



City of St. Albert Proposed 2020 Budget Input

Engagement Platform: <https://stalbert.insights.us>



This report is based on the
WISDOM OF YOUR CROWD

To read all answers and insights
VISIT THE PLATFORM



The central question of the process

“What do you believe the City’s priorities should be over the next budget year (2020)?”

Background provided for the participants on the side

Share your thoughts by November 10!

This social sharing tool allows for community dialogue, enabling everyone to generate discussion on the feedback. Thank you for your collaboration.

Proposed 2020 Budget Overview

On October 28, 2019, Chief Administrative Officer Kevin Scoble presented City Council with Administration’s Proposed Financial Plan and 2020 Budget.

For the 2020 Budget, the City is proposing a 2.4 per cent property tax increase. This consists of a 0.9 per cent increase to maintain current services and a 1.5 per cent increase focusing on repairing, maintaining and/or replacing (RMR) existing municipal infrastructure.

- *The City is facing a significant funding challenge on municipal infrastructure over the next 10 years. Council approved the 1.5 per cent property tax increase for the next three years to start addressing this challenge. Administration is working on various long-term solutions to help offset the impact of RMR on municipal taxes.*
- *The remaining 0.9 per cent increase is focused on maintaining the City’s current services.*

For details visit budget.stalbert.ca [<http://budget.stalbert.ca/>]

Long-term fiscal sustainability is one of the City’s top priorities. Administration is focused on developing sustainable business practices through revenue generation opportunities, cost-savings initiatives, process efficiency improvements and the creation of regional partnerships and collaborative opportunities where appropriate.

We want to hear from you! What priorities are important to you?

All input will be shared with City Council to inform their decision-making on the 2020 budget.

The approach

The engagement platform was open for answer between October 25th and November 10th. On the engagement platform citizens were invited to formulate their answers to the central question. Once answers were added, the platform requested participants to highlight the key points and aspects of their answers. Supported by the platform's algorithm, the highlights were clustered thematically leading to 9 key insights.



Based on the 145 answers 9 insights are gained using digitally leveraged qualitative research methods. Here are the insights with some of the highlights that stand behind:

Insight #1

1

RETHINK SPENDING -- An increase of property tax and utility costs constitutes a huge burden for some citizens.

To avoid increases, city could focus on essential services, refrain from nice-to-haves such as public art, review the administration budget, remove inefficiencies by searching for synergies such as duplicating design in development projects. The city can apply user-fees and development levies to reduce the burden for taxpayers.

 Draft

 **64**
Supportive Users

Randomly selected highlights related to this insight:

Participant 183

Council needs to forgo "nice to have" projects and not go on a borrowing spree.

Participant 29

Our taxes are one of the highest in the province. Stop wasting money on more recreational facilities, more libraries, more public art installations

Participant 92

Please balance your budget and if anything look for ways to reduce my taxes. I am a senior and my income can not keep up with continuous tax increases.

Participant 177

Hold the line until we see how the gov cuts effect the citizens. Don't take on new spending at this uncertain time!

Participant 149

Stop funding frivolous artsy stuff - Amplify? How many teens were actually involved? The Arts community is small and vocal and many of these projects are in the "nice to have" category.

Participant 141

Reduce the AGCM portion of spending by 10%, approaching nearly 20% of the budget, that's a lot of money for administration and governance.

Participant 122

First, review all the city's expenses and compressed it by 2.4% and/or freeze the salaries of the non union employees including of course the council members.

Participant 114

Cuts need to also be made to cultural services, including possibly leasing out the St. Albert Place visual arts studio space for the use of private businesses.

Participant 107

Increase bus fares, rec center fees, recreation programming (eg. fitness classes, art classes) and museums, and any other service fees paid by users, incl. increases to seniors rates.

Insight #2

#2 IMPROVE MOBILITY IN TOWN

Fixing St. Albert Trail and twinning Ray Gibbon Drive are crucial to improve traffic flow in the city. Smart traffic lights should be rolled out in the entire city. Curb extensions are considered unnecessary. Potholes should be fixed citywide.

To increase efficiency of the bus system, it is suggested to rely on smaller busses servicing more routes. This can help to reduce traffic in the city and allow people to get around without their cars.

 Draft

 **35**
Supportive Users

Randomly selected highlights related to this insight:

<p>Participant 9</p> <p><i>Ray Gibbon Drive Twinning. Completion of St. Albert Trail light synchronization - Need to ease congestion on that road it is horrific.</i></p>	<p>Carol</p> <p><i>light synchronization throughout the city</i></p>	<p>Participant 45</p> <p><i>Funding the North St. Albert Transit Park & Ride should be completed in tandem with the widening of St. Albert Transit. More transit investment like this is needed for more riders.</i></p>
<p>Participant 77</p> <p><i>Better transit - more people will pay for transit if you remove barriers: DIRECT buses or shuttles from neighborhoods to St. Albert Place / library and Servus Place.</i></p>	<p>Participant 93</p> <p><i>Finish the adaptive signals on St. Albert trail and then expand them to the whole city Downtown redevelopment.</i></p>	<p>Participant 103</p> <p><i>Review traffic flow, the frustration of the terrible light timing is causing safety issues.</i></p>
<p>Participant 103</p> <p><i>Stop wasting money on curb extensions and keep using the new lights...they are awesome.</i></p>	<p>Ivan Hall</p> <p><i>Council should focus on the promised Provincial support for twinning of Ray Gibbons Drive all the way to the Villeneuve Road in conjunction with the ongoing traffic light synchronization on St. Albert</i></p>	<p>Participant 34</p> <p><i>Ray Gibbon drive twinning is the only legitimate expenditure need but NOT at the expense of higher taxes, must identify cost reductions in other areas to subsidize the Ray Gibbon infrastructure plan.</i></p>

Insight #3

#3

FOCUS ON THE ESSENTIALS -- Many consider safety, snow removal and waste management as the essentials of municipal service.

The city should prioritize public safety by fully-funding police and fire service. Installing lights in dark streets contributes to the safety of citizens.

Reliable and timely snow removal is key for citizens to get their days going smoothly.

Review garbage and recycling pick up schemes to meet the real needs of citizens and remove inefficiencies.



Draft



24

Supportive Users

Randomly selected highlights related to this insight:

Participant 183

RMR budget, fire & police services should be top priority as they benefit all St. Albertan's.

Participant 143

Freeze all capital spending except for public safety purposes (no civic facility construction for instance), cut all departments by 2% evenly across the board each year for the next 4 years.

Participant 135

To maintain services at a minimum, if anything snow removal is falling behind and should be approved. It takes days to clear walking trails, it would be easier to groom them instead of plowing atm.

Participant 108

Snow removal in residential areas like was done in the past. Recent years have seen a decline in snow removal service.

Participant 149

Keep tax increases to a minimum. Maintain policing budget - safety is of prime importance.

Participant 114

Funding to deal with increase in break in and vehicle thefts.

Participant 99

Also better brighter lights on all roads mostly the darkest ones to start so people can cross roads more safer and maybe improve all crosswalks.

Participant 68

The City's priorities for the 2020 budget year should be to ensure that current emergency service standards are maintained now and in the future as the City grows

Participant 152

Run the city. Garbage pick up is not sufficient with the cutback in recycling acceptance.

Insight #4

#4 ADDRESS THE RECREATION DEFICIT

St. Albert should provide multipurpose recreation facilities, swimming pools, playgrounds and parks to activate our community and foster healthy lifestyles.

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 **16**
Supportive Users

Randomly selected highlights related to this insight:

Participant 182

A dog agility park would get more people outside with their under walked canines kids.

Participant 174

It's time for the City to honour the opinions and votes of the citizens of St. Albert and to budget funds to plan a new pool to be added to Servus Place Recreation Centre.

Participant 174

Expanding the multi-recreation centre in Campbell Park is the most sensible and economical option for increased recreational facilities in St. Albert.

Participant 169

Adding a new multi-purpose recreation facility and doing this in a cost-effective manner. St. Albert's lack of recreation infrastructure is making us second rate compared to surrounding communities.

Participant 161

Would love to see additional projects funded (I.e. Grey Nuns White Spruce Park, Heritage Site), but not at the expense of the other priorities.

Participant 149

Rec Centres are over subscribed - another one built in the North would be nice - but another one anywhere is long over due.

Participant 95

The budget should balance the needs for basic infrastructure and staffing with the things that make St. Albert special - green spaces, local business, community events and transit.

Participant 45

Millenium Park is desperately needed for St. Albert. This park would create a central gathering space for citizens and visitors year-round. We need an urban park like Millenium Park.

Participant 18

Additional ice facilities, addition swimming options. Servus is very expensive for a day pass and fountain has very few public swim times.

Insight #5

#5 MAINTAINING THE LEVEL OF SERVICES

Maintaining and improving the levels of service is important to citizens. It is part of what makes St. Albert attractive and why the city is growing.

 Draft

 **10**
Supportive Users

Randomly selected highlights related to this insight:

Participant 110

I Support a budget that ensures current service standards are maintained.

Participant 168

Keep tax increase to a minimum. However do need to maintain at least our current level of services and provide for increases for our growing city. Be cost-effective with any new projects.

Participant 90

If we want to ensure we keep up to the pace and demands of growth of this great City and community, this budget hits the mark on being very conservative to achieve this.

Participant 78

I would like to see the city maintain current services as well add to make services better if possible.

Participant 74

I would support a budget that ensures current service levels and standards are maintained/improved.

Randy Wolsterholm

Modest tax increase ok.

Participant 16

Maintaining services and growing infrastructure. We need to grow and keep up with the demand of our growing population.

Participant 8

Maintaining service and adding to accommodate growth. Tax increases reflect the services required to maintain standards which I am happy with.

Participant 85

We as residents need to ensure our City services are maintained and held in high regard. This is after all, what makes this City so attractive to live in. If this means a slight increase in tax, I am ok

Insight #6

#6 FOSTER COMMUNAL COHENSION

Fighting isolation and increasing the well-being of children, seniors, families and the most vulnerable should be a priority. Arts and leisure programmes for children, special deals for seniors, support for parents as well as affordable housing should be high on the list.

 Draft

 9 Supportive Users

Randomly selected highlights related to this insight:

Participant 171

Community Development work addressing isolation (both seniors and youth)

Randy Wolsterholm

As much as it is within the city's scope, we need to look after our vulnerable population.

Participant 79

Connecting neighbors and cultivating community.

Participant 58

Low income housing for single parents, new families and seniors.

Participant 154

Youth arts programming. Programs like Amplify have helped my kids so much over the last few years..

Participant 143

Educational programs for kids suffering with mental illness. - Support for parents and kids suffering with mental illness.

Participant 161

Ensuring social well-being of residents (i.e. support of community organizations and City programs providing social, cultural, recreational opportunities).

Participant 96

I think our priority should be to look after the most vulnerable in our community. Specifically to address the lack of affordable housing and homelessness.

Participant 50

More services and programs for children and adults with disabilities.

Insight #7

#7 | STRENGTHEN LOCAL ECONOMY

The City should consider taking measures encouraging local business activity and restaurant life in our downtown.

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 **5**
Supportive Users

Randomly selected highlights related to this insight:

Participant 149

Tax incentives maybe for new business ventures?

Participant 81

We need more approachable and appealing storefronts and restaurants on main street. Why should St. Albert residents have to spend their money in Edmonton?

Participant 81

Let's make lease rates more appealing to small business. We need more cafes, patios, restaurants, boutiques. For example the old Bruin Inn on the corner, remove the metal cage.

Participant 62

Infrastructure to bring businesses and new revenue should be top of the list.

Participant 36

Investment/business attraction, business retention, tourism business development, business park development

Participant 95

local business

Insight #8

8

ST. ALBERT, A GREEN CITY

The city could focus on some green initiatives advancing environmental protection and energy efficiency. Creating community gardens across the city and planting more trees can improve the attractiveness of public spaces.



Draft



3

Supportive Users

Randomly selected highlights related to this insight:

Participant 175

1.Planting more trees. 2. Community garden on every block.

Participant 159

Environment protection, alternative energy projects, energy efficiency

Participant 40

I think the city should concentrate more on green initiatives in 2020. I am really pleased we got rid of plastic bags for leaf clearance, but I would like to see things like solar panel rebate to encourage more renewables.

Insight #9

#9

FURTHER THOUGHTS AND IDEAS REGARDING BUDGETING

 Draft

 +9
Supportive Users

Randomly selected highlights related to this insight:

Participant 188

Benefit-cost-analysis needs to be performed and shared with the public before any commitment is made to establish a municipal utility commission

Participant 170

Equal distribution of services and amenities among the neighborhoods

Participant 134

Further spending reduction and efficiency opportunities could easily be indentified by simply benchmarking best practises with other municipalites, get advice from taxpayers and external consultants.

Participant 122

Realize the most crucial project for the benefit of the all residents.

Participant 183

The City should automate or outsource functions that are not the City's core strengths.

Participant 37

I think the city should do what is necessary (eg. Zero-based budget) in order to cover the operation and maintenance of existing infrastructure within the current budget.