessarily residents of Burlington and are focused on specific interests rather than a city focus

Budget Documents

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
The information contained in the capital budget documents is relevant, meaningful and presented in a concise manner.				6	1
The information contained in the current budget documents is relevant, meaningful and presented in a concise manner.		1		5	1

2010 was the beginning of a new budget process. Staff presented a more concise document, with high level information. As we continue to move forward with this process, we are continually refining the documents to ensure the documents are easy to read and present meaningful data. Overall, Council was pleased with the budget documents and the overview reports. One comment which was made by all members of council is that there was too much detail presented in the current budget, and staff should consider a dollar threshold and/or material items only when reporting on key issues. Further recommendations for improvement are as follows;

- Add more non-financial measures such as long terms goals and strategies
- More comparative data in the current budget
- Department submissions should be oriented as a ‘business plan’, with key goals, objectives, performance indicators, and trend information
- More information regarding net zero budgets
- Integrate information on Parks & Recreation’s secondary reporting model
- Remove repetition in the documents
- Capital budget should be classified according to new and renewal type projects, within each asset category
- Consolidate overview reports and budget documentation, so they are more easily relatable

Multi-year Simulation

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
The CURRENT budget ten-year simulation is useful in decision making	1	1		4	1

Majority of Council agrees that the ten year multi year simulation is a useful tool in forecasting budget impacts, as it assists Council in visioning the long term plans for the

city, identify potential issues and provides a context for the upcoming strategy. Two Councillors felt, that a ten year simulation does not provide accurate data in the forecast years, when council priorities are changing, and that a four or five year simulation is of more value. Others would like to see the simulation more frequently throughout the year.

Council Information Sessions

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
Information sessions is a useful process		1		5	1
The time allotment for each budget information session is sufficient to ask questions		1	1	5	
Appropriate responses are provided by departments/ asset leads in a reasonable timeframe.				6	1
The layout of the room is conducive to provide access to all departments/ asset leads.		2		5	

Council appreciates the opportunity to ask questions to departments and asset leads during council information sessions. With new members of Council there was a significant amount of information to review in order for the information sessions to add value to the 2011 process. Council has expressed that for time effectiveness it allows access to everyone at one place during one time. Some suggestions for improvement are;

- Scheduled council information sessions with more time between budget overviews and committee reviews to give Council adequate time to review the document and ask the right questions
- Have one council information session that is longer in duration but address both the capital and current budget at once
- Schedule time slots for a small group of departments/ asset categories rotating throughout the allotted time period, so as to not have all groups available at once. This will be a better use of staff time, as well as allow members of council to hear the questions and responses of their colleagues
- Provide budget action request forms prior to council information sessions in order to address those questions, which can assist in shortening the number of questions at committee

Budget & Corporate Services Committee Review Forms

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
The Budget Review Forms are easy to understand and assist in preparing for the committee review.				6	1
The Budget Review Forms should be used as the agenda for the budget committee reviews to focus on key issues.				6	1

Generally Council appreciates the budget review forms as a way to focus the debate on the key issues of the budget.

Budget & Corporate Services Committee Deliberations

	December	January	February
Optimal time of the year for Council approval of the capital budget	1	6	
Optimal time of the year for Council approval of the current budget	1	1	5

	1 day or less	1-2 days	2-3 days
Optimal amount of time required to review and approve the capital budget	4	3	-
Optimal amount of time required to review and approve the current budget	2	5	-

As mentioned earlier Council has expressed the desire to have a shorter budget cycle with timely budget approvals. From the above it can be determined that Council would like to see the capital budget reviewed and approved in January, followed by the current budget in February, with generally 2 days or less for committee deliberations. Most of Council requests budget approvals in the new year, in order not to coincide with the Region's budget deliberations in November/ December. Suggestions to shorten budget deliberations are;

- Schedule as separate meetings not part of a regular committee week for budgets only, all budget delegations would occur on a regularly scheduled B&CS meeting

- Special quarterly council meetings to provide information on key issues in each division, such as issues that are on the horizon, variance reporting, key trends, new initiatives and their relation to the strategic plan – this will provide education to council throughout the year as opposed to once a year
- Ensure that the time limit for delegations is enforced

The above highlight overall comments received at the one-on-one meetings with individual members of council regarding specific areas of the budget process. This is a new process, and some members of council have indicated the process is continually improving. Overall, Council provided a lot of positive feedback and some opportunities for improvement. Some of the overall themes in the meetings were a shorter and timelier process, budget discussions that are more high level and strategic, and receipt of budget information throughout the year to ease the budget approval process.

STAFF DEBRIEFING

Finance staff conducted three budget debriefings with current budget coordinators, capital budget asset leads, as well as with Executive Budget Committee (EBC). Comments on the budget process as they relate to Council and Committee reviews are as follows;

- Need to be aware of Council strategic direction/ expectations so that asset leads can develop a capital budget that meets those needs
- Council Information sessions are valuable
 - Recommend booking specific times with each department/ asset category
- The one-on-one opportunity to speak to members of Council works really well to answer questions and address issues
- More consultation and interaction with Council prior to budget reviews
- Council approval of capital budget was late, has impact on tenders and pricing

NEXT STEPS

Refer to report EBC-03-11, 2012 Budget Process & Direction report, in the same agenda, highlighting some of the changes staff will implement into the 2012 budget process in response to the feedback and comments received from the council debriefing sessions.

Financial Matters:

Not applicable.

Communication Matters:

Throughout the 2011 budget process, the City of Burlington has been using a variety of forms of social media to inform staff, council and the public. New to the 2011 budget process was the use of Twitter, and Facebook.

Conclusion:

The report provides Council and staff comments and feedback as they relate to the 2011 budget process. Staff will review feedback and continue to incorporate opportunities for improvement and streamlining where possible into the 2012 budget process.

Respectfully submitted,

Reena Bajwa
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Appendices:

A. 2011 Budget Process Debriefing Questionnaire
B.

Notifications:
 (after Council decision)

Name	Mailing or E-mail Address

Approvals:

*required

_____ *Department _____ City Treasurer _____ General Manager _____ City Manager

	To be completed by the Clerks Department
Committee Disposition & Comments	
	01-Approved 02-Not Approved 03-Amended 04-Referred 06-Received & Filed 07-Withdrawn
Council Disposition & Comments	
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