



Townhall Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, October 30, 2024, 7:02 p.m.

S.H. Blake Memorial Auditorium

1. At Large Townhall Meeting 02-2024

Chair: Councillor Shelby Ch'ng

Present: Councillor Rajni Agarwal
Councillor Mark Bentz
Councillor Shelby Ch'ng
Councillor Trevor Giertuga

2. Resource Persons

John Collin, City Manager
Krista Power, Director-Legislative Services & City Clerk
Katie Piché, Council & Committee Clerk
Crystal DePeuter, Council & Committee Clerk

There were approximately 15 people in attendance.

3. Guests

Wayne Bahlheda, Council Composition Review Committee

4. Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Chair provided introductory remarks and welcomed those in attendance.

5. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the At Large Town Hall meeting held on June 10, 2024, for information.

The Chair provided an overview of the above noted meeting minutes.

6. City Growth

City Manager John Collin provided an overview on city growth including the following:

- Thunder Bay's growth has been stagnant for the last decade and has only grown 1.3%
- Increased population results in increased business which creates a thriving atmosphere.
- Thunder Bay population growth is well below the Ontario and National averages.
- Focus over the next decade must be on smart growth.
- City creating a Growth team and taskforce to address/focus on city growth

A discussion was held relative to parking rates at Marina Park. The City Manager advised that Administration has committed to review the parking model and provide an update to Council on the recent changes. The City Manager noted that parking needs to be self sufficient with costs recouped either by user or broader tax base.

A discussion was held relative to parking rates incurred to visit small businesses in downtown cores as compared to large corporations and concerns with meters not functioning properly. The City Manager noted that private corporations are responsible for their lots and are able to recoup costs through business practices. The City Clerk advised that issues with specific meters should be directed to the City (Parking Authority) to be investigated and resolved, in addition, parking cards are available to minimize the use of coins.

A discussion was held relative to the reasons for slow growth and density as it relates to housing.

A discussion was held relative to the City Manager by-law and procurement policy and the increase in discretionary spending. The City Manager advised that the changes are consistent with best practices and Council still directs the parameters the by-law and policy work within.

7. Council Composition Update

Council Composition Review Committee Member Wayne Bahlleda provided a presentation relative to Phase Two of the Council Composition Review.

The presentation included an overview of the committee make up and process, and key findings from the consultations in Phase One:

- There was no clear preference on type of council.
- Majority of community member respondents wanted change and to reduce council size.
- Compensation for councillors is adequate.
- Focus group with current Mayor and Council agreed with a review of ward boundaries and raised concerns on increased workload with a reduced council.
- Indigenous sharing circle voiced a need for more Indigenous representation on council and felt that the at-large model provides a greater chance of being elected.

Brief discussion on the comparison with other municipalities:

- Most had a ward system and Thunder Bay is an anomaly with a hybrid system.
- Most reflected a full time mayor and part time councillors.
- Average number of councillors was 12 with some accommodating more than 1 per ward.

Wayne Bahlieda presented the two options that are being presented to the community for feedback during Phase Two:

- Option 1 – 4 Wards (2 each) + 2 At-large, Mayor
 - Wards will divide via main thoroughfares (Red River Road / Dawson Street; Oliver Road; Arthur Street) and will run east to west to include waterfront, urban, industrial, rural, potential growth areas in each ward
 - Wards will be balanced according to: population, income, education, number of households, and diversity.
- Option 2 – 10 elected at-large, mayor

Wayne Bahlieda advised of upcoming public feedback opportunities including the deputation opportunity on November 20, 2024 via special committee meeting.

A discussion was held relative to an all-ward option and concerns with the willingness of the committee to accept feedback. Committee member Wayne Bahlieda confirmed that the committee has been and is open to feedback for

consideration. The City Clerk advised that committee members are subject to a code of conduct and have committed to transparency with open meetings, in addition, Council will make the ultimate decision on the path forward.

8. 2025 Budget

Councillor Mark Bentz provided an overview of the upcoming 2025 Budget highlighting the adjustment to deliberate the Capital Budget in November 2024 and the Operating budget in January 2025, and the 2024 Q2 Financial Status Update.

9. Encampment Response Update

Councillor Shelby Ch'ng provided an update on Encampment Response including an overview of the Human Rights-Based Community Action Plan and the Temporary Village including the two proposed sites and the survey seeking public input located on the Get Involved site.

Questions were raised regarding whether the City of Thunder Bay can declare a State of Emergency with respect to homelessness, if agencies have the ability to create trust funds for people who access assistance benefits and are using the temporary village, and if there is funding for temporary hotel use. Councillor Ch'ng advised that DSSAB receives funding for cold weather temporary shelter such as hotels and shelters. Administration will follow up on State of Emergency requirements for municipalities and the ability for agencies to create trust funds for clients.

A question was raised regarding whether a location in the North Core was considered. Councillor Ch'ng confirmed the two sites proposed for the Temporary Village were Kam River Heritage Park and 114 Miles Street and clarified that designated encampments were separate.

A discussion was held relative to Temporary Village location in the South Core and whether increased police presence and maintenance for garbage collection is being considered. Councillor Agarwal advised that the Fort William BIA has also discussed the issue of garbage removal and maintenance for the area.

A discussion was held with respect to the potential cost savings in health care and emergency services and the need for a more comprehensive view of the root causes of the issue.

A question was raised regarding whether resources with parameters could be provided to DSSAB to operate the Temporary Village. Councillor Ch'ng advised that this will likely be considered.

10. Housing Accelerator Update

Councillor Rajni Agarwal provided an update relative to the Housing Accelerator Fund, including background information, highlights on the delivery of housing initiatives, next steps and how residents can stay connected on the most up-to-date information on the program.

11. Surplus Properties

Councillor Trevor Giertuga provided an update on Surplus Properties highlighting an emphasis on infill and advising that to date the City has made 14 properties available for infill housing development through the surplus process.

12. General City Issues

The following question relative to traffic light synchronization was received prior to the Townhall meeting:

What is the completed expected cost all in for the traffic signal light synchronization project? Kayla Dixon mentioned 2025 at Council Monday night, but is that total completion or the first phase implementation?

The following response was provided by Director - Infrastructure, Development & Operations Kayla Dixon:

We have budgeted \$2.8M for the full upgrade from 2022 to 2025. This includes new traffic management software, new traffic controllers at intersections, new communication to controllers (fibre) and replacement of failed detection. Back end work as well including server set, training, etc.

A question was asked relative to Thunder Bay's population:

Thunder Bay's population is frequently cited as being severely undercounted (by 10% to 30%, according to various community estimates), which has significant implications for both public and private sector investment. Accurate population data is crucial for proper planning, per capita analysis, and ensuring accountability in public services. In the private sector, undercounting population leads to underinvestment, suppressing growth and opportunities. What is your

understanding of the nature of this undercount, and what steps can city council take to help rectify it, considering its impact on the city's prosperity.

Councillors discussed census data and accurate population counts with respect to funding and potential partnerships to encourage greater participation in data collection.

Numerous questions were asked relative to the proposed temporary village:

Given the vulnerable nature of the people living in this city-owned facility, tell us about the plan for providing 24-hour security in the village and how much it will cost.

Councillor Ch'ng advised that those details are not yet available. Administration will follow up when responses are available.

What are the criteria for the selection process? And what is the timeline of that individual having to transition out of the village?

Councillor Ch'ng advised that specific details are not yet available. Administration will follow up when responses are available.

What measures will be taken to ensure that the temporary nature of the village remains temporary, and what is the estimated timeline for this project?

Councillor Ch'ng advised that specific details are not yet available. Administration will follow up when responses are available.

What studies or impact assessments and consultations were conducted to assess how this encampment might affect local business revenue, foot traffic, property values etc?

Councillor Ch'ng advised that consultations are ongoing with more details to come. Administration will follow up when responses are available.

Councillor Bentz advised that if Administration is unable to operate within the approved budget, the decision to increase the funding amount will need to come back to Council for deliberation.

13. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:01 p.m.