



## 2021 MUNICIPAL BUDGET

### Results of First Round of Budget Engagement (Balancing Act & Paper Surveys)

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first portion of the City of Wetaskiwin’s annual budget engagement—for the 2021 municipal budget—was conducted through an online budgeting tool called ‘Balancing Act’. This was the first year that the City used this software as part of the annual budget engagement process. While the number of people who participated in this simulation fell short of the engagement witnessed last year (48 people participated this year compared to 185 people last year), helpful and qualitative commentary was captured during the process. Additionally, the continued persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with the timing of the budget outreach (school season) likely contributed to the lower-than-hoped-for engagement.

As you’ll note in the attached report, there is a substantial gap between total pageviews (437) and completed online submissions (37) for the budget engagement simulation. Balancing Act was impressed with our budget simulation and asked us for permission to showcase our simulation to other current and potential Canadian clients. We provided permission for them to do so, and over half the pageviews came from outside of our community as a result.

To ensure representation from our local seniors, the City also sent out paper copies of the scenario questions to each seniors complex within Wetaskiwin (with the exception of the Seniors Centre as they appear to be closed to the public at this time).

There were a few contradictions in the data collected, including an overall desire to lower taxes—or at least keep them from increasing—while simultaneously wanting to increase RCMP representation and our snow removal level of service.

#### RESULTS (HIGH-LEVEL)

Forty-eight (48) submissions were received in total for the first round of public engagement on the 2021 municipal budget (37 online; 11 paper surveys). While the full Balancing Act report has been attached to this document, the breakdown of each category by overall increase or decrease is as follows:

#### **Areas where participants indicated an increase in spending overall:**

- **Sales**  
This included proposed changes to revenue generation, including at the Manluk Centre through a change in user fees

- **Fire Services staffing**  
This included the proposed addition of a full-time Daytime Response Firefighter and/or a full-time Fire Prevention Officer
- **Management and Support**  
This included updating the MDP and LUB to align with the Community Visioning project outcomes
- **RCMP**  
This included the possibility of adding more RCMP members in Wetaskiwin
- **Snow removal / street maintenance and cleaning**  
This included different options on our snow removal level of service

**Areas where participants indicated a decrease in spending overall:**

- **Airport**  
This include the proposed addition of a part-time City employee to perform airport maintenance vs. contracting that service out
- **Parks maintenance**  
This was specific to grass cutting; various options were given ranging from partially to fully contracting out grass cutting services on City-owned property, or having City staff perform this function entirely
- **Recreation**  
This focused on the Manluk Centre hours of operation; options were to increase, decrease, or keep the hours the same

**The following areas received no change in spending (these categories were not editable in the simulation):**

- General Municipal Services
- Grants
- Property taxes
- Transfers (including Transfers to Reserves)
- Utilities

**Comments**

The following comments were received as part of the online budget simulation engagement. One comment was removed due to inappropriate content.

Category (and Question)	Comments
Business & Residential Property Taxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This should be the very last option to add revenue. I know many people who are trying to sell their homes because of the high property taxes that we have.</li> <li>• Decrease residential tax rate.</li> </ul>
Sales of Goods & Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The City should look at more full cost recovery fees and new fees such as annual animal licensing fees, partnerships with user</li> </ul>

	groups (i.e. schools), downtown parking meters, higher fees for tickets, and take away the 50% discount if paid in a week option.
Salaries, Wages, Benefits & Expenses - Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If possible, continue to keep council costs as low as possible.</li> <li>• This is excessively high for a small community. I would be interested to see how this compares to other similar sized communities. Other than the Mayor these are part-time positions. Amount should be reduced to \$400,000.</li> </ul>
Enforcement Services (Bylaw)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adding more bylaw officers can help reduce the non-emergent RCMP calls (loitering, dogs at large, property compliance and accident scenes).</li> </ul>
Planning & Engineering (cost of updating MDP and LUB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is not the right time to be going through this process. Elected officials are there to do this for us. The impending financial issues faced by our country and province need to be our top concern as a City.</li> <li>• Does this actually help attract business to our city? Because if it doesn't then you need to justify it a bit more.</li> </ul>
Transferring money to reserves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So we are putting millions of dollars into reserves, but roads can't be paid by the City in full and have to be partly paid by the homeowner? Something is off here.</li> </ul>
RCMP member wages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 RCMP and 2 more bylaw officers would help our current issues</li> </ul>
Fire Services staffing (addition of daytime response / fire prevention officer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'd have to see what value one single daytime firefighter would add. Perhaps one daytime crew but the way this is worded sounds like one single person. Fire prevention officer duties should be absorbed and distributed between the chief/deputy chief and health and safety guy.</li> <li>• We need to staff a full-time crew of 3 or 4 for daytime calls. Some cost savings can be had by reducing the callouts to paid-on-call members for those same daytime calls. This way we can rely on the additional support of on-call members when needed for large scale events.</li> </ul>
Manluk Centre LOS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If we want the gym facility to compete locally, we will need to change to 24-hour access. Anything less, and it is a pretend gym. There is no way a punch card system and cameras will cost an additional \$100,000.</li> <li>• I would want the same hours of operation for the Manluk Centre (assuming these are the hours the facility was open pre-covid).</li> </ul>
Snow Removal / Street Maintenance & Cleaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We live in a snow belt region. Our vehicles should be equipped accordingly. We need to start enforcing the rule that says we cannot shove snow onto city road. That alone will help many residential areas.</li> <li>• We only get one sweep of our area anyway.</li> <li>• We need road repairs. Badly. It's embarrassing when family or friends from out of town visit and we have to ask them to go the back way to our house so they don't hit the potholes and ruin their cars.</li> <li>• There are a few roads in the city that need to be re-paved—specifically the one on the west side of Queen Elizabeth school. I</li> </ul>

	would like to assume that the potholes have not been repaired because it's already slated to be redone, but I'm truly not that optimistic.
Water/Wastewater/Storm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I would hope that by now you've figured out how to pay for the water treatment plant that's being required by AEP. But it also needs to be acknowledged that the fees to residents are starting to get too high. An average family home now has a water bill of \$130-200/month which is \$260-400 per billing cycle. I would urge the city to ensure that these costs do not increase further if there is a projected surplus.</li> </ul>
Solid Waste / Recycling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If you truly want to extend the life of the landfill, then the City needs to make recycling mandatory with weekly pickups. There are several cities that do this. Sherwood Park is one of them.</li> </ul>
Grass Cutting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This year the grass service was a disaster. Maybe try having some 'natural spaces' to save costs but for the major parks and areas use the teenagers who always did a great job.</li> <li>Let's shop local and hire local – be an example! The Edmonton company certainly didn't maintain trees and planted beds in Ashoro Friendship Park!</li> <li>Keep the contracted company local as best as possible.</li> <li>You have not provided any information to residents about the grass cutting contracts as to whether or not it actually saved the city money. I do know that service standards appeared to be below par. Yes we had a wet spring, but there were still things that could have been done. Did we actually save any money when compared to the actual hours of man-power that were put in?</li> <li>The City cannot urge citizens to SHOP LOCALLY as I have been told that an out of city business was contracted to complete this task this year and I don't feel that they did as good as the university/college students.</li> <li>If it costs more to contract a company out of Edmonton than it would to hire at minimum wage, you are doing it wrong.</li> <li>Sheep would keep the grass down – benefit to City. Pay for grazing rights on exchanges, pasture &amp; the services for the sheep. Barter system.</li> </ul>

**Paper Survey Results** (senior demographic)

Eleven (11) paper surveys were completed by participants at the various local seniors complexes, with the results summarized below. The most popular opinion for each question is shown in bold.

Question	Response(s)
<b>Recreation (Manluk Centre)</b> The Manluk Centre operating budget is funded through a combination of user fees, rental revenue, and sales (merchandise, etc.). Would you support changes to the user	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9% would support a small increase to user fees</li> <li><b>55% would not support an increase to user fees</b></li> </ul>

<p>fee structure?  <i>Note: A change to the user fees charged at the Manluk Centre will affect the level of service provided.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 27% would like to see user fees decrease</li> <li>• 9% did not specify either way</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recreation (Manluk Centre)</b>  The hours that a facility is open to the public affects the costs associated with providing that service. If hours are increased, additional staffing may be required as well as more maintenance costs.  Keeping this in mind, would you like to see the hours at the Manluk Centre decrease, increase, or remain the same?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18% would like the hours of operation to increase</li> <li>• 9% would like the hours of operation to decrease</li> <li>• <b>64% would like the hours of operation to remain the same</b></li> <li>• 9% did not specify</li> </ul>
<p><b>Planning &amp; Engineering</b>  The Municipal Development Plan (MDP) and Land Use Bylaw (LUB) reflect current community values and development trends. Since the City is undergoing a broad Community Visioning project, this is an opportunity to update our documentation to align with the community’s vision for the future. Do you support the expenditure of updating the MDP and LUB?  <i>Note: These updates are budgeted for \$60,000</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 36% support the expenditure to update our MDP and LUB</li> <li>• <b>55% do not support the expenditure to update our MDP and LUB</b></li> <li>• 9% did not specify</li> </ul>
<p><b>RCMP Staffing</b>  Do you feel the overall safety of the community would be improved by hiring additional RCMP members in Wetaskiwin?  <i>Note: Each additional officer costs \$125,758</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>36% support hiring one (1) additional RCMP member</b></li> <li>• 27% support hiring two (2) additional RCMP members</li> <li>• <b>36% do not support hiring any additional RCMP members</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Fire Services Staffing</b>  The Fire Services department is mainly staffed by paid-on-call firefighters and does not currently have a dedicated Fire Prevention Officer. This poses a risk to resident safety due to reduced capacity to perform required building fire inspections, etc.  Calls for service have increased significantly in the past several years, and it is more difficult for the paid-on-call firefighters to respond during daytime emergencies due to many of them having other daytime jobs. The addition of a Daytime Response Firefighter would alleviate some of this uncertainty and increase the level of daytime service the fire department can provide. Do you support the addition of one, both, or neither of these positions?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 36% support adding both positions (Daytime Response Firefighter and Fire Prevention Officer)</li> <li>• 0% support only hiring a Fire Prevention Officer</li> <li>• <b>45% support only hiring a Daytime Response Firefighter</b></li> <li>• 19% want to see staffing levels remain the same</li> </ul>
<p><b>Airport Operations</b>  Maintenance services at the Wetaskiwin Airport are currently being performed by a contracted company. The City is considering hiring a part-time City employee who would perform the airport maintenance work rather than the contracted company. Hiring one part-time staff would be an overall cost savings of \$16,000. Should the Airport use the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>73% support hiring a part time airport maintenance employee</b></li> <li>• 18% support staying with the contracted company</li> <li>• 9% did not specify</li> </ul>

<p>contracted services budget to add a part-time airport maintenance staff position?</p>	
<p><b>Snow Removal</b>  The City budgets for two full snow removal cycles per year. There is a cost difference between City staff and contracted snow removal services.  What option would you prefer for snow removal services in the City of Wetaskiwin?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18% support contracting out one (1) snow removal cycle—City does one cycle in-house</li> <li>• 9% support contracting out both snow removal cycles</li> <li>• <b>64% support keeping things the same as they are now</b></li> <li>• 9% support decreasing the LOS to only one (1) snow removal cycle per year—done by City staff</li> </ul>
<p><b>Grass Cutting</b>  In 2020, the City conducted a pilot project to partially contract out the grass cutting operations on City-owned properties. What would you like to see happen in future years for grass cutting services on City-owned properties?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18% support partially contracting out this service (similar to 2020)</li> <li>• 9% support contracting out all grass cutting services</li> <li>• <b>73% support having City staff conduct all grass cutting</b></li> </ul>