

**One Calgary Report to  
Priorities and Finance Committee  
2019 March 05**

**ISC: UNRESTRICTED  
PFC2019-0196**

## **Telling the service story on Calgary.ca**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Over the past four years, the annual Citizen Satisfaction Survey has shown that 92 to 93 per cent of respondents agree or strongly agree that they are interested in knowing how their property tax dollars are invested. However, the percentage of Calgarians who believe The City of Calgary is doing a good job of providing citizens with this information is declining from 67 per cent in 2014 to 60 per cent in 2018.

Through the work of the One Calgary Program in 2018, a strong focus has been put on service value and transparency. This represents a shift in mindset by Administration from tax and spend, to invest and value – reflected in the 2019-2022 Service Plan and Budget approved by Council in November 2018.

Part of being more transparent meant improving public communication channels, specifically online. As part of the communications work for the 2019-2022 plan and budget cycle, the One Calgary Program was granted \$150,000 from The City's Innovation Fund (PFC2018-0721) to improve The City's transparency of how Calgarian's tax dollars are invested and the service value created by this investment. These resources were required to better define The City's value for tax dollars story, and to update and improve current information and online tools. The goal was to make The City's web presence as useful and engaging as possible to tell the service story.

From June through to December 2018, work was completed to build out The City's service story online, with a focus on user experience and engagement. Along with the new information, the online property tax calculator was also updated to align with The City's 61 services. Once launched after the 2019-2022 Service Plans and Budgets were approved by Council in November, a marketing campaign was completed to create awareness of the online service story and promote visibility and use of the property tax calculator with citizens. The following is a report back on the success of this work.

### **ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION:**

That Council:

1. Receives this report for information.

### **PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY**

On 2018 June 5 (PFC2018-0721) Council approved the application "Improving Budget Transparency" to the Council Innovation Fund.

### **BACKGROUND**

Information that helps citizens understand their tax investment increases their satisfaction with the services The City provides. With over 90% of Citizen Satisfaction Survey respondents stating they are interested in knowing how their property tax dollars are invested, and only 60% agreeing The City does a good job at informing them on this, One Calgary began laying a foundation to close this gap and increase transparency as part of the service approach. To

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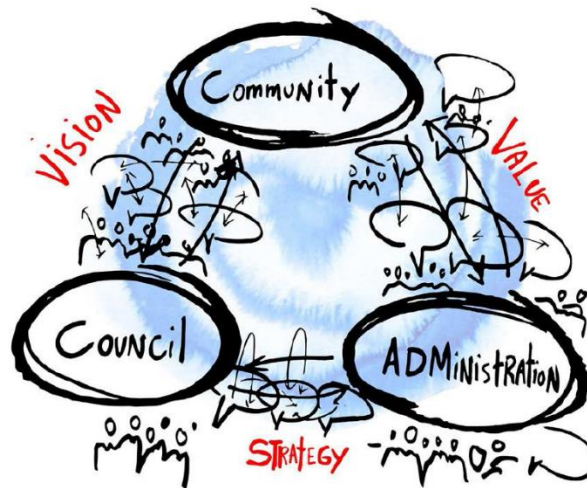
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initiate this, the One Calgary program applied for a grant of \$150,000 from The City's Innovation Fund to:

1. Develop The City's service and budget story online
2. Tell The City's service and budget story to citizens

Council approved the grant on 2018 June (PFC2018-0721) at the Strategic Meeting of Council June 18, 2018. This report provides information about how the Innovation Fund grant was invested to develop and tell The City's service and budget story through calgary.ca and the results of that work.

The One Calgary approach to creating this online story was aligned to the "Three Conversations, One Calgary" framework shown below demonstrating three sets of relationships, conversations and results.



These three conversations are demonstrated online in a visual way – taking users through the three conversations journey. From public input results informing Citizen Priorities, to the strategic direction for Administration put forward by Council, and lastly to delivering service value to citizens, customers, communities and businesses, including continuous improvement of that value provided.

The online story improves The City's transparency on service value and value for tax dollars, by communicating to, and engaging citizens to understand and be a part of the service story.

**INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS**

**Developing The City's service and budget story online**

Through the One Calgary program, The City developed the 2019-2022 service plans and budgets by its 61 services instead of by department. This service view improves how The City shows the value and cost of each City service to citizens, communities, customers and businesses. The online story had to demonstrate how a service view improves transparency and clarity on The City's budget. The aim was to create a web presence that provides more

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transparent and easy-to-understand information and satisfies citizens' desire to better understand the City budget overall, the impact of tax rates on City service delivery, how much a service costs, and how well a service is performing.

An overarching, citizen-friendly online narrative was created including common themes that are woven through the updated web pages. These themes are:

- Citizen-centric service delivery – We're working for you, on outcomes that matter to you.
- Clarity and transparency – You'll easily know what's happening and where the money is going.
- Resiliency – We're building a stronger, sustainable Calgary, for all Calgarians, in everything we do.

In developing this online story, we considered feedback from users of our website which highlighted citizens' interest in:

- Seeing where their taxes are invested
- Understanding how much a service (e.g. snow clearing) costs
- Giving feedback about which services should get more/less funding
- Downloading the total budget for The City
- Knowing if property taxes will go up and if so, understanding why

To address some of these points, and based on further user experience testing, service pages were created at [calgary.ca/yourservices](https://calgary.ca/yourservices) and categorized by topics that match the structure and navigation of calgary.ca, making them consistent with the user experience elsewhere on the site. These topics were selected based on user research patterns which indicate that people are more likely to find what they are looking for when content is organized in simple, plain language topics.

The original grant application also included a proposal for the creation of an "open budget". However, this option was not approved by Council on 2018 June (PFC2018-0721), but instead earmarked to be revisited in the future. An open budget would require one-time funding to set-up and continuous operational funding for maintenance. In the context of continuing to develop The City's service and budget story, and in increasing transparency, it may be worth considering this option going forward.

**Attachment 1** showcases the journey citizens take as they experience the story of our strategy and services, as well as showing the allocation of tax dollars by service in our online property tax calculator ([calgary.ca/tax-breakdown](https://calgary.ca/tax-breakdown)). This calculator allows users to enter their property tax amount (or best estimate) and was designed to be easy for users to interact with and show results in a visual and clear way. The entire web presence shown in the attachment, along with the tax calculator was developed online for approximately \$46, 000 of the total \$150,000 grant.

### **Telling The City's service and budget story to citizens**

To engage citizens online, a marketing campaign was created to focus attention on those services citizens use most during the winter months. Web data and 311 call data from the past few years were reviewed to understand the services citizens were searching for most, or calling

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about the most, for the months of December and January during which the campaign would run. The result revealed that citizens are most interested in the following services during those months: Public Transit, Streets, Sidewalks & Pathways, Parks and Open Spaces and Recreation Opportunities. The content of the marketing campaign was designed to help citizens make service connections they may not make on their own, and build a more comprehensive narrative about the breadth of City services. The concept may serve as a blueprint for future campaigns.

The remainder of the grant (approximately \$104,000) was used towards this marketing campaign. Advertisements were designed in a service-focused theme with aligned messaging which included the web link to both the services website ([calgary.ca/yourservices](http://calgary.ca/yourservices)), and the property tax calculator ([calgary.ca/tax-breakdown](http://calgary.ca/tax-breakdown)). These advertisements were promoted through multiple communications channels which were chosen based on audience research and web user data, such as television, radio, print (English and multicultural), social media, search engine marketing and online. The first marketing push ran throughout December and January 2019, and the second in late February, early March of 2019.

### **Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication**

The most recent updates to The City's web presence are not the first attempt to communicate value for tax dollars to citizens. Over the past several years, The City identified key learnings that the One Calgary marketing strategy built upon.

- The value for tax story is a complex one. It cannot be told in a day or a week, and not through a single brochure or webpage. It needs long-term commitment over the course of a year, and over multiple years.
- If you build it, citizens will not use it...unless you promote it.
- Informing and educating citizens on the service value they receive for the tax dollars they invest does not equate to value perception. However, it's a starting point.
- Timing, relevancy and context are key.
- The City has made progress towards communicating the "what" (taxes are due, transit fares increasing, utility fee changes, etc.) but needs to increase its efforts in building the next layer around the "why" (value).

Through the marketing campaign that supported the One Calgary public engagement, The City gained insight that the most responsive audiences were Calgarians between the ages of 25-54, engaged citizens/homeowners, citizens residing in Calgary for 10 years or less (these were more likely to see value in the services provided), and newcomers/multicultural groups. The City's research showed that those using digital/online tools to find information were most likely to:

- Be under 65 years of age (40% vs. 14% 65+).
- Have completed education above high school (40% vs. 20% with high school or less).
- Have household income over \$90K (44% vs. 26% <\$90K).
- 47% of citizens indicate they would prefer information from The City from online sources, second is print at 18% (skews higher for those speaking languages other than English).

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This information was used to refine the marketing approach to increase awareness for the new web presence and the updated tax calculator. The integrated marketing campaign consisted of print, online, radio, television, and social media advertisements delivering over 4.6 million ad impressions (estimated number of times an advertisement was run/displayed or aired) resulting in 63,894 pageviews to our website.

**Attachment 2** outlines the marketing approach chosen which leveraged The City's Multicultural Strategy for Communications and Marketing, and showcases sample ads, demonstrating how the campaign successfully increased awareness of City services and promoted the tax calculator to citizens.

Overall, progress towards closing the gap between the over 90 per cent of people who want to know more about how their taxes are spent, and the 60% who feel The City is not providing this information, will take time to achieve. In most cases, measures that are tracked over one marketing campaign will not significantly move. However, a foundation has been created to better demonstrate service value for tax dollars to citizens. Improvements in perception can already be seen through base measures established throughout the process of updating and promoting The City's service and budget story. To measure the success of this campaign with citizens, One Calgary established a base measure with a sample of citizens through the Citizens' View Panel. Two surveys were run – the first before the web pages and tax calculator were updated and promoted, and the second after the updates and promotions.

**Attachment 3** contains an overview of these findings, demonstrating where successes were made, and where there is still room for improvement. This base measure is a great starting point for continuous measurement of the website efficiency over time, and the creation of longer-term comparable data points. The success of a campaign like this can be seen in its momentum over time; success is seen in the staying power of the message and shifting citizens' perception of the information they receive from The City.

**Strategic Alignment**

The improvements and additions to calgary.ca and the online property tax calculator support the Citizen Priority *A Well-Run City*, specifically, "...the need to speak in a collective voice that improves communication with Calgarians to help them understand: the services The City delivers; how their taxes are invested; that their municipal government functions to service Calgarians; and that their municipal government is well-run and efficient."

Additionally, it supports the "Three Conversations" model, helping to improve the conversation between Administration and the community. By clearly defining The City's "value story" and using modern tools online, we can better communicate the value of our services and be transparent about how the tax dollars of Calgarians are invested, in a consistent way. Building a renewed online story and improving our financial information and tools, including the online tax calculator, will enable The City to create awareness of our services, the value for tax dollars and our success along the way. Furthermore, these tools and information can be used by both Council and Administration in their external communications with citizens, customers and communities to provide consistent and engaging information to Calgarians.

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### **Social, Environmental, Economic (External)**

The services that The City provides contribute to social, environmental and economic outcomes for citizens. This project improves citizen's understanding of how City services contributes to these factors, showcasing the value they are receiving for their tax dollars.

### **Financial Capacity**

#### ***Current and Future Operating Budget:***

This project was funded with \$150,000 one-time funding from the Council Innovation Fund (PFC2018-0721). Going forward, continuation of this work will be funded within existing operating budgets. **Attachment 4** provides a summary breakdown of the spending of this grant.

#### ***Current and Future Capital Budget:***

There are no capital budget implications in this report.

### **Risk Assessment**

Given the one-time nature of the Council Innovation Fund, there is a potential risk in sustaining this work. However, as work continues throughout 2019, opportunities to redirect existing resources towards supporting this work will be explored.

### **REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):**

This report provides the results on how administration leveraged the Council Innovation Fund grant to improve budget transparency of the 2019-2022 Service Plans and Budgets for citizens. This work has been completed and there is no decision required by Council at this time.

### **ATTACHMENT(S)**

1. Attachment 1 – Telling the service story online
2. Attachment 2 – One Calgary Marketing Approach Overview
3. Attachment 3 – One Calgary Citizens' View panel survey
4. Attachment 4 – Financial Summary for Grant Spending