

Strategic Planning and Budget Committee Minutes



February 8, 2023

6:30 p.m.

Council Chambers/Electronic

Members Present: K. Redman, D. Craig, R. Deutschmann, J. Erb, S. Foxtan, M. Harris, C. Huinink, C. James, J. Liggett, D. McCabe, J. Nowak, N. Salonen, S. Shantz, B. Vrbanovic, K. Williams, P. Wolf

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1. Call to Order

Chair M. Harris called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Land Acknowledgement

Chair Harris provided a land acknowledgement.

3. Declarations of Pecuniary Interest under the “Municipal Conflict of Interest Act”

None declared.

4. Delegations

4.1 Jodi Koberinski, Kitchener

Jodi Koberinski did not appear when called.

4.2 Craig Sloss, Waterloo

Craig Sloss of Waterloo appeared before the Committee to provide a perspective on the reliability of the statistics that have been cited for the justification of the WRPS budget increase, sharing that budgetary increases have failed to prevent the increase in the reported violent crime

rate, and that the police budget grew at a rate faster than inflation and population growth combined. C. Sloss shared that their analysis has identified situations where the information is misleading and incomplete and urged Council to insist that an independent control be put in place to ensure the statistical information they are presented with is relevant, complete and interpreted correctly.

A copy of their presentation is attached to the minutes.

4.3 Jessica Hutchison, ReallocateWR

Jessica Hutchison, a social work professor and member of ReallocateWR, presented their research on women's experiences of being strip searched. J. Hutchison shared that their research has shown strip searching is sexual violence and that a vote to increase the police budget is a vote to increase sexual violence. J. Hutchison called on Council to vote for real safety and to send the police budget back for a zero percent increase.

A copy of their presentation is attached to the minutes.

4.4 Ann Marie Beals, Kitchener

Anne Marie Beals of Kitchener appeared before the Committee to request that Council not accept the increase in the police budget for 2023, as that means a decrease in cultural life, arts, recreation, and the things that make and strengthen this community. A. Beals also expressed concerns with the 2023 police budget, as it results in an increase in property tax that some residents may not be able to afford, and that if the Region wants less crime, the priorities that should be invested in are housing, healthcare, education and land back.

4.5 Teneile Warren, Kitchener

Teneile Warren of Kitchener appeared before the Committee to share their concerns with the police budget and how the time allotted to the police budget presentation is a privilege that no other community group is afforded. T. Warren urged Council to consider the calls to action from the ACB network of the Waterloo Region, to send back and challenge the police budget, and to stand with the community who are willing to say no to this budget request.

4.6 Melissa Bowman, Kitchener

Melissa Bowman of Kitchener appeared before the Committee to address transit, policing and housing. M. Bowman shared how they were hopeful

that the increase in transit service hours for 2023 will result in less cancellations, and that they hope to see continued improvements and timeliness on GRT alerts. M. Bowman expressed concerns with increasing transit fares, noting that a loss of riders, is not the direction to go, especially in a climate emergency. M. Bowman shared concerns with the police budget presentation and questioned why it is assumed that the officer per capita rate should stay the same, if the WRPS is serious about shifting from a reactive to proactive approach, perhaps the per capita rate should decline. M. Bowman concluded by addressing housing and urged Council to stay with their original commitment of 2500 units in 5 years.

4.7 Diane Wiles, CEO, Leadership Waterloo Region

Diane Wiles, CEO of Leadership Waterloo Region appeared in order to ask for \$100,000 to help build financial sustainability, and as an investment in the future of the community. D. Wiles stressed the need for more trained leaders who can design and implement the complex solutions that are desperately needed to help solve challenges and be a part of the upstream solution our community needs.

4.8 TK Pritchard, Executive Director, SHORE Centre

T. Pritchard, Executive Director at SHORE Centre appeared before the Committee to request an increase of at least \$50,000 in annual funding for counselling, sexual health education, and to sustain services, noting the increase in demand and services provided since 2005, with no additional funding.

In response to the Committee, T. Pritchard confirmed that SHORE Centre currently receives annual funding of just over \$50,000 from the Region and that the majority of funding comes from time limited community grants. T. Pritchard also confirmed that services are offered across the Region and that there are no physical sites in Cambridge currently, but that a physical site is in the plans for 2023.

A copy of their presentation is attached to the minutes.

4.9 Asma Al-wahsh, CEO and Founder, Canadian Arab Women's Association

Asma Al-wahsh, Executive Director and Founder, Canadian Arab Women's Association spoke in support of a police program, which provided an opportunity for the Arab community and police to work together, start a dialogue, and discuss some of the issues Arab women

and their families face in the Region. A. Al-wahsh shared concerns with the decision to remove the community police programs in schools and concluded by stating that as a community we need to work together, with the police, to find solutions, so that everyone can belong and feel safe.

4.10 Gabriel Quindamo, Waterloo

Gabriel Quindamo from Waterloo expressed concerns with respect to the homeless encampment on 100 Victoria Street and asked that funding be allocated to create more affordable housing, as the existence of the homeless encampments is a clear indication that the Region has failed to provide adequate support to those in need, and that access to mental health, addiction, and job training services should also be improved in order to break the cycle of homelessness.

4.11 Kelly Anthony, Waterloo

Kelly Anthony of Waterloo and professor at the University of Waterloo appeared to ask the Committee to listen to what they are hearing and what they are not hearing, on the issues of decriminalization and legalization, noting that Portugal spent two years planning in order to have the infrastructure and supports in place.

In response to the Committee, K. Anthony stated that we do not want to criminalize addicts, but that British Columbia has not followed Portugal or Iceland and as such, she has deep concerns as to what is going on in British Columbia.

4.12 Mark Egers, President, Waterloo Regional Police Association

Mark Egers appeared as the President of the Waterloo Regional Police Association, to show support for the staffing increases proposed in the WRPS 2023 budget, noting that the chronic staffing shortage cannot continue, and that a large investment is needed now in order to guarantee the safety of the public and members.

4.13 Roz Gunn, Director of Communications and Advocacy, Cambridge YWCA, and Jennifer Gordon, Director of Advocacy, YW Kitchener-Waterloo

Roz Gunn, Director of Communications and Advocacy, Cambridge YWCA and Jennifer Gordon, Director of Advocacy, YW Kitchener-Waterloo appeared before the Committee to ask for an investment in the needs of homeless women, specifically noting a need for a women's shelter in Cambridge and an enhancement of resources at the shelter in Kitchener,

to meet the emotional, physical, psychological and social needs of its service users.

Responding to questions from the Committee, J. Gordon noted that they do not have a specific dollar amount that they are asking for, but that at a minimum they are asking to be able to meet the requirement of 24/7 support and for general oversight into shelter resourcing that considers the needs of women and encourages the women's narrative to come through. J. Gordon also shared that there is a large spectrum of needs and with a one roof model you will miss people.

4.14 Brian Enns, Waterloo

Brian Enns from Waterloo appeared to encourage Council to take bold action by reconsidering the police budget increases and to consider all possibilities for affordable housing property. B. Enns asked why the Region would spend more money on criminal punishments instead of focusing on the social/economic determinants of criminal behaviours, and encouraged Council to make budget decisions based on hope rather than fear.

A copy of their presentation is attached to the minutes.

4.15 Martin Asling, and Damian Mikhail, Waterloo Region Yes in My Backyard

Martin Asling and Damian Mikhail spoke on behalf of Waterloo Region Yes in My Backyard, stating that housing and homelessness are top concerns for Regional residents and as such, they asked the Region to commit to a housing first strategy, with a recommendation to add 1,100 affordable housing units within the next 5 years that are directed solely to the development of a housing first initiative, based off of successes from cities such as Helsinki, Finland.

A copy of their presentation is attached to the minutes.

4.16 Andrew Jacob Rinehart, Waterloo

Andrew Jacob Rinehart of Waterloo appeared before the Committee to express concerns as an artist living in the Region, specifically the lack of funds invested in the arts, active transportation and housing. A. Rinehart expressed that world class communities are achieved through their arts and culture and that under investing in the arts and culture community makes it difficult for an artist to stay here, personally sharing that if their rent goes up in September, they can no longer afford to live in the area. A.

Rinehart shared the need to be actively driving down the cost of rental units and that artists provide a benefit to the community, noting that they make people happy and the benefits of having beautiful public spaces.

4.17 Cameron Dearlove, Executive Director, Porchlight Counselling and Addiction Services

Cameron Dearlove, Executive Director, Porchlight Counselling and Addiction Services asked the Committee to increase the organization's funding from \$36,000 per year to \$72,000, for increased staffing support, which would add an additional 3 beds for women. C. Dearlove also provided an overview of the addiction services provided by Porchlight and how the services provide support and guidance for people to rebuild their lives.

A copy of their presentation is attached to the minutes.

In response to the Committee, C. Dearlove shared that it is difficult to measure what the needs are, noting a wait list of one to two years and that their program is not for everyone, as they are abstinence based.

4.18 Robyn Beckett, Woolwich

Robyn Beckett of Woolwich appeared to encourage the Committee to reject the proposed police budget and to reallocate the funds to services that improve community safety and public health. R. Beckett noted recommendations from the ACB Network that could be considered, such as increasing public transportation services and reducing fare rates, intercultural community led mental health programs, and ensuring that all members have safe housing. R. Beckett concluded by urging Councillors to reject the proposed increase in the police budget, to review the letter from the ACB Network, and to consider how the Region can invest in a supportive and healthy community.

4.19 Meg Ruttan, Kitchener

Meg Ruttan's written submission is attached to the minutes.

4.20 Janice Jim, Waterloo

Janice Jim of Waterloo appeared before the Committee to express accessibility concerns with snow clearing at GRT and LRT stops, noting issues such as large snow banks that need to be climbed over or ice covered bus stops. J. Jim suggested solutions such as better coordination between the Region and the City for clearing transit stops, asking transit

operators to report issues, and a real time reporting system where users can report issues. J. Jim stressed that the Region should be striving for equity, inclusion and accessibility for all, which includes transit, that is absolutely vital to many residents.

The Committee recessed from 8:28 p.m. and reconvened at 8:38 p.m.

4.21 Graham Baechler, Waterloo

Graham Baechler of Waterloo appeared advocate against allocating more money to the police. He stated that budgets are moral documents revealing the priorities and values of those with decision-making power and asked that the funds be re-directed to address fundamental community needs, and that the recommendations of the ACB Network be adopted. G. Baechler concluded by asking the Committee to choose healing, not further harm.

4.22 Auntie Ken:ni and Chestnut Seppala, Survivor Secretariat

Auntie Ken:ni and Chestnut Seppala appeared before the Committee to ask for formal recognition for themselves and Chestnut as reconciliation practitioners and residents. Auntie Ken:ni also asked for administrative support and invited the Committee to participate in online training.

4.23 Laura Coakley, Kitchener

Laura Coakley of Kitchener encouraged the Committee to reject the proposed police budget and to send it back for a zero percent increase this year. L. Coakley stated that community organizations know what the challenges and needs are, and that they have the tools and ideas, they just need the funding and asked that investments be made in real upstream supports.

4.24 Courtney Waterfall, Chapter Director, Shelter Movers Waterloo Region

Courtney Waterfall, Chapter Director, Shelter Movers Waterloo Region appeared before the Committee to ask for \$75,000 in funding to increase staff hours, and to offset additional costs such as vehicle rentals, fuel, and rental fees for training and events. C. Waterfall provided an overview of Shelter Movers Waterloo Region, noting that the primarily volunteer run organization provides moving and storage services to families and individuals experiencing abuse, as they transition to a life free of violence and that they are on track to complete 150 moves this year, already completing six moves in February 2023.

In response to the Committee, C. Waterfall confirmed that they will follow up with Council with more information regarding the organization.

4.25 Megan Snyder, Unsheltered Campaign

Megan Snyder spoke on behalf of Unsheltered Campaign to call on the Waterloo Regional Council to reallocate the police budget to desperately needed areas of social service. M. Snyder stressed that communities need upstream investments in programs that reduce the need for police responses, and that increased policing does not invest in the community, does not keep people safe, and does not decrease crime rates.

4.26 Jennifer Hutton, CEO, Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region

Jennifer Hutton, CEO, Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region appeared before the Committee to provide an overview of the work and services provided by the organization, sharing the recent opening of Aspen Place, a new model of transitional housing that has the benefit of an on site staff office. J. Hutton noted that this new model is working and asked for the Committee to consider one time support in order to replicate that model elsewhere, such as Cambridge. J. Hutton also asked for \$60,000 to fund an additional outreach worker, noting that demand for outreach services have increased by 78% from fiscal year 2020-2021 to fiscal year 2021-2022.

A copy of their presentation is attached to the minutes.

In response to the Committee, J. Hutton confirmed that the demand on services have significantly increased during the pandemic. J. Hutton confirmed that the organization has the model and that the capital needed to replicate Aspen Place would be around 1.5 million, and that the organization is also trying to assess how many Aspen Place's are needed.

4.27 Mark Vuorinen, Artistic Director, Grand Philharmonic Choir

Mark Vuorinen, Artistic Director, Grand Philharmonic Choir addressed the Committee with respect to the changes in the arts grant programs and what that could mean for the Choir. M. Vuorinen emphasized the importance of financial sustainability for the organization and that the arts sector is very valuable to a growing community, providing delight to audience members and a sense of belonging and education to Choir members and youth.

Responding to questions from the Committee, M. Vuorinen confirmed that the operating budget for the Choir is roughly \$400,000-\$450,000 per year,

with the ask of \$32,000 from the Region and receiving approximately \$10,000 from the City of Waterloo and \$13,000 from the City of Kitchener. M. Vuorinen also confirmed that the lack of funding stability would create spin off challenges for other cultural groups, such as the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, of which the Choir has a close relationship with.

4.28 Beisan Zubi, Kitchener

Beisan Zubi of Kitchener appeared in opposition to the increase in the number of police officers as presented in the WRPS proposed budget. She suggested that the current number of police officers is sufficient for the community needs that require police intervention and that instead there should be different resources such as addiction workers and affordable housing.

4.29 Andrew Bennett, Executive Director, Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony

Andrew Bennett, Executive Director, Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony expressed the importance of annual regional funding as its crucial to ensure that the Symphony remains sustainable and accessible for all economic backgrounds. He noted that the Symphony has a positive impact both on a individual level and on a community level as it is a tourist attraction that benefits small businesses.

In response to the Committee, A. Bennett explained that when he referenced a decrease in funding from the Region, he meant that the amount had not increased with inflation, but the actual dollar amount has not decreased.

4.30 David Marskell, CEO, THEMUSEUM

David Marskell, CEO, THEMUSEUM, was unable to appear and sent their regrets.

4.31 Steven Caswell, Staff Lawyer, Waterloo Region Community Legal Services

Steven Caswell, Staff Lawyer, Waterloo Region Community Legal Services, discussed the housing crisis and how the crisis disproportionately impacts residents living on low incomes and those using government financial assistance. He provided highlights from the January 2023 Canada Housing Market Report including that the Region's current vacancy rate is at a 20 year low and that the Region is experiencing an historic increase of rent growth. He requested that the Region address the issue of affordable housing to ensure the health and

prosperity of the community, and that the Region should not wait for Federal or Provincial funding, but should investigate all funding possibilities in the future.

4.32 Peter Kotwicz, Kitchener

Peter Kotwicz of Kitchener requested a more detailed budget to better explain each line item in the budget. He provided various examples such as "police equipment" with no further information about what constitutes equipment.

4.33 Nate Whalen, Cambridge

Nate Whalen of Cambridge expressed concern about the increase in property taxes and he proposed decreasing costs in the operating budget to lower the proposed tax increase to 3-5%. He provided suggestions to lower the costs of the operating budget such as the reduction of the \$15 million Transit Services line item.

4.34 Jeffrey Beckner, Kitchener

Jeffrey Beckner of Kitchener appeared before the Committee to express concern related to the WRPS budget, specifically that resources are not being properly allocated to provide proper Community supports. He further noted the importance of inclusion when considering funding distribution.

5. Call for Delegations

5.1 Mitchell Avis

Mitchell Avis appeared in opposition of the proposed budget, specifically that the two largest line items are the WRPS budget and roads. He expressed concern that the budget does not properly reflect the Region's Strategic Plan focus areas.

5.2 Aswan Annamalai

Aswan Annamalai appeared before the Committee to request that the Region provide funding in the budget to improve the roundabout at Ira Needles Blvd and Erb St. W as there are safety concerns.

6. Communications

6.1 Written Submissions

Received for information.

7. Other Business

None.

8. Adjourn

Moved by J. Nowak

Seconded by S. Foxtan

That the meeting adjourn at 9:56 p.m.

Carried

Regional Clerk

Regional Chair