



November 24, 2018

Re: Adjustments to One Calgary Service Plans and Budgets

Dear Mayor Nenshi, City Council,

I would like to communicate the BIA collective's concern for the increase in property taxes some of our members businesses are projected to experience in 2021.

I realize how complex the challenges of the current budget discussions are and how many City services, administration staff and property owners will be affected by the necessity for everyone to make sacrifices for the common good of our City. I also appreciate how limited our City revenue streams are even in good times and how truly broken our property tax system was prior to COVID.

That said, we are so very fearful for the survival of our business members as a second lockdown looms and Council discusses the inevitable increases in non-residential property taxes for those businesses that received the PTP in recent years. Many of our businesses are already on the verge of failure and have been hanging on in the hope that shopping local for Christmas sales will help them survive into 2021.

The profit margins for many of our small businesses are so very small. My own members are working 7 days a week in their businesses. Shop owners are driving deliveries of on line purchases themselves and many are making nothing themselves and only barely managing to keep a few long-time employees paid. Many face family financial ruin as they have leveraged their business success with personal loans and mortgages and many smaller businesses have fallen through the cracks of federal and provincial COVID support programs for wages subsidies and for rent help.

In previous years the Mayor suggested a grant program for small businesses as an alternative to the blunt force PTP tool. Would it be at all possible for this grant idea to be re-visited? If small businesses could apply for a grant to offset that potential 17% increase in their property taxes this might make the difference between those businesses failing and surviving. In the 17th Avenue SW example in budget slide deck presented prior to this week's budget talks the 17% increase for the example business works out to \$4,640. A grant program for those small businesses that are facing increases like this might make the difference between failure and survival. I would hope that most businesses have already factored in their anticipated property taxes for 2021 but they surely have not factored in a 17% increase buffer.

This is my 18th year as Kensington's ED and it is by far the worst year of my career as I watch established, well run, successful businesses owners lose everything and fail through no fault of their own as a result of this economic downturn and now COVID. This pandemic is heartbreaking for all of us but I fear now for the fabric of our City. At the risk of sounding callous, we can always attract new residents and new big companies but if our small inner City shopping districts fail those empty retail locations will be rented by chains and the charm for locals and our ability to attract tourists will be lost for years to come.

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I realize the BIAs are only one of the many voices clamouring for attention as Council and administration try to do their best to manage all the wants and needs of this difficult budget but I urge you to try to find some way to help mitigate this anticipated property tax increase for so many small businesses.

Sincerely,

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Public Submission for Mid Cycle Adjustment CoC Council – November 2020

- Good afternoon, my name is Matt Osborne. I'm the spokesperson and vice-president of Government Relations with the Calgary Firefighters Association. I have also been a firefighter for almost 20 years.
- On behalf of all your Calgary Firefighters, thank you for this opportunity to speak today.
- Who are we? Firefighters don't just fight fires. We do a lot more. We're the first on scene to crashes on Deerfoot, we perform water rescues and we're on the frontlines of the second epidemic that still rages, the opioid crisis. We are proud to work day and night to keep Calgarians safe.
- I know you've heard me say this before, but I'll stress it again. The fire department budget has been cut more than \$30 million since 2015. This includes:
 - In July 2019, 5 fire trucks were cut and removed from service
 - 185 fire department positions have been cut
 - This last fall, a recruit class for new firefighters was cancelled
 - Since August 1st 2020, a frontline fire engine has been placed out of service and unavailable for emergency calls 24 times because there are not enough firefighters in fire halls.
 - And finally, this budget includes an additional \$1.5 million in cuts to the fire department.
- We know times are tough. We know Calgarians are struggling. We are Calgarians also.
- However, these cuts have occurred at the same time our city has grown bigger and bigger.
- The fire department is getting spread thinner and thinner. Our budget is getting smaller and smaller as the city grows, both in terms of the number of people who live here, and also in terms of the larger geographical area of our city.
- In our business, seconds matter. I'll say that again. Seconds matter. They truly do, when it comes to saving property, the environment and even the lives of Calgarians.
- A fire can double in size every 30 seconds. In as little as three minutes, a fire can go from starting in a kitchen, to spreading throughout someone's entire home and begin threatening their neighbours house.
- Whether we're fighting fires, or responding to medical emergencies, seconds matter when the safety of Calgarians is on the line.
- I believe in giving credit where credit is due, and I do want to thank you folks. I know you understand what I've been saying and I have spoken to many of you one-on-one about these issues. You've listened, and I want to thank you for that. This has been reflected in recent decisions.

- I would like to give a shout out to Cllr Farrell, Cllr Gondek and Cllr Woolley for publicly bringing forward and speaking to concerns regarding the consideration of closing an inner-city fire hall. And I would also like to thank our City's hardworking Administration, who listened to the thousands of Calgarians who recently spoke up against the proposal to close Fire Hall 6, in Calgary's inner-city, in order to staff the brand-new Livingston Fire Hall.
- As I said a few weeks ago, to reporters and to many of you, the recommendation to close Fire Hall 6 was a disaster in the making. It would have increased response times and reduced safety for more than 25,000 Calgarians who live in the inner city. Closing a fire hall would create a negative domino effect to other Fire Halls being pulled out of their communities to now cover the thousands of incidents that Fire Hall 6 responds to each year.
- While we're certainly relieved by administration's decision to not recommend the closure, we know the potential closure will be back on the table again next year.
- This is concerning.
- As the city gets bigger and bigger, and the fire department's budget gets smaller and smaller, it becomes harder and harder for firefighters to do our jobs.
- We need the tools to do our jobs and we need enough firefighters in fire halls.
- On that note, as all of you are aware, two new fire stations are scheduled to open in 2021– in the communities of Livingston and Belvedere.
- A scheduled recruit class was cancelled this past fall. Unfortunately, this means we don't have a pool of firefighters ready to staff the Livingston firehall that is planned to open early in 2021 and the Belvedere fire hall that is planned to open later next year. This is a very unfortunate result of the fire department being constantly cut, and cut, and not having the confidence to hire and train firefighters to keep up with the approved growth of our city.
- Imagine having a brand-new fire hall in Calgary's suburbs that is empty. It makes no sense. Imagine no staff. No one to go to fires, car crashes, opioid overdoses and medical emergencies.
- Please know, we understand and respect these are difficult times. However, our job is to be there for Calgarians' on what could be one of the worst days of their lives. Again, we are proud to do our work, we are proud to serve Calgarians. We are just asking for the tools to do our job, and we need enough firefighters in fire halls.
- Thank you for listening today. And Thank you for keeping the safety of Calgarians, and the safety of your firefighters, in mind as you make decisions on next year's budget.