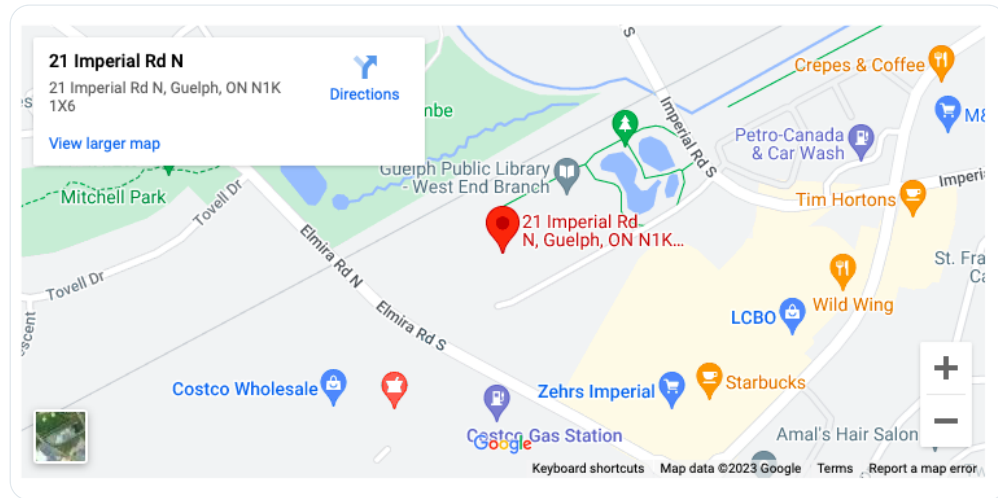




Adam A. Donaldson @adamadonaldson

Nov 23, 2023 · 57 tweets · [adamadonaldson/status/1727838655757050321](https://twitter.com/adamadonaldson/status/1727838655757050321)

Coming to you live tonight from #TheQuatro for the Ward 4 budget town hall at the West End Community Centre. Stand by for live coverage!



Why this town hall?

- 1) There were conflicts with regular meetings and the other council town halls.
- 2) This is the last town hall before budget day (the last word).
- 3) The Quatro is my 'hood.

Linda Busuttill and Christine Billings call the meeting to order-ish. CAO Stewart is also hear and so is DCAO Lee, Treasurer Baker, Police Chief Cobey and Deputy Gill.

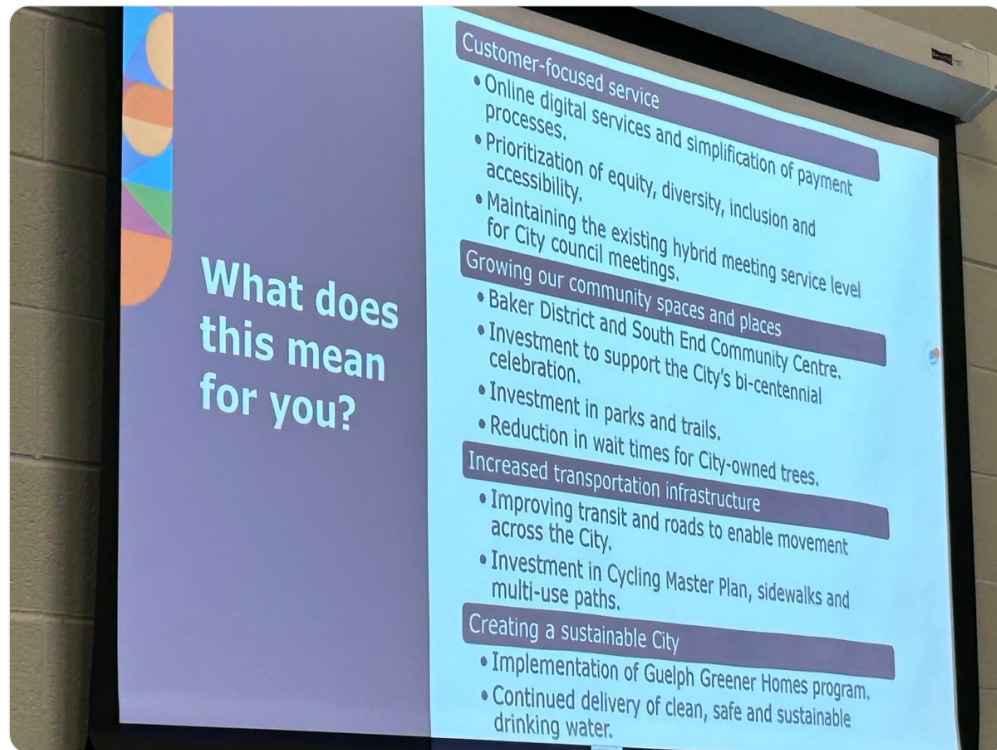
Lee sets up the budget discussion: More homes needed, also more business, more infrastructure, fewer fees, more pressures from social service needs, hospital expansion, and being asked to do more with less. Again, we need a new financial deal!

Reminder: For every dollar the City spends, 51 cents comes in from property taxes, 21 from other governments, and 27 from user fees and other sources.

The City delivers over 80 different services for that dollar.

Pressures on the budget:

- Inflation
- Housing
- Changes to fee collection/allocation
- Asset management (focus on downtown, GID)



The initial increase was 10.32 per cent but now it's down to 9.9 with some changes to assessment growth and the amount Wellington County requires for social services in 2024. Shanna O'Dwyer from the finance office explains that she and her colleagues are not taking this lightly.

Reminder, this is the first budget under Strong Mayor power, which means that the mayor can veto. If he doesn't veto, it's then adopted. If he does veto, council can override so long as its done by Dec 13.

Mayor Cam Guthrie has entered the town hall.

Questions? Susan Watson asks about process, the mayor has to present the budget, right? Guthrie said he delegated that authority to staff to present it as they've developed it.

Busuttil adds that Guthrie did put forward the guiding principles to staff: Alignment with Strat Plan, maintain service levels, incorporate legislative changes, et al.

Guthrie says technically the mayor is ultimately responsible for the budget, but he was not going to do a half-billion dollar budget himself.

Baker says the SMP was legislated in late June and staff were pretty far along with the budget at that point. There will be further considerations once this budget is done, but right now only TO and Ottawa were through this process using SMP.

Reminder that there will still have to be a confirmation vote for the next three years. One resident asks how much confidence they have in these numbers? Billings says she does know.

So what's the point? It lets you see how decisions work out over years, like when the new library and SECC come online in '26 and '27, Lee says. Makes it easier to predict. Could go

up, but it could also go down if there's a new financial deal.

Lee points out that on homelessness, housing and hospital, the City is out about \$9 million (tax levy impact is about 3%, 1% = \$1 million).

Baker says staff have a lot of confidence in the projections, they've done a lot of work to make sure that they didn't miss anything. The value is also the way that staff can phase in costs and it lets council see impacts over time.

Billings says she's going to be hopeful for more grants from upper levels of government because these some big increases for the community to absorb otherwise.

Question about local boards, where's the accountability without direct control? Billings asks Guthrie to speak to Social Services b/c he have one person on that board. Guthrie says the previous admin had issues with county, used to have 4 members of council on there...

...so for years there was no oversight from council. Guthrie's been sitting on that committee, first as non-voting member, now as full voting member. He adds that all meetings are open to the public, but there is a coming governance review.

Guthrie notes that the relationship with the County has been restored so they're at the point that they can have open conversations about making change.

Watson notes that if DCs are waived for one detached house that's \$85k in lost revenues; developers win and residents lose. Greenbelt is "peanuts" compared to that, she adds.

Watson says that we should "check out of this Ponzi scheme." Billings says she's with Watson!

Baker says it's complicated. The City's role in growth is two-fold, pre-building infrastructure and approving permits. We could slow down capital, but it doesn't slow down growth right now b/c that's going to land that's ready. It's a four-year phase-in till City can get 100%

Lee adds that the City responded to the housing pledge by asking the provincial government to step and by asking the developers to step up too. They have to get the shovel in the ground. Right now there's 6k approved units approved to be built.

Guthrie notes that it's been a year since Bill 23 came out, and they're still waiting for regulations like the definition affordable and attainable housing. He says there has been "winds" from the City about changing affordable definition beyond 80% or market

Guthrie says that Ontario Big City Mayors is asking ONgov to shelve the ideal of defining attainable so that they can focus on affordable. Guthrie says no one was sure what ONgov meant by "attainable" in the first place.

Watson says she would like to see more done on vacancy tax. She knows that it's been reported that we can't get "a lot" of revenue out of it, but you don't have to worry about DCs when a house is already there. About 6-7 houses on Oliver Street in Ward she says are empty.

Billings says there was a response from staff about not going forward with vacancy tax. Baker says they tried to do a high level scan (no direction to do deep dive), and there's only 2-3 municipalities with program and they're very new.

Admin is significant and it's voluntary, so people have to call in and say they own a vacant home. Toronto apparently sends out a notice and if they don't hear back they put the vacancy tax on. Sometimes there's a lot of work to reverse that when it turns out someone lived there.

Baker says there's no ability in the tax team to do that on even a pilot basis, but council could still direct staff to do something. Perhaps a budget update or a study funded through reserves.

Watson notes that there are social and environmental benefits, it can hurt a neighbourhood if there are too many empty houses. Baker says that there may be other tools they can use before a tax.

Guthrie notes that Kitchener used water use as a measurement and it turned out to 125 homes in total. It's not exactly apples and oranges for Guelph, but they do have to be aware of the potential costs on admin side.

Finally a question for Chief Cobey, where does the increase go? Cobey says they've been working on the budget for over a year, and worked with KMPG to plan ahead. GPS has been underfunding WSIB benefits last 5 years, plus 50k of overtime this year. (200 hrs per officer.)

Cobey says it will make the Service better at being proactive. If there are couple of big accidents that means that no one's getting a lunch break and there are only a couple of cars left on patrol.

Cobey adds that there will be a mental health worker on patrol with a downtown police officer, the first of its kind program. He notes that the police are not the first choice for mental health, but there are one of the only ones on call 24 hours.

Billings asks about the emails she and other councillors have been getting about "defund the police". Cobey says Guelph has lowest number of officers responding to highest number of active cases in a fast growing city. Only Chatham-Kent invests less, he says.

Cobey adds that he hopes there's a better tomorrow, but until then, there's the GPS and they need support.

Someone asks about U of G students. Cobey says they have a great relationship with the auxiliary service at the U of G, and they do a lot to support the community. Funding is a broader matter and he mentions the heads in beds levy, which is complicated.

Guthrie notes that the costs in overtime prompted the police board to make a motion about U of G covering the bill, but that never went anywhere. He says OBCM has been trying to get help funding that and ON univ's trying to stagger Homecomings to take pressure off.

Guthrie notes that it's more than police, but also waste collection, transportation and other City services.

Cobey adds on transparency that members of the public serve on the police board and all the meetings are broadcast online on YouTube.

Guthrie asks the people here what they might feel comfortable about cutting. One woman asks if the City isn't hiring 20 new people. Baker says the compensation increase is \$10 mn,

which includes local boards.

Guthrie asks everyone to keep in mind that some positions are not funded exclusively from tax base. Baker notes that a hiring freeze could mean a reduction in service. It takes people to run those services.

One man notes that Guelphites now that tax increases every year has come in over inflation, and there are orgs that have had to make really difficult decisions. Every level of gov't is looking to every other level of gov't.

He says that council and staff have done an incredible job of painting what they'd like the city to be, but the question is how we afford it. Watson adds that this is why growth should pay for growth and the City should draw a line in the sand.

Billings adds that she sometimes feels like we can't afford to take grants from the upper levels of government b/c the portion the City pays is always bigger than the other gov's.

Another woman asks about the 9 hires for planning. Lee says on a good year, the City did 800-1000 building apps, not were being asking to 1,800. IF council doesn't turn that around in 90 days, they have to return fees. More + faster = need more staff.

Guthrie adds that the ONgov has since added that if they don't meet targets, we don't get \$14.8 million from the Building Homes Faster fund. Not meeting goals means 5% added cost to the city.

Questions about DCs, if a project is canceled can the money go anywhere to any project? Sort of. We have city-wide DCs, and DCs gathered for roads has to be spent on roads, and rec has to be spent on rec.

Is there any onus on the developer to move a project along? Guthrie says the when Paul Calandra used the term "use it or lose it" when it comes to getting projects going. A lot of mayors think that attitude might help, but something has to be explored.

Guthrie adds that there are some properties in this area (The Quatro) that were approved 36 years ago. Guthrie says he advised the ONgov to make changes once, because some developers are playing wait and see with changes.

Guthrie says that Ward 4 has excellent councillors and that this has been great town hall. Encourages everyone to reach out and leave their thoughts with council before Wednesday.

That's a wrap!



@threadreaderapp unroll please!

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