



**Synthesis of Feedback from 2020 Municipal Budget
Engagement
(Open Houses and Citizen Budget Tool)**

Executive Summary

The City of Wetaskiwin was very successful in engaging the community in the budget process this year as compared to previous years. **In total, 234 community members provided their feedback on the proposed 2020 municipal budget** (185 people completed the Citizen Budget online survey, and 49 citizens attended the 2020 budget open houses held in various community spaces). Compared to one open house for the 2019 budget with 14 citizens attending—and no online engagement—this was a significant increase. Thank you to all the City staff and Council members who attended these engagement sessions and helped make them a reality!

While the entirety of the feedback received has been summarized in this document, the following themes were prevalent throughout the engagement sessions (both in-person and online):

- Community members are not in favor of a tax increase (affordability is a major issue).
- The community is very concerned about the lack of local economic growth and prosperity.
- Community members would like to hear more about how the City is reducing spending and saving taxpayer dollars.
- The community believes the City should only spend money on needs at this point (not wants).
- Community members would like to see the City continuing to lobby higher orders of government with an end goal of saving taxpayer money.
- Local crime rates continue to be a concern for many in the community.

The City received positive feedback on utilizing both online and in-person consultations. Many who attended the budget open houses stated they appreciated the conversational approach and felt empowered to learn more about City operations, current challenges the City is facing, etc. The City would like to thank all the community members—businesses, residents, etc.—who took time to provide their feedback on the 2020 proposed municipal budget. That feedback has been organized below and is being presented to City Council at their regular Nov. 28, 2019 Council meeting.

General Feedback

The comments below are a mix of general themes that came out of the budget engagement sessions, as well as quotes from members of the participating public. The quotes from the public are shown below in orange (Note: the figures presented by the public have not been confirmed by Finance).

- **Budget format:**
 - People appreciated the conversational approach to the budget engagement.

- **Taxes:**
 - Does not want a tax increase
 - Roll back taxes
 - Taxes have doubled in 20 years
 - Moved to Wetaskiwin for lower taxes initially; not happy with current tax amounts.
 - With taxes and service fees increasing, service fees increasing the City should be looking at making cuts. Other similar size communities are growing in the region, but Wetaskiwin is stagnated. The City should look at similar municipal budgets and align with them to maximize success.
 - Staff costs and debt repayment combined account for 107% of tax revenue (not sustainable or affordable).

- **Spending:**
 - Stop spending and start saving.
 - Would like the City to consider a 3-year hiatus of zero spending due to economy.
 - Spending money on staffing is not welcomed by public (every department should have to justify their positions).
 - A wage rollback for City staff and Council should be seriously considered.
 - City can't afford 'base' budget much less any service increases.
 - Per capita spending comparisons are important.
 - Fundraising should be considered wherever possible to help alleviate the stress on the tax base.
 - Citizens are comfortable with cutting costs on beautification of City; get rid of the flowerpots, get rid of the Christmas lights and all other spending in this area; focus on keeping the City together.
 - Use contractors to help bring down costs.
 - Hire local contractors at competitive prices - tax dollars stay in Wetaskiwin.
 - All possible funds should be going to road repairs. No upgrades unless those upgrades impact safety in a big way.
 - Instead of spending money on wants it should be spent on what needs to be done.
 - City departments need to reduce their spending and actively look for ways to save money.

- Please ensure any funds available are put to the best use possible. While parks and trails are nice, they should hold a lower priority at this time. Please select wisely, City of Wetaskiwin.
 - Money should only be spent if mandatory. All other money should go towards debt repayment or the wastewater treatment plant.
 - Stop unnecessary spending on frivolous stuff. The City needs to take the lead and be its own entity (not trying to copy Edmonton, Red Deer, etc.).
 - The City has spent over 1 million dollars on contracted and general services. Can some of these be completed by employees? Is the City getting value for money on these contracted services? Why are all these services not tendered in a competitive process? As a business owner who keeps an eye out for opportunities on your website, this is disappointing.
 - Focus more on the infrastructure and debt. Pull back on events, etc.
 - Cut to get costs under control. Lower taxes and cost of living in Wetaskiwin.
 - In other parts of Canada, small municipalities coordinate on volume purchasing to get better pricing. Many communities and provinces across the country have had to make some hard decisions about parks, picnic areas, etc.. Maybe the City needs to cut back on some of those types of expenses for a few years.
 - For the 2020 budget only spend on infrastructure improvements to be completed in the City. Funds earmarked for other projects should be saved for the Wastewater Treatment Facility. The City should also consider a head count reduction in parks and recreation, with an overall reduction in city-maintained parks.
 - The City should have no 'assistant' positions due to its size.
 - Maintenance of all City assets like the Manluk Centre seems beneficial as opposed to letting things go and ending up with large, more expensive repairs in future.
 - Please spend more money on safety, policing, and roads so theft drops.
 - Have each department review their spending to ensure that they are not wasting money on frivolous advertising (note pads, pens, etc.). If the City is going to cut spending, consider what is necessary and what can be done without. If salaries must be cut, start at the top—don't cut lower paying positions.
 - Too much is spent on manger wages. Why are there departments with single or dual employees where there isn't a need for a manager and a wage to go with the title?
- **Economic Growth:**
 - People want to see new investment and economic growth in the community.
 - Wetaskiwin needs to be competitive in something to enable growth.
 - There would be many great opportunities for businesses if the airport was expanded.
 - Some community members believe the Airport is under-utilized.

- Most successful cities have an active airport as an important part of their infrastructure.
 - The Wetaskiwin Regional Airport is a great deal for pilots and the training school. Possibly look at a modest fee for take-offs or landings and begin putting that money away to eventually lengthen the runway (which would increase use of airport).
 - With respect to the industrial area the City is promoting, perhaps look at the book value and decide if selling at a lower price per acre might move some of that property, producing other benefits to the City.
 - Need to find a way to attract/retain families.
- **Equipment Pool :**
 - Delay equipment replacement and then save money on replacements by purchasing used equipment.
 - Decrease in equipment pool spending.
 - Concerns about growth of fleet vs limited growth of City.
- **Roadways:**
 - Focus on the highest priority levels (best when combined with necessary utility placements); If the City wants to do something at the hospital intersection then dedicate all the road upgrade funding there.
 - Roads in Wetaskiwin need to be better maintained unless the City wants to keep replacing them. Quality control is just as important as getting the job done.
 - Roads and sidewalks have been a low priority for too long and should be moved up to the top as this has caused an image and safety problem for too long.
- **Other:**
 - The number one priority for the City should be reducing local crime. Anything addressed before that is a waste of time.
 - No clear understanding of service levels that the City provides.
 - Solar-lit signs are expensive and unnecessary.
 - Increased lobbying through AUMA.
 - Newspaper section for good news (opposite of rant and rave).
 - Plan better for the future.
 - Citizen believes in maintaining control and ownership of water; not selling it to someone else.
 - Move towards indoor facilities (climbing wall, racquetball courts, etc.).
 - More connectedness on bike paths.
 - Library is an important service to continue funding.
 - Please review service levels for all services.
 - By the lake park should finish getting the path upgraded.
 - Need to revisit the local improvement levy that is being placed on residents. All roads and sidewalks should be addressed from the tax base, not penalizing residents depending on where they live and how the city decides to define their road.

- Would it be possible to get a 10% increase in productivity in all departments without adding to the head count?
- Listen to the community, watch spending at city hall, and don't increase the already-high taxes. Stand behind the people/community; look for grants; make cuts.
- The expansion of the library is very important to our community.
- would be helpful to know where major funding was allotted last year. It would also be helpful to see which facilities have had a lot of funding before.
- Please plan for a walkable city. New infrastructure to support walking and biking on the same sidewalk all over Wetaskiwin would be nice.
- Allow households to reduce their waste pick up from once a week to once every two weeks and provide a different color bin to accommodate this as it will reduce cost to the homeowner and save money on picking up trash.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Additional RCMP Members - \$176,890

- **Comments in favor of additional RCMP members:**
 - Police are overworked, see the need for more members.
 - Wetaskiwin is getting good value from RCMP.
 - If RCMP and CPOs are the same price go with more RCMP.
 - Spend money on policing, not by-law. This community is suffering from crime and costing everyone in every capacity. Get the RCMP to do more foot patrols and take pride in making Wetaskiwin safe again.
- **Comments against additional RCMP members:**
 - Do not support the RCMP officers; unsure of where that money would come from (Perception the city pays for everything. Where does the province, county, etc. put in for cost sharing?).
 - Hire our own police service instead.
 - Community would like to see alternatives to adding police every year.
 - Crime would be better served by a city police department.
- **Other RCMP-related comments:**
 - Policing changes, deployment of officers - frustrated with the level of service (wait time for RCMP to arrive).
 - Who holds the RCMP accountable?
 - Community is concerned with poor response time with RCMP.
 - County doesn't contribute enough to RCMP costs.
 - What are the current Cost sharing negotiations? Funding agreement between RCMP, Province and the City.
 - Would like to see more police follow up (looking into how they're responding to calls and ensuring they're updating files appropriately).

Additional CPO Member - \$113,400

- **Comments in favor of additional CPO:**
 - Support for two additional CPOs as they are more visible than the RCMP.
 - Yes, but CPOs need to be protecting the city, not going out to the callouts (following the announcement of rural crime initiatives).
 - Funding the CPO would be a better use of funds vs. hiring more police.
 - Support for three CPOs and Zero RCMP.
- **Other CPO-related comments:**
 - Do we currently have 24-hour coverage with our CPOs?
 - Dollars spent on CPOs is considered 'supporting local' by the public.
 - CPO support is local (within City limits) and more economical.

Community Policing Plan - \$50,000

- Comprehensive approach is needed for policing, due to the connection between crime rates, mental health, addictions, etc.
- People remain concerned about Wetaskiwin's ranking on the crime severity index.
- Holistic approach to the plan needed; not just officers but social services.
- Supportive of community policing plan.
- Cost Benefit Analysis of continuing to hire the RCMP vs. having a City owned police force would help.
- Support of the policing plan; best bang for our buck.
- Community would like to see alternatives to adding police every year.
- Support Citizens on Patrol.
- Homeless shelter is an important piece for community safety.
- Do we need to hire a consultant for the policing plan?
- Look at economic origins of increased crime (social issues etc.).
- Look at pilot programs to help kick start addressing homelessness etc.
- Homeless shelter important piece; leads to reduction in crime.
- Homeless shelter not staffed with qualified people (safety concerns); should be accessible and centralized.
- Some people believe local petty crimes are committed out of necessity due to the socio-economic demographic of our area. Solve that, crime will disappear.

UTILITIES

Inflow and Infiltration Summer Staff - \$50,000

- No comments.

Utility Rate Increase: Inflation - \$298,100

- Concern about current rates already being high, much less proposing to increase rates again (perception that it is lower in other communities compared to Wetaskiwin).
- Does the utility increase get us to a better place financially to sustain water/utilities?
- Calgary has a bylaw to have gravel and grass to reduce stress on the system—might help keep local rates low.
- Want to see a monthly billing cycle (instead of every two months).
- Is the \$10 admin fee per unit or per title?

Utility Rate Increase: Increase to Wastewater Consumption Fee - \$540,000

- Most attendees felt that the increase from \$1/m³ to \$1.50/m³ was substantial.
- Commercial rates for water consumption vs. residential (why are commercial rates higher?)
- Do not want an increase to utility fees; utility increases cannot be support by current demographics (seniors on fixed income, low income, etc.)

Utility Rate Increase: Transfer \$10/month charge to wastewater - \$468,000

- No comments.

Utilities Master Plan: Phase 2 - \$200,000

- No comments.

Multi-Family Trash Participation - \$12,100 increase to revenue

- No comments.

Recycle Yard Change of Hours - \$30,000 savings

- Most attendees were in favor of the change in hours.
- Attendees like how the recycle centre is set up/manned. They see the value and want to ensure minimal impact to the service.

Curbside

- People like the idea of the curbside recycling, but do not want to pay extra for this service.
- Most people commented they were happy to take their items to the recycle centre (the community is already used to doing this).

PROPOSED 2020 CAPITAL EXPENSES

Public Works Shop and Annex Buildings Replacement - \$6,500,000

- **Comments in favor of shop replacement :**
 - Liquidate surplus assets (VIC, Civic Building, etc.) to pay for public works shop replacement instead of borrowing or putting it on taxpayers.
 - Yes to replacing it; old infrastructure needs to be fixed before it gets worse.
 - Just build new to save money in the long run; Renovations can cost more.
 - Yes but City should build out in industrial area (instead of downtown area).

- **Comments against replacement of shop:**
 - Concerns about space for new shop.
 - Does not support a new building but does support renovating existing one to meet minimum safety code requirements.
 - Is the City is considering creative, less expensive options to remedy the safety concerns at the PW shop?
 - Reuse/repurpose; don't take on more facilities, which drive up costs.
 - Add another level to existing shop as a renovation to solve space issue.
 - Public feels we need to spend money only on needs right now.

- **Other comments related to the shop replacement:**
 - Local electrician said we can increase the power to existing shop to meet the demand for more power (City to follow up with him).
 - Concerns about renovations; will this space adequately meet our needs now and in the future?
 - Wanted to know the specific safety concerns, and how can the City can address those without replacing the whole building?
 - What square footage does PW need for a shop?
 - Want council to move forward with the best option.
 - People want the least expensive option due to the high cost of WWTP
 - Is there any historic value to the current shop?
 - Clarification wanted on what the \$6.5M is for - is it just for the building?
 - What investigation has been done to see what is needed for the PW shop?
 - Encouragement from public to think about the best bang for our buck for the long term, and make the right decision now thinking about the long-term implications.

CCTV Contractor - \$500,000

- **Comments in favor of CCTV contractor :**
 - Supportive of this initiative as it protects infrastructure.

- **Comments against CCTV contractor :**
 - More efficient to have our own equipment and our own trained people.

- **Other comments related to CCTV contractor :**
 - Want to see a better breakdown of CCTV costs.
 - Utilize the source control officer more to help protect infrastructure.
 - Is this for cleaning and inspection of lines?
 - Want more information on cost benefit analysis of doing work in-house vs contracting
 - See if there is interest in neighboring municipalities to share the equipment along with the cost.
 - How many other cities this size have this equipment?
 - Would the City consider a third-party arrangement (Private investors - P3)

Wastewater Treatment Plant Design - \$1,000,000

- **Comments in favor of WWTP design:**
 - Supportive of the replacement.
 - Safe drinking water a priority for this community (as shown in Citizen Budget results).
 - It needs to be built with future expansion possibilities in mind (plan for the future).
- **Other comments related to WWTP design:**
 - Many attendees would like to see continued efforts to secure cost-sharing with higher orders of government.
 - Partner with neighboring municipalities to share cost of WWTP design.
 - What if we don't build it? What is the environmental impact of building it and not building it? After we pay \$1M for the design are the higher orders of government going to change the requirements again?
 - Why is the cost for the WWTP so high?
 - How could grey water be rerouted to water lawns / reduce strain on infrastructure?
 - Would like more information on what environmental standards could be relaxed.
 - Some attendees viewed this as a political issue instead of a financial issue.
 - To what degree is the City upgrading to being comparable with our neighbors?
 - Do we bill the County for their storm water that we treat?
 - Why is the federal government forcing us to spend money that we don't have?

PROPOSED 2020 OPERATING EXPENSES

Business Case	Cost
Utility Franchise Fee Change <u>Feedback:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns about franchise fee increase based on limited ability of citizens to pay (many maxed out with fees and taxes already). 	(\$161,900 increase to revenue)
Manluk Regional Aquatic Centre Rate Changes <u>Feedback:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most people were ok with user fees increasing. Some attendees wanted to know how much money the Manluk Centre generates in a year. Other attendees were concerned there would be reduced usage when Camrose opens their pool again. 	(\$35,000 increase to revenue)
Records Management & Human Resources Coordinator <u>Feedback:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was community support for this position. Some suggested it be a term position at this time. 	\$57,300
Grant Writer / Financial Analyst <u>Feedback:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was community support for this position. Some suggested it be a term position at this time. Could this person work in a consultation capacity or as an overall resource for the community? 	\$76,000
Recreation Programming Assistant <u>Feedback:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was community support for this position. 	\$0
Community Resource Coordinator <u>Feedback:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Half of attendees supported this position; half did not. This position would be valuable to help increase success of local transit (transit needs to grow for everyone in the community; have scheduled route and stops; would like to see a bus service to Maskwacis and back). 	\$11,250
Enterprise Software System Strategy <u>Feedback:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was community support for this item. 	\$25,000
Budget Software License Seats <u>Feedback:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was community support for this position. 	\$10,000
Citizen Satisfaction Survey <u>Feedback:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This item was not supported by the community. 	\$25,000

<p>COLA increase of 1 percent</p> <p><u>Feedback:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most attendees did not support this initiative (felt it was unjustified due to economic recession; COLA and any raises should freeze for all city workers until the vital things are fixed. No one will buy anything here or move here until the taxes are down and the infrastructure is maintained and up to snuff—especially when our wastewater system is suffering). • A few community members did show support; wants the City to retain good employees. • Some community members wondered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ is this in line with what the province is doing? ○ why don't the highest paid employees live in the City? 	<p>\$129,600</p>
<p>Compensation Survey Implementation</p> <p><u>Feedback:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most attendees did not support implementing the compensation survey findings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 57% increase in labor costs for City since 201, which is higher than the increase for labour for Alberta workers (province as a whole, not just Government of Alberta). ○ Too many high paid staff and over-paid managers. ○ There shouldn't be a wage increase when the City is increasing taxes to cover costs. ○ No enhancements, no upgrades, no new hires or raises until City roads and storm drains are fixed. ○ We are in a recession and need wage freezes at the least; rollbacks preferred. • A few attendees saw value in paying comparably to other municipalities; need to be able to retain staff. 	<p>\$276,800</p>

Results of Citizen Budget Modules

Funds Allocation Module (Citizen Budget Tool)

Ranking	Area of Service	Total Dollars Allocated
1	Protective Services	\$57,130
2	Public Works	\$40,460
3	Economic Development	\$18,230
4	Recreation	\$16,020
5	Parks & Trails	\$13,190
6	Airport	\$8,890
7	Public Transit	\$8,730
8	Community Grants & Special Events	\$7,200

Prioritization of Projects (Citizen Budget Tool)

The priorities were determined by taking the number of people who indicated that the project was in their top 3 listing and ranking them accordingly. Ties have additional information included to show how many people ranked it as a 1, 2, or 3 priority, and the item with the higher priority was listed first.

Ranking	Project	Respondent Priority
1	Lead Pipe Replacement - Water Service	Top three for 99 people (54% of 185 respondents)
2	Asphalt Overlays	Top three for 81 people (44% of 185 respondents)
3	Fire Hydrant / Main Valve Replacement / Utility Infrastructure Rehabilitation	Top three for 77 people (42% of 185 respondents)
4	Roadway Lane Markings	Top three for 57 people (31% of 185 respondents)
5	Sidewalk Trail Rehabilitation	Top three for 51 people (28% of 185 respondents)
6	Manluk Centre Maintenance	Top three for 45 people (24% of 185 respondents)
7	Traffic Signal Replacement	Top three for 42 people (23% of 185 respondents)

8	Fire Training Facility Expansion	Top three for 41 people (22% of 185 respondents)
9	Public Works Shop Replacement (17/8/11)	Top three for 36 people (19% of 185 respondents)
9	Equipment Replacement (9/10/17)	Top three for 36 people (19% of 185 respondents)
11	Sports Field Rehabilitation (16/6/12)	Top three for 34 people (18% of 185 respondents)
11	Parks/Trails Infrastructure Replacement (6/7/21)	Top three for 34 people (18% of 185 respondents)
13	I.T. System - Server Upgrade	Top three for 32 people (17% of 185 respondents)
14	Upgrades and Elevator Installation at By-the-Lake Park	Top three for 29 people (16% of 185 respondents)