

City of St. Albert Proposed Financial Plan and 2020 Budget World Café Discussion Summary Report

Fall 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 PROJECT BACKGROUND 3

2.0 METHODOLOGY 3

3.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS 4

 3.1 Service and service levels.....4

 3.2 Resident Priorities8

 3.3 Community Priorities9

 3.4 World Café Feedback.....9

4.0 SCREENING, RECRUITMENT, AND FORM DESIGN 10

 4.1 World Café Participants..... 10

 4.2 Script and Form Design..... 11



1.0 Project Background

The City of St. Albert contracted Yardstick Research to organize a “World Café” Discussion for the Proposed Financial Plan and 2020 Budget. In total, 26 residents attended the facilitated discussion held on October 30, 2019. Participants were able to share their thoughts and opinions on what they viewed as priorities for the community. Feedback from the discussion will be used by City Council as they deliberate and finalize the proposed financial plan and budget for 2020 and establish their priorities. This report provides a summary of participant’s responses from the October 30, 2019, World Café Discussion.

2.0 Methodology

Participants were recruited through Yardstick Research’s database of residents living in the City of St. Albert, as well as through targeted Facebook advertisements. The session consisted of two roundtable discussions, with half of the participants assigned to each table. Table assignment was randomly determined by Yardstick Research prior to the session with the goal of ensuring that each table had a good mix of participants, according to their age and gender. The discussion was broken into three main segments. First, participants were asked what services they felt the City has done a good job of providing, as well as areas for improvement. Second, participants were asked to elaborate on themes gathered from participants prior to the discussion. Finally, participants were asked to comment on a list of six priorities identified by City Council in the [St. Albert Council Strategic Plan \(2018 to 2021\)](#).

Four representatives from Yardstick Research were present for the session. A facilitator and note-taker were assigned to each table. The Mayor of St. Albert, City Administration staff, and City Councilors attended the session. City Council and Administration circulated around the tables to listen to the discussion as well as answer any questions as necessary. Following the discussions, residents were provided the opportunity to interact with Council on a one-on-one basis.

For more information on the screening, recruitment, and profile of participants, as well as the script and form design process, please refer to [Section 4.0](#).

Please Note: Readers should be cautioned as to the interpretation of results obtained from this process. World Café sessions provide qualitative data, and, while valuable insights were gained through this process, the results cannot be considered statistically representative. The language used in the report is subjective and should be read as indicators of key themes, rather than quantifiable measures. For example, a few respondents would indicate that two (2) or three (3) respondents responded in a particular way. In contrast, the usage of the words “majority,” “typically,” or “mostly”

indicate that approximately three-quarters or more of the participants felt similarly about a topic or theme.

3.0 Summary of Findings

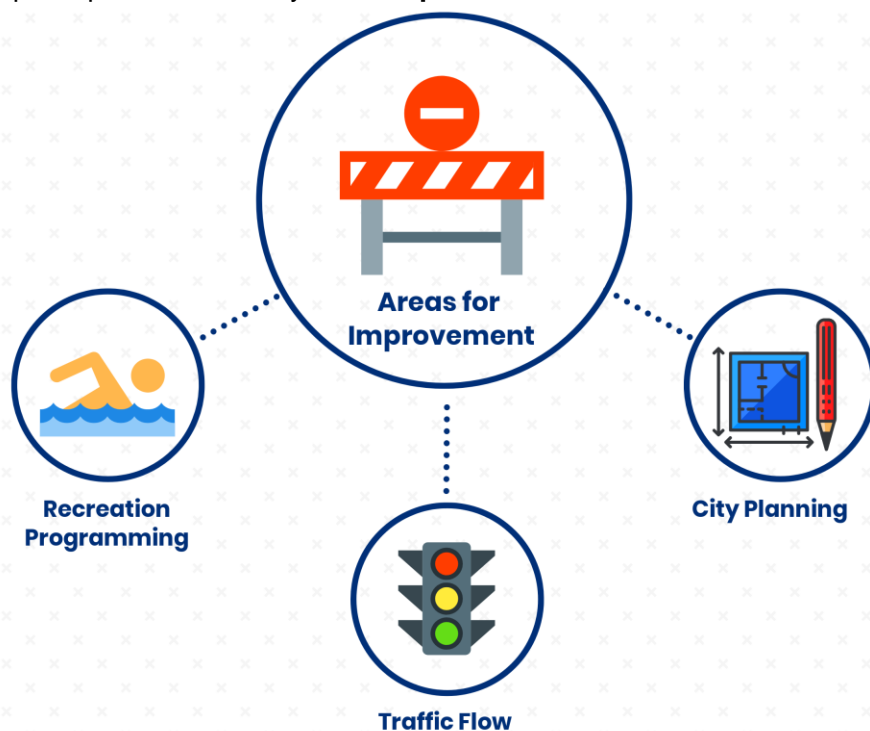
3.1 SERVICES AND SERVICE LEVELS

To begin the discussion, participants were asked what services they felt the City of St. Albert has done a good job of providing.



Frequently mentioned responses included **parks and recreation, public works, snow removal and the beautification of the City, overall**. Other areas in which participants felt that the City has done a good job of providing services included: **public engagement, the library, and the safety of the City, overall**.

Areas in which participants felt the City could **improve services** included the following:



- **Traffic Flow.** Although some participants mentioned that the timing of the lights on St. Albert Trail have improved since the advanced left turning lights have been implemented, many residents were frustrated by the traffic flow entering Edmonton. “I miss every green light.” A few participants specifically mentioned that getting from Erin Ridge to the Anthony Henday is difficult. A couple of participants also mentioned that while they appreciate high visibility crosswalks, the paint on the roads wears out quickly and quickly looks “run-down.” One participant mentioned traffic congestion in newer neighbourhoods: “When a new neighbourhood is built, we end up with what we had before. We expand quickly and have the same traffic issues in the new neighbourhoods.”
- **Recreational and Cultural Programming.** Many participants mentioned that swimming lessons fill up quickly and it’s difficult to secure a place in these classes. Booking ice surfaces was also difficult for a few participants as availability is scarce in the City. A couple participants also mentioned they would like to see more ‘niche’ sporting and cultural programming in the City, such as rock climbing, or programs offered in French. Increased promotion or communication of events was also requested by a couple of participants.
- **City Planning.** A few participants mentioned that City planning needs improvement. Revitalizing mature neighbourhoods and making them more appealing to young families was suggested by a respondent. Another participant mentioned a lack of sidewalks in some neighbourhoods. One participant also mentioned that the planning process for future developments was unclear: “I saw an ad for a high rise in a remote spot, but I thought the plan was to develop in the core. If we don’t invest in this vision, it won’t happen.”

Increasing Service Levels

Next, participants were asked if there were any services for which they felt the City should *increase* service levels. The most frequently mentioned areas have been detailed below:



One of the most frequently mentioned areas was **snow and ice clearing**, particularly ice clearing on sidewalks, snow and ice clearing on trails, and the snow clearing in cul-de-sacs.

A new **recreation centre** was requested by a few participants, specifically in the northwest quadrant of the City.

An increase in **safety** was mentioned by a few residents. This included more police and bylaw officers in parks: “There are only 1 to 2 Mounties on duty per night. That’s not enough for a community this size.” Increasing lamp posts in parks and on the trails was also suggested as a way to increase perceived levels of safety. One participant mentioned that she was instructed to call the police when she was trying to help a homeless person. Another individual mentioned that 911 responders are “receiving calls about barking dogs”. Creating separate channels for these issues was suggested by a few respondents, to better utilize police resources.

A few respondents felt that the City should increase **public transit** service (particularly between residential neighbourhoods and Edmonton, during peak hours, and increasing dial-a-bus services). A few respondents also mention the need for increased services for seniors, in general, as well as a general increase in communication to residents regarding all services offered. A few participants mentioned that while they would like to take the bus into Edmonton for work or school, they are not inclined to do so as the local routes stop running after 5:00pm or 6:00pm.

Some participants felt that, in certain areas, service levels do not need to be increased so much as services need to be **better coordinated** so as to operate more efficiently. This was felt with regards to the **hours of operation for the recycling yard**, as it is difficult to access if one works a typical Monday to Friday 9 to 5 job.

Decreasing Service Levels

In terms of the areas in which participants felt the City should *decrease* service levels, the most frequent responses were as follows:



Many participants agreed when a participant said: “for what I pay, I don’t want to see any services decreased.” **The beautification of the City** was mentioned by a few respondents, particularly the painted sidewalks and the flowers on St. Albert Trail: “We only get a couple of months to enjoy this.” A few participants mentioned that they appreciated the efforts made to create a beautiful City, “this increases the overall quality of life, and has a positive effect on mental well-being.” However, a few participants mentioned efforts to beautify the City don’t necessarily have to be the responsibility of City government, and the onus could be placed on individual residents and business owners. With changes to what can and can’t be recycled, a couple of participants mentioned that they no longer have a lot of items to put in their blue bins, and that **recycling services** could be reduced. A few also felt that the City should decrease **composting services**, moving to a bi-weekly pick-up schedule during the winter months. **Public transit** was mentioned, with a couple of participants mentioning that public transit should be amalgamated with the City of Edmonton and other surrounding municipalities.

3.2 RESIDENT PRIORITIES

Prior to the session, participants were asked what they considered the top priorities for the City. Responses were collected by Yardstick Research via e-mail or phone, and compiled and coded into themed categories for the purposes of the discussion. The responses most frequently mentioned included:

- Tax Spending Priorities (17 mentions);
- Road and Traffic Issues (15 mentions)
- Recreation Facilities (13 mentions); and
- Community Programs (10 mentions).

During the discussion, participants were invited to elaborate on the following:

- **Tax Spending Priorities.** Many participants mentioned that the services provided by the City, such as snow clearing, garbage collection, and road maintenance are of a very high standard. However, affordability must also be considered. Many participants indicated the need for St. Albert to diversify the economic base by increasing business growth in the City. Many participants mentioned they would like to see more knowledge-based, commercial, and industrial businesses in St. Albert: “You get what you pay for, and we get lots of good stuff. But I see the tax increases 2.4% every year. I don’t get a 2.4% raise every year. There’s always talk of expanding the tax base, but it’s always 80/20 resident/business. The City should hire someone to go out and find clean energy businesses.”
- **Road and Traffic Issues.** Curb bump-outs were seen as unnecessary by a few respondents, as they make the roads too narrow to pass a bus. A few participants also mentioned that the new yellow blocks on a cross walk “don’t seem to have a purpose” and suggested that crossing lights would have increased the safety in this area. Re-evaluating speed zones on a case-by-case basis was suggested by a few respondents (particularly in Erin Ridge, Kingswood, Bellerose, and Woodlands).
- **Recreation Facilities and Community Programs.** Respondents wanted to see an increase in the following programs, services, and/or facilities: running track, spray parks, skate parks, football fields, outdoor tennis courts, pools, indoor soccer facilities, skating trails (or better maintained trails for winter activities), drop in art classes at the library, swimming lessons, and dedicated mountain bike trails. Increased communication of programs was also requested by a few respondents. Many participants mentioned that the cost of a recreation facility membership was too high, and classes fill up too quickly. A few participants believed that St. Albert residents should get first priority when signing up for classes. Some participants also wanted to see a discount pass for St. Albert residents, or have ‘outsiders’ charged a premium for a pass. However, when a few participants mentioned that this could ‘backfire’, as Edmonton recreation centres could ‘retaliate’ and charge St. Albert residents a premium to access their recreation centres, participants began to re-think this idea.

3.3 COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Participants were provided with a list of Council priorities from the Council's Strategic Plan. As an activity, participants were provided this list and, using 3 stickers each, were asked to mark what they felt were the top priorities on the list. Participants were permitted to distribute their stickers however they liked, including putting all 3 on one item if they preferred. The responses were as follows:

Priority Area	Group 1	Group 2	Total
Economic Development: Enhance business/commercial growth	13	8	21
Building a Transportation Network: Integrated transportation systems	6	11	17
Infrastructure Investment: Identify and build needed capital assets	5	8	13
Growth Policy Framework: Develop a robust policy framework to guide growth	7	4	11
Environmental Stewardship: Explore innovative environmental and conservation opportunities	6	3	9
Housing: Enhance housing options	5	2	7
TOTAL:	42	36	78

With regards to **economic development**, one participant mentioned that “municipal economic development plans are not very reliable,” and the “trade-off is not always clear and measurable.” In terms of **growth**, a few participants needed more clarity on this priority: “Provide growth for what? Commercial growth? Population? City size?” With regards to **building a transportation network**, a few participants indicated that it is difficult to cut back on vehicle traffic. One participant wondered about the cost to maintain electric busses and whether they were a good investment.

3.4 WORLD CAFÉ FEEDBACK

At the end of the discussion, participants were invited to submit any final comments and/or feedback for the discussion on handout forms. Additional comments included the need for river clean up, as there were concerns about water quality. One participant suggested a youth volunteer program in which youth could volunteer in exchange for admission passes to recreational centres in the City.

In terms of suggestions for improvement for future discussions, while many enjoyed the discussion, a number of participants desired more background information prior to the session, as well as additional time for questions. Finally, when asked how likely they were to participate in another World Café discussion, participants were, overall, very likely, with a mean rating of 9.65 out of 10 (scale: 1 = “not at all likely”; 10 = “very likely”). When asked about their likelihood to recommend a World Café to someone else, participants provided a mean rating of 9.04 out of 10.

4.0 Screening, Recruitment, and Form Design

4.1 WORLD CAFÉ PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited from Yardstick Research’s database of residents living in the City of St. Albert as well as through targeted Facebook advertisements. Participants were screened according to their age and gender, in order to ensure a representative mix of participants. Additional demographic data collected during the screening and recruitment process included: household composition; employment status; length of residence in St. Albert; and classification as a homeowner or renter. Those who self-identified as any of the following were considered ineligible and were screened out during the recruitment process: current employees of the City of St. Albert; a market research firm, advertising firm, or a media source; and those who currently or have previously served on the St. Albert City Council.

Forty (n=40) individuals were recruited for the session, of which 36 were confirmed to attend as of October 30, 2019. Each individual recruited received an e-mail confirmation prior to the session that provided the details of the groups, including time, date, and location; reminder e-mails and/or phone calls were made to all participants the day prior. Ultimately, 26 individuals attended the World Café session on October 30, 2019.

The table on the following page demonstrates the demographic profile of: 1) those who were recruited to attend the World Café discussion; and 2) the final number of participants who attended on October 30, 2019.



4.2 SCRIPT AND FORM DESIGN

The session was facilitated based on a discussion or moderator's guide, developed prior to the session in conjunction with the City. The guide was designed to gather respondents' top-of-mind opinions regarding City services and service levels, and what they considered the top priorities for City Council. In large part, the World Café process is an open-ended interview. While questions were pre-determined, flexibility was allowed during the session to facilitate the probing of unanticipated findings. In this regard, the moderators used the guide to keep participants on track, while still encouraging spontaneous discussion.

Table 1: Recruited and Final Participant Demographics

	Recruited Participants				Final Participants (Attendees)			
	Female	Male	Prefer not to say	Total	Female	Male	Prefer not to say	Total
AGE								
18 to 34 years old	3	5	-	8	2	2	-	4
35 to 54 years old	8	7	2	17	7	5	1	13
55 years of age or older	3	8	-	11	1	8	-	9
HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION								
Married/cohabitating with children	4	9	1	14	3	7	1	11
Married/cohabitating without children	5	7	1	13	4	6	-	10
Single person without children	2	3	-	5	2	2	-	4
More than 2 adults	3	1	-	4	1	-	-	1
EMPLOYMENT STATUS								
Employed Full-Time	9	15	1	25	6	11	1	18
Employed Part-Time	1	1	-	2	1	-	-	1
Retired	2	4	1	7	1	4	-	5
Student/Homemaker	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	1
Unemployed	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	1
HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION								
Graduated high school	2	4	1	7	-	3	-	3
Some college credit	2	2	-	4	2	2	-	4
Trade/technical/vocational training	4	5	-	9	3	2	-	5
Bachelor's degree	6	8	-	14	5	7	-	12
Master's degree	-	1	1	2	-	1	1	2
HOME OWNERSHIP								
Own	11	18	1	30	8	15	-	23
Rent	2	1	-	3	1	-	-	1
Other	1	1	1	3	1	-	1	2
LENGTH OF RESIDENCY IN ST. ALBERT								
Less than 1 year	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
1 to 3 years	2	-	-	2	1	-	-	1
4 to 5 years	-	1	1	2	-	1	1	2
6 to 10 years	3	3	-	6	3	2	-	5
More than 10 years	9	16	-	25	6	12	-	18
Total	14	20	2	36	10	15	1	26