



**City of Kingston
Information Report to Council
Report Number 21-138**

To: Mayor and Members of Council
From: Desiree Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer
Resource Staff: Lana Foulds, Director of Financial Services
Date of Meeting: June 22, 2021
Subject: 2022 Budget Engagement Process

Council Strategic Plan Alignment:

Theme: Council requests

Goal: See above

Executive Summary:

On July 7, 2020, Council endorsed a multi-year phased-in approach to an open budget process as outlined in [Council Report Number 20-098](#). An open budget process offers the community an opportunity to learn about the municipal budget process, provide input on priorities and influence the allocation of public resources. The recommended approach included the use of various engagement tools to inform residents about municipal revenue sources, choices, and services.

Staff have incorporated lessons learned from last year's engagement process in developing the 2022 budget engagement plan and continue to monitor a variety of budget engagement strategies, tools and techniques utilized by other municipalities across the country. The 2022 budget engagement plan has been developed with the objective of providing opportunity for greater discussion and consultation from an expanded and more diverse cross-section of the community.

The engagement process will continue to be impacted by the pandemic restrictions and plans have been developed with reference to the City's Engagement During COVID-19 Tool Kit and Guidelines, respecting social distancing and other pandemic boundaries. The engagement plan will also provide opportunity to engage the community on specific pandemic recovery strategies and how the City can support the community in its recovery efforts.

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This report provides further information on the 2022 budget engagement plan including the use of new techniques and tools as we continue to develop and enhance the budget engagement process.

Recommendation:

This report is for information only.

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Authorizing Signatures:

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF FINANCIAL
OFFICER & CITY TREASURER

**Desiree Kennedy, Chief
Financial Officer & City
Treasurer**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**Lanie Hurdle, Chief
Administrative Officer**

Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Paige Agnew, Commissioner, Community Services | Not required |
| Peter Huigenbos, Commissioner, Business, Environment & Projects | Not required |
| Brad Joyce, Commissioner, Corporate Services | |
| Jim Keech, President & CEO, Utilities Kingston | Not required |
| Sheila Kidd, Commissioner, Transportation & Public Works | Not required |

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Options/Discussion:

On July 7, 2020, Council endorsed a multi-year phased-in approach to an open budget process as outlined in [Council Report Number 20-098](#). The recommended approach included the use of various engagement tools to inform the community about municipal revenue sources, choices, and services. It encompassed a consultation process to gather suggestions on how to use the municipal budget to further improve services and performance as well as a feedback process summarizing suggestions received and the rationale for decisions made.

An open budget process offers the community an opportunity to learn about the municipal budget process and to influence the allocation of public resources. A successful budget engagement plan is built using a two-way process that involves listening and interaction with the objective of generating mutual benefit.

Information and outreach are essential components of a public engagement strategy. To successfully engage the community in the budgeting process and to ensure that interaction is effective and feedback is constructive, it is important that the engagement plan incorporate a comprehensive informative element to ensure that residents have appropriate and accessible information about the budget process and a solid understanding of service levels, budget constraints, and other relevant fiscal measures.

The City's Public Engagement Framework guides the phased-in engagement approach using a continuum of engagement levels. Using this framework, the budget engagement plans focused initially on informative outreach with some consultative engagement, moving incrementally along the continuum each year to the mid-level of public engagement. As part of the phased-in approach, the 2022 budget engagement plan will incorporate strategies to increase the consultative opportunities.

The 2022 budget engagement approach will continue to:

- Engage residents in the budget planning process and inform residents about the City's operating and capital budget processes.
- Illustrate the linkages between budget and Council's Strategic Priorities, which inform the budget process.
- Consult residents on defined aspects of the City budget and generate ideas to further improve services and performance.
- Inform residents about the connection between budgets and property taxes.
- Provide feedback to residents throughout the budget engagement process and build trust and support for plans.

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Focus of the Budget Engagement Process

Determining the objective of any public engagement is critical because the purpose becomes the foundation for deciding who to involve, how to connect with them, what activities they will be involved in, what information will be collected and, most importantly, how the City will use the information. The municipal budgeting process is a broad concept with many inputs into the process that can benefit from public input but there are also a number of guiding principles and constraints that need to be considered. As a result, the focus of the engagement within the parameters of an open budget process needs to be clearly identified and well-defined.

The following elements will continue to provide focus to the budget engagement process:

- Strategic priorities and investment - understanding the level of support for Council's priorities and the level of desired investment in moving those priorities forward.
- Service levels - closely aligning services to residents' preferences - adjusting existing service levels and adding new services in the context of limited resources and effective service delivery.
- Performance – generating ideas to further improve services and performance – creative ideas and solutions for revenue generation, cost savings and efficiencies.
- Project specific – understanding the linkage between preferences and investment and how to allocate fixed resources.

2021 Budget Engagement Debrief

The 2021 budget engagement process was implemented in the fall of 2020 in order to provide new opportunities for residents to interact with staff and Council regarding specific aspects of the operating and capital budgets. The objective of the engagement was to provide residents with balanced and informed information to deepen their knowledge of the budgeting process and to obtain feedback on specific priorities and defined aspects of the City budget.

Consultation elements were also designed to generate ideas to further improve services and performance. A summary of the feedback received was reported to Council as part of [Council Report 21-049 - Operating and Capital Budgets](#).

In developing the 2022 budget engagement plan, staff solicited feedback on the 2021 engagement process and continue to monitor best practices of other municipalities across the country. The following feedback has been considered and incorporated into the 2022 budget engagement plan:

- Provide less information and more opportunity to provide input:
 - Open houses - too much of a lecture style
 - Information overwhelming

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- Not enough opportunity for discussion
- Need to reach an expanded and more diverse cross section of the community:
 - Utilize community partners to reach targeted groups
 - Use of in-person engagement where pandemic restrictions will allow
- Repeat service-related survey questions - track comparative data to highlight changes and trends
- Utilize “What we Heard” infographics – feedback summary in a Council report was not easily located
- Increased use of interactive tools

The 2022 budget engagement plan outlined below has considered this feedback and incorporates new techniques and tools as we continue to develop and enhance the budget engagement process.

2022 Budget Engagement Plan

Planning work commenced earlier this spring to determine the focus of the engagement and the tools that would be utilized. The 2022 engagement will formally launch in late June and will conclude in early August.

Based on feedback from the previous year’s engagement process, one of the objectives of this engagement process is to reach an expanded and more diverse cross-section of the community. Discussions with various community partners has generated creative ideas and support for ensuring that everyone who would like to engage with the City has the opportunity to do so. The plan will leverage existing relationships that agencies and community partners have with various sectors of the community in order to reach targeted demographics such as businesses, senior’s population, and social services sectors.

The 2022 budget engagement process will be shaped by the pandemic restrictions and plans have been developed with reference to the City’s Engagement During COVID-19 Tool Kit and Guidelines. The engagement plan will employ a variety of tools that respect social distancing and other pandemic boundaries.

Scope of Engagement

The 2021 engagement focused on a strategy more heavily weighted to informing the community on the municipal budgeting process and related service levels and priorities. This was an important foundational piece that helped to ensure that the community had appropriate and accessible information to support effective interaction and constructive input.

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Feedback from last year's budget engagement process confirmed that there was an overwhelming amount of information and that participants were looking for increased opportunity to ask questions, participate in discussion forums and provide input. In response to this feedback, the 2022 budget engagement plan will incorporate a more defined scope of engagement thereby reducing the need for subject matter context and increasing opportunities for consultation. The scope of the engagement will include the following components:

- Follow up of 2021 budget priorities – Engage further on priorities highlighted from the 2021 budget engagement process including climate change and affordable housing; information will be provided on the scope of investment made in these areas; information snapshots will be available through social media and the Get Involved Kingston budget page to demonstrate the current and projected investment in these programs; the engagement process will solicit input on identifying the scope and level of investment in these priorities.
- Service levels – A focus on specific services using shorter and informative discussions with specific City departments and agencies; information will be provided on existing services and service levels and the engagement process will gather feedback on the effectiveness and efficiency of those services.
- Pandemic recovery – The engagement process will provide an opportunity to assess how the City can support community recovery, where transitional or longer term changes in service levels could be different going forward, how change previously implemented to address the impact of the pandemic could become the new norm, and how we continue to leverage community partnerships and initiatives.

These elements will be addressed through the use of various tools, as described below.

Get Involved Kingston 'Budget' Page

The Get Involved Kingston budget page will be updated to provide additional tools that will support both inform and consult elements of the budget engagement process. It will continue to provide informative budget information, allow the community the opportunity to learn about the budget process, engage with City staff and access information relevant to the budget process including timelines and opportunities for engagement.

Content on the Get Involved Kingston budget page will include previously utilized information and new features including:

- Targeted financial information using infographics & chart formats
- Videos of the budget process (what is a budget, how it works)
- A 'who's listening' section with City staff contacts and dedicated email address as well as a Q&A section
- Budget timelines and key dates

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- Frequently asked questions
- Links to the City's Budgets and Financials webpage (current being rebranded)
- Property tax and assessment information and webpage links

The Get Involved Kingston platform offers expanded functionality that allows for interactive tools and simulator products. Staff are currently reviewing options for expanding the platform functionality to develop and incorporate simulation tools in a future engagement process.

Budget and Financials Webpage

As more people become engaged with our budgeting process, staff recognized the need to update the existing Budget and Financials page on the City website to reduce technical language and be more user friendly. Information on the new webpage will be presented in easy to navigate sections including:

- Budget and financials
- Where your tax dollars go
- Revenue sources
- City Treasurer's blog
- Links to property taxes and assessment.

Budget Open Houses

Budget open houses are essential for interacting with the community. They provide an effective, innovative approach to inviting participation. They provide the opportunity to reach a broad range of residents and can be structured in such a way that they appeal to a variety of people, fostering both small group and on-on-one communications.

Feedback from last year's budget engagement process confirmed that open houses were too long, too much of a lecture style and needed to be more interactive and discussion focused. The 2022 budget engagement process will continue to use virtual open houses; however, the plan will include more frequent and shorter virtual open houses that are narrower in scope of topic and include increased opportunity for questions and open discussion. They will utilize quick polls, Q&A opportunities and other interactive solutions that will help the information be more digestible and support increased consultation and feedback.

This year's virtual events will focus on service level feedback and the follow up of 2021 budget priorities by hosting two front-line service departments and two City agencies. Contextual information provided will inform residents on the service levels that each service area provides and how those services are funded. Focused discussion will solicit feedback from participants. The following departments and agencies were selected based on survey feedback from the 2021 budget engagement process:

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- Recreation and Leisure Services
- Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority
- Kingston Police
- Housing and Social Services

Data collected through this engagement will be shared with departments and partner agencies for consideration when developing their budgets.

Survey

Similar to last year, a community survey will be conducted. Based on best practice, the survey will include some repeat questions, primarily related to service priorities, in order to provide year-over-year data for comparison and trending purposes. The survey will incorporate questions on all elements of the engagement scope including pandemic impacts and recovery, taxation and user fee levels, and service level and program priorities.

Ideas

The 2022 engagement will include a new feature on the Get Involved Kingston budget page called “Ideas”. Through this new tool, residents will be invited to submit their ideas for low or no-cost projects that could make a big difference in their neighbourhood. Community members will be able to submit their idea via Get Involved Kingston and once posted, others will be able to see the ideas and show their support by “liking” their favourite ideas.

Pop-Up Displays

In order to reach a broader population, and in particular those with limited on-line presence, the use of pop-up displays will encourage further discussions in a more informal environment on a variety of topics. Whether display tables that are manned or simple interactive message boards, pop-up displays provide an additional opportunity to talk about and provide input on the budget. All public displays will be operated in accordance with Public Health measures. Staff are currently exploring the options for having pop-up displays in public market settings.

Closing the Feedback Loop

An important step in the engagement process is ensuring that participants feel that their feedback is valued and has influenced the subject matter at hand. Reporting back to the community is the best way to demonstrate the City’s dedication to the public engagement process.

The City’s Public Engagement Framework supports a process for summarizing and reporting feedback through a variety of methods including emails to survey responders, social media posts, the City’s Get Involved Kingston platform, and Council reports. The 2022 budget engagement plan will include a reporting back to Council in the fall summarizing the results of

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the engagement process as well as “What We Heard” infographics on the City’s Get Involved Kingston budget page.

Timeline

The budget engagement process will officially launch before the end of June with an updated Get Involved Kingston budget page, a rebranded Budgets & Financials webpage and a City Treasurer’s blog. The survey will launch late June and the virtual and pop-up events will be scheduled throughout July and early August.

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting is a specific type of engagement process where residents can propose and vote on community investment projects, based on defined parameters and available funding as determined by the municipality. Typically, residents are asked to propose, discuss, prioritize and/or vote on municipal projects, and are ultimately empowered to make real decisions about how municipal funds are spent in areas that impact or benefit them.

While the methods and processes used in participatory budgeting can vary, they generally follow a series of steps including:

- Community outreach and engagement
- Project proposal development
- Community voting process
- Reporting back
- Project implementation

As tools and information evolve during the phased-in budget engagement process, it is expected that suggestions for participatory budgeting projects will emerge and can be integrated into a future phase of the budget engagement process. Originally scheduled for phase three of the budget engagement plan, the impacts of the pandemic may mean a delay in this element of the overall budget engagement phase-in.

Existing Policy/By-Law:

None

Notice Provisions:

None

Accessibility Considerations:

None

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Financial Considerations:

Costs incurred to develop budget engagement tools were included in the approved 2021 operating budget. Any costs related to future phases will be incorporated into future years' operating budget submissions as required.

Contacts:

Lana Foulds, Director, Financial Services, 613-546-4291 extension 2209

Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted:

Julielee Stitt, Communications Officer

Exhibits Attached:

None