

Subject: FW: Chris Bell's Notes To Council
Attachments: COMMENTS TO COUNCIL ON 2023.docx

From: Christopher Bell
Sent: Monday, April 17, 2023 11:53 AM
To: Jacqueline Killawee <killawee@newwestcity.ca>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Chris Bell's Notes To Council

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the City of New Westminster's network. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Hello Jacque,

I am attaching my pdf of my comments & questions to council tonight. If possible would you please forward my notes to Mayor & Council so that they may have them before the council meeting and read along? I will not be reading the whole thing onto the record.

Thank you,

Sincerely,
Christopher Bell

Christopher Bell
XXXX Nanaimo St.
New Westminster, BC

MY COMMENTS TO COUNCIL ON 2023-2027 DRAFT FINANCIAL PLANS

Public Outdoor Toilets vs Staff Workload & Wellness?

First, a story...

“Imagine you are the lone clerk working under tremendous loads in a City Of New Westminster department ... overwhelmed and losing your health from too many demands being placed on you ... you are considering taking a mental health & wellness leave. You have been pleading for additional staff support for years ... asking for perhaps two more souls to adequately handle the required tasks that are all on you at present ... to give you a break.

The best management can do is to offer to add a .2 FTE to make your job a 1.0 FTE ...but you are to be still on your own to handle the enormous pressures of the job.

One day you get to work and read a memo that the City is planning a (PFT), a Permanent Free Standing Toilet, downtown and the costs to build it will be hundreds of thousands of dollars and the annual cost to run it will be \$225 000.

You are flabbergasted, shocked, and upset. You, and other City department clerks, have been pleading for years for colleagues to help shoulder the workload ... and received a cold shoulder. Instead, you see the plan to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on an outdoor toilet downtown.

You find that decision hard and cold, lacking compassion or empathy for your plight. You feel helpless.”

Mayor & council, that may be the story of many of your City support staff as you consider the draft financial plan tonight. I ask that you reassess the need for the Downtown (PFT) and reassign those substantial dollars to getting our overwhelmed and overworked City employees the help they have been asking for ... and need ... and deserve.

I ask that a consultant be hired to assess the true nature of staff shortfalls in our City's departments and a plan created to postpone new hires (unless they support core department needs) until the current needs of staff support can be assessed.

The following was taken from the document: **General Fund Service Enhancement Requests (to support the above story) I have bolded in red Staff comments.**

25 ENG Permanent Free Standing Toilet (PFT) Operating Costs

FTE 1.0	Full time	\$225 000
---------	-----------	-----------

1 FTE position - The PFT is scheduled to be operational in Q3 of 2023. The anticipated costs include: staff position to liaise with non-profit service provider, cleaning materials, water and sewer rates, insurance, depreciation, etc. The new staff position would oversee all public washrooms, portable washrooms (operations) and would be a public washroom specialist for the City, helping to manage, inform, strategize and implement public access to washrooms, which is a human right and a current City priority.

39 Human Resources Assistant	FTE 1.0	Temporary \$82 265
-------------------------------------	---------	-----------------------

There is increasing workload in HR and the requirement to ensure appropriate staffing to provide administrative support in the areas of recruitment, labour relations, training, customer service, and special projects. **In the five years before the pandemic, the number of job postings doubled from 90 to 180 and as a result, it has been challenging to meet the demands of City departments.**

In addition, HR will be implementing an electronic filing system for personnel files, thus reducing paper and storage; implementing an applicant tracking system to streamline recruitment which includes onboarding and offboarding;

and creating other electronic processes (such as benefit welcome packages and personnel action forms). The addition of a regular full-time Human Resources Assistant would provide the support necessary to address the increased workload and increasing number of City and HR projects and initiatives.

In 2006 the total annual payroll was \$41,549,251 and in 2021 the annual payroll was \$79,313,673. In the last 15 years annual payroll has almost doubled and there has been a minimal increase in the number of HR staff, not enough to keep up with demands.

Request 1 TFT for HR Assistant (3 years, RFT is preferred)

44 **IT Information Technology Support Clerk (administrative assistant)**

FTE .2

\$20 000

This is to upgrade IT Service's only clerical position from regular part-time (28 hrs/week) to regular full-time (35hrs/week) to provide valuable support services for IT and internal departments. This position is responsible for processing contracts renewals, administrating City-wide mobility, landline and print services agreements, invoice processing, purchase requests, timekeeping and assisting with Helpdesk calls.

End of Above Document

MY GENERAL COMMENTS

I find the whole discussion about a 6.4% tax raise somewhat pointless as home owners whose homes' assessed values rose higher than the New Westminster average increase will pay a lot more than 6.4% in taxes and home owners whose home's assessed values rose less than the average increase will pay a lot less than 6.4% in taxes.

The brutal part of such a large tax increase will be the landlords (who pay 4 times the residential tax rate) passing along their increased tax costs to all of the mom and pop shops in New Westminster in terms of much higher rent. I have not heard any concern about those business rent increases at council's budget workshops.

I find the announcements from politicians, “Do you want roads and sewers repaired or lower taxes?”, to people who are concerned about rising taxes, a piece of political sleight of hand as our taxes do not pay for capital works but do pay for salaries, benefits and training. This year we will pay 105 million dollars in taxes and our local government’s salaries, training and benefits will cost us all 103.5 million dollars ... so there is no “tax money” left over for roads, water infrastructure and sewer repairs.

I find it frustrating that politicians will announce annual capital spending budgets in the full knowledge that those capital project budgets will be underspent by tens of millions of dollars every year... leaving dozens and dozens of needed capital projects unfunded and never completed. Why can’t citizens have a say in what capital projects will get the green light ... and what ones will not?

Also, our Utilities budget (\$110 million) is as high as our operating budget (\$105 million) ... with utility rates pulling in an equal amount of money to our taxes ... and yet the Utilities budget (as vital as it is) gets short shrift and a cursory look by our council at an afternoon workshop.

The Climate Action Reserve Fund is racking up \$5 million dollars a year ... equivalent to a 5% tax hike therefore please ease the burden on New Westminster utility rate payers/tax payers by reducing the Climate Action Reserve Fund down to 2 million per year ... equivalent to a 3% tax drop.

Would a council member take action tonight and serve a Notice Of Motion to lower the Climate Action Reserve Fund charge on our electrical bills?

MY COMMENTS & QUESTIONS ON THE OPERATING BUDGET

Council are considering a \$3.3 million tax increase to pay for a host of new positions in the city. Council has been given a long list of General Fund Service Enhancement Requests that describe the various positions that will be filled. How does the public know that the tax money being asked for [to hire the long list of new jobs listed] will actually be used for those jobs ... and not be redirected to different jobs or spent on different priorities? Also, I find it problematic that it is council selecting from all of the proposed job postings as political bias may enter into the picture ... where less glamorous core City staff needs (like increasing the number of clerks across the departments) may fall

to the wayside. How many of last year's Service Enhancement Request job postings (approved by council) did the City actually create, post and fill?

Parks & Recreation's expenses rise from \$19 874 730 dollars in 2023 to \$26 647 378 in 2024 (a \$6.3 million dollar increase) and beyond. I am told this is due to the normal annual wage increase and to the need to staff up and operate TAAC, the new aquatic centre. Where will the additional millions needed to staff and operate the new aquatic centre come from? Will cuts be made in other areas next year to pay for the aquatic centre or will there be a large tax increase necessary?

The draft financial plan shows 2022 Contracted Services costs of \$10 733 000 million dollars while the proposed 2023 Contracted Services will cost \$12 849 000 million dollars ... a one year increase of \$2.1 million dollars ... a near 20% increase over last year. What will these funds be spent on? Tonight, I ask council to scrutinize these Contracted Services costs and explain their need to the public and, perhaps, if the purpose is frivolous then axe them and cut our tax rate by the amount saved ... or perhaps do not have a tax rate cut and redirect the saved funds to the City's own Human Resources... it's employees ... towards a fair and equitable new Collective Agreement or the salaries of a host of new employees who would increase **core** department support needs?

MY COMMENTS & QUESTIONS ON THE CAPITAL BUDGET

The draft financial plan Capital budget shows a 2023 vehicle expenditure of \$11 361 650 while 2024 will be \$3 925 650, a drop of some \$7 400 000 dollars. What vehicles will be bought for \$11 361 650 in 2023?

What will be the total debt carried on the TAAC by the end of this year? What will be the annual debt payments for the TAAC ... including principal and interest? Will the Phase 2 landscaping of the TAAC be an additional burden on taxpayers... above the budgeted amounts?

COMMENTS & QUESTIONS ON THE UTILITIES BUDGET

Why do Capital Plan expenditures plunge for our Water & Sewer funds from this year to next year? The Asset Management report for the Water utility shows it in desperate need of repair and yet the utility's Capital plan falls from \$11.14 million this year to \$5.70 million next year ... and stays low for the next

three years. What is the rationale for the sustained drop in Capital expenditure repairs and replacements to our Water infrastructure ... considering the tremendous need.

Why are we paying 2.3 million dollars this year towards the Sapperton District Energy project? What will this money be used for ... and could the funds not be better spent on increasing the budgets for road, sewer, and water infrastructure repairs? How much money has been spent to date on the district energy project?

The Utilities financial plan shows the City spending some \$50 000 000 dollars in 2024 & 2025 towards the Sapperton District Energy project. What is this about? Where will the needed monies come from ... debt ... cutting other capital project budgets... the Climate Action Reserve Fund? What will be the all-in costs to build the entire District Energy Infrastructure from energy centre through kilometres of hot water carrying pipes...and when will those extra costs show up in our five year financial plan?

WORKSAFE PREMIUMS

It was shocking to see the increase in WorkSafeBC premiums for the City. What happened to necessitate such large premium increases from WorkSafeBC? What is being done to provide the necessary wellness aid and care to our employees? The priority for us all, is the emotional and physical well being of our City employees. Spare no expense. If necessary, redirect money from other less important City initiatives to staff up the City with those persons who can best provide wrap around aid and support to our employees.

General Fund Service Enhancement Requests

High-lites in red are done by me and not by City staff

As found in March 27th, 2023 report to council

The postings below are part of a greater list comprising 54 different postings for a total of 19.55 FTES and a total budget of \$3.55 million dollars (\$1.2 million from General Fund + \$350 000 from Capital fund + \$2 million from property taxes)

ENGINEERING

25 ENG Permanent Free Standing Toilet (PFT) Operating Costs

FTE 1.0	Full time	\$225 000
---------	-----------	-----------

1 FTE position - The PFT is scheduled to be operational in Q3 of 2023. The anticipated costs include: staff position to liaise with non-profit service provider, cleaning materials, water and sewer rates, insurance, depreciation, etc. The new staff position would oversee all public washrooms, portable washrooms (operations) and would be a public washroom specialist for the

City, helping to manage, inform, strategize and implement public access to washrooms, which is a human right and a current City priority.

HUMAN RESOURCES

36 HR Learning & Development Specialist

FTE 1.0 Temporary \$28,415

To meet the demands of managing the training needs due to an increase in number of employees and a number of City initiatives such as DEIAR, Truth and Reconciliation, Professional Development Plan, mentoring/coaching program, etc. Also, to support corporate training for the City such as respectful workplace, customer service, leadership and management, etc.

In 2006 the total annual payroll was \$41,549,251 and in 2021 the annual payroll was \$79,313,673. In the last 15 years annual payroll has almost doubled and there has been a minimal increase in the number of HR staff, not enough to keep up with demands.

37 HR Workplace Wellness & Ability Management Specialist

FTE 1.0 Temporary \$28865

To meet the demands of managing the medical needs due to an increase in number of employees, increased cases of medical support that have accumulated during Covid, WorkSafe cases, and to provide the admin support for our mental health support tools.

In 2006 the total annual payroll was \$41,549,251 and in 2021 the annual payroll was \$79,313,673. In the last 15 years annual payroll has almost doubled and there has been a minimal increase in the number of HR staff, not enough to keep up with demands.

38 Human Resources Recruiter

FTE 1.0 Full time \$116 854

Due to increased work load, increased number of employees, and the increasing demands of HR support required, the City is at a high risk of not supporting staff and accomplishing HR functions without sufficient support for critical issues.

In 2006 the total annual payroll was \$41,549,251 and in 2021 the annual payroll was \$79,313,673. In the last 15 years annual payroll has almost doubled and there has been a minimal increase in the number of HR staff, not enough to keep up with demands.

Request 1 TFT HR Recruiter (3 years, RFT is preferred): Salary (PB3, step 3 including 2%) \$87,698, Benefits (27%) \$24,152, Computer equipment and professional development \$3250.

39 Human Resources Assistant

FTE 1.0 Temporary \$82 265

There is increasing workload in HR and the requirement to ensure appropriate staffing to provide administrative support in the areas of recruitment, labour relations, training, customer service, and special projects. **In the five years before the pandemic, the number of job postings doubled from 90 to 180 and as a result, it has been challenging to meet the demands of City departments.**

In addition, HR will be implementing an electronic filing system for personnel files, thus reducing paper and storage; implementing an applicant tracking system to streamline recruitment which includes onboarding and offboarding; and creating other electronic processes (such as benefit welcome packages and personnel action forms). The addition of a regular full-time Human Resources Assistant would provide the support necessary to address the increased workload and increasing number of City and HR projects and initiatives.

In 2006 the total annual payroll was \$41,549,251 and in 2021 the annual payroll was \$79,313,673. In the last 15 years annual payroll has almost doubled and there has been a minimal increase in the number of HR staff, not enough to keep up with demands.

Request 1 TFT for HR Assistant (3 years, RFT is preferred)

40 HR 2022 Service Enhancement Carryover / Training / Diversity / Equity Inclusion / Anti-Racism training / Sanctuary City
\$25 000

There are several key organizational effectiveness strategic priorities that have a staff training and education component to support these initiatives. These include staff training with respect to DEIAR, Sanctuary City, violence prevention for the homelessness plan and opioid crisis, mental health, etc. Additional funding is needed for external trainers to facilitate these various training sessions and subsequent refresher training.

There was a delay in spending the 2022 funds due to a delay in hiring of the Learning & Development Specialist. The L&D Specialist was hired in September 2022, which did not give sufficient time to schedule the training in 2022.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

41 IT Information Technology Project Manager
FTE 1.0 \$126 669

Each year, IT Services has many concurrent projects, including major capital projects such as eGovernment, advanced metering infrastructure implementation and integration, asset management, and City-wide computer systems and infrastructure refresh replacements. A dedicated IT Project Manager would allow technical staff to focus on the technical aspects of projects, keep projects on track and on budget, improve project budgeting estimates, and improve time and resource management. A dedicated PM position would also allow for synergy between projects and decrease waste by identifying potential overlaps and opportunities within different projects. This position is vital to ensuring project efficiency, organization, service delivery, and reducing overall business risk

44 **IT Information Technology Support Clerk (administrative assistant)**

FTE .2

\$20 000

This is to upgrade IT Service's only clerical position from regular part-time (28 hrs/week) to regular full-time (35hrs/week) to provide valuable support services for IT and internal departments. This position is responsible for processing contracts renewals, administrating City-wide mobility, landline and print services agreements, invoice processing, purchase requests, timekeeping and assisting with Helpdesk calls.