



Adam A. Donaldson @adamadonaldson

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Coming to you live from Rise & Shine for a Q&A with Mayor Cam Guthrie at Breezy Breakfast. Follow along:



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First Q: Does Guthrie recall a time when his mind was changed from debate in chambers? He says Brooklyn College Hills HCD vote, he thought it would be too onerous on homeowners, but learned more. Also, 1% infrastructure levy.

Q2: The 4% target for next year, what's the deal? Guthrie notes that Legislation has mayor direct budget, and he noted a lot of anxiety coming out of the 2024-27 budget vote last fall. Wanted to set target of >4% and have a runway till fall to give staff time to figure it out.

CG: Budget will be tabled in draft form, so he can hear from public, colleagues about what's in that draft. After town halls (he hopes to do six) it will come back to him to table the budget. Lots of opportunity for input.

He notes once tabled, it's approved. Council can then vote up and down about amendments, and he can let the amendment stand or veto. If he vetoes, council needs super-majority of 9 votes to override. Guthrie notes there's still a learning process.

Numbers: \$15 million needs to be "found" in order to move the budget from 10% to 4%.

City share is 2.63 per cent, and then the local boards and shared services make up the rest. The LBSS have their own governance, and have to figure how to meet their targets "if they can" (he emphasises). Guthrie notes Barrie does this, City does theirs in Nov, LBSS in Jan.

Next Q: Why engage when the mayor makes the call? Guthrie says the final stage is council veto override, though he's not sure if it gets there. He feels that he speaks for the vast majority that 10% for 2025 is unaffordable and he will stand by that all day long.

Guthrie says that 99.9% of people he talk to agrees with him 100% on that.

Next Q: Why invoke Strong Mayor Powers after saying you wouldn't?

Guthrie: Housing targets released after SMP, and if we don't act we're leaving money on the table. If we have money on the table to speed up housing, then using SMP to get more housing going is appropriate.

Notes that people have issue with mayor passing bylaws with 1/3 support. Hasn't used that, hasn't contemplated using that. All he did was accelerate conversations about housing and those reports came back to public council meeting.

Q: Would you do public spaces use bylaw the same way? Guthrie says that people had issue with the 11 day-timeline, so he would have done that differently, get feedback especially from people with lived experience.

Q about increase in students, what has the U of G done to mitigate challenges?

Guthrie: "Nothing I've been aware of."

Q: What would he like to see U of G do?

CG: Concerned about transit, impact on food banks and other services. About 1,300 people initially w/o placement and he asked for a brief every week. Currently, that's down to 850, which is still an issue.

Guthrie says about 5-6 calls per week he's received from parents, they feel like maybe the mayor's in charge of universities, but he doesn't blame them b/c they do not know where their child's going to live.

Q from Brian Holstein: Guthrie, Chow, Brown et al have used Strong Mayor Powers w/o consulting members of council first, how does he balance that with council collegiality?

Guthrie takes exception with not consulting council mates, all he's doing is accelerating a report that comes to council with "full transparency", and he's done that on two big issues: Housing, and homelessness. Out of 29 BCM, there are 22-23 using the powers.

Guthrie: He's also delegated away most powers, and no one seems to give him credit. He isn't hiring/firing CAO, reorganising staff structure, or appointing committee chairs. (Guthrie sounds a little perturbed about the Q.)

Q: Any recommendation for people now competing with increasing student pop?

CG: Delegate to council and support new developments, YIMBY! Need voices to support b/c more housing = more supply. Guelph has difficult market and only answer is more supply.

Q: Parts of Transit plan deferred to reach 4%, what about that?

CG: Everything's up for debate, no sacred cows. 10-year plan already stretched to 13. No transit changes (yet), and expansion of (on demand) Sunday service will begin this fall as scheduled.

CG: In fact, he says he's been asking about how to accelerate things.

Q from Ron East: Drinking water. He's had health issues with the water at his rentals, so where does responsibility lie? Guthrie says, he will be happy to follow up, but his gut reaction is that it sounds like the line, maybe equipment that the landlord has installed 🙄

Next Q: Police. Such a huge part of the budget, is there nothing that can be done? No council control?

CG: Council can say that they won't give police \$1 million blanket, but they can't get into operations. Police can appeal to Civilian Overstay Board, and usually get way.

CG: He adds that police are one of the only services that used their budget to hire a mental health worker to patrol with Police downtown. It's small, but there's impact in this decision. Unique.

Guthrie adds that the police budget is 90% people, and they're all under union contracts so they get their salary and benefit changes every year.

Q: If the boards can't get to >4%, does that mean City must cut more?

CG: this is a city-wide exercise. Residents will see that the City has done their part, and his expectation is that the others will do the same. All we can do is wait.

Guthrie notes that if they can go lower without compromising safety or causing hurt, he's for that too.

What will hurt? Deferral of delay on capital, but he hasn't seen that list yet. He notes that he will have gut reaction if that's the case.

Q: If boards can't get there, will you hold fast to 4%?

CG: We will have to see. There could be good reasons why the boards can't get there, but they can't cut Public Health or the Elliott on a whim. Need to respect the process.

Guthrie: I will do what every I can to make it 4%, and I'm very confident that we will get to 2.63 of that.

Q: Worried about Culture Plan, and that it's being seen as a "frill", first move is always to cut.

CG: Can't promise anything, hasn't seen the draft yet. Again, there are no sacred cows, everything's under the microscope. That goes for all department, b/c 10% is not affordable.

Q: Bicentennial! Where do we stand?

CG: Doesn't have any new information, but acknowledges that the date is creeping up on us.

Q: Why can't we get Prince Williams here? He'll be on tour.

CG: Had a similar thought. Asked DCAO about getting some royals here.

Q: Environment. He's worried about losing ground with budget cuts and suggest Guthrie doesn't care about environment?

CG: Like what?

Tanya Gayvaert notes the hiring of a nature technologist that was never completed. Guthrie says that was a call of whole council.

CG: Notes that Guelph has won environmental awards, and has Green Homes Program, part of UN panel of mayors working on climate, secured funds for youth grants. Notes District Energy lost money, and was mishandled and he's glad its stopped.

Q: IMICo property, what's the deal?

CG: The appeal is done, and the City won, so they're looking at next steps now. Nothing ready to disclose.

Q: About letter of 3 on OR land park?

CG: Stands by it. Should look at other public uses first. Maybe something else will come up.

Cam gets thanks, and believes we need to come together as a community. We've gotten into a scarcity mentality, that we can't do things, not lean on us versus politicians. This is an amazing community and it can be more amazing.

Q: Comment on DoFo's line about "left wing lunatics"?

CG: Called out Ford for that, and made a point to prepare some remarks for a council meeting.

Guthrie asks for one more Q because he's got interviews lined up for a new staff position.

Last Q: Getting more funds from ONgov, what do we do?

CG: Lots of download on 4Hs, "housing, homelessness and hospital." So no more underfunding, they need to stop putting the burden on cities. We have levy for hospital renos, which is healthcare = ONgov.

How much does the community have to provide for operating cost for new hospital?

CG: Operating? None. Capital (renos, expansions or build) 10% has to come from "local share", depending on community that's mix of fundraising and tax base. Need 100% coverage thru ONgov.

That's a wrap for the Q&A. Cam has left the building!

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