

November 9, 2023

David Webb,  
[REDACTED]

City of Kawartha Lakes  
Re: Budget Deliberations

I would like to thank council members and staff for their diligent efforts to arrive at a reasonable and achievable budget. It is no easy task, especially in these times of many competing pressures and economic instability.

I was recently reminded of a strategy that was used by a previous council which I thought was the right thing to do and might be helpful in your deliberations. As I was moving into the City of Kawartha Lakes in 2015, there was a plan to raise taxes by 8% - a very difficult pill to swallow! Council that year took a great step that sold me on the increase.

I attended a townhall meeting where Mayor Letham presented the case for increasing taxes (i.e., spending outside income) and he used the results of a city commissioned "Core Service Review" to justify options for saving money. It was a logical approach that demonstrated to me that there was a genuine attempt to match funding to required services. All services were reviewed, including what level of service was used and the cost to deliver. Some services were reduced/eliminated based on the results of the review. Since then, taxes have not had to be increased nearly at that level, but they are increasing more than I like (without using all reserves) and I think a Core Service Review might again be in order.

The current budget process seems to rely on service deliverers describing their services and seeking the same or greater funding to maintain the service rather than justifying the service and corresponding service levels. The process assumes the service is obviously required and looks for the amount needed to maintain it. No service should be off limits for reduced service or elimination if the need is reduced or is not seen as worth the money. Only measuring the need and value can support an informed decision.

I suggest that this council undertake a new Core Service Review exercise, looking at all services delivered by the city and assessing the need, how each is performing, what each cost and is the service level correct (i.e., too high, too low, just right, not required). With such information council can more easily make cases to increase, decrease or discontinue any service. Continuous monitoring of the performance of each service also gives council information with which they can adjust service levels between budgets and measure the impact of service changes they might implement. Of course, in doing this the level of service required/desired will need to be discerned from input from the public.

If it is too late to undertake such an effort for this budget, I suggest that such an effort be given allocation for 2024 such that it can inform the 2025 budget process.

Sincerely

David Webb  
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