



# Budget Speak / Parlons Budget

An Experiment in Public Deliberations  
Hosted by Urban Wards Councillors

February 10, 2015



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<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>THE CONTEXT</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>THE PARTICIPANTS</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b><i>BUDGET SPEAK/PARLONS BUDGET – WEST WARDS (FEBRUARY 10, 2015):</i></b>	
<b>SUMMARIZING WHAT MATTERS MOST TO PARTICIPANTS</b> .....	<b>6</b>
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES .....	6
GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUDGET 2015 .....	7
OPEN VOTING .....	9
BIKE RACKS / PORTE-VÉLOS.....	10
<b>NEWS MEDIA, SOCIAL MEDIA AND LIVE BLOG</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>OBSERVATIONS &amp; RECOMMENDATIONS:</b> .....	<b>11</b>
BY CITIZENS ACADEMY.....	12
BY PARTICIPANTS .....	13
BY COUNCILLORS.....	13
<b>NEXT STEPS</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>ANNEXES</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANKS</b> .....	<b>15</b>



## Introduction

Four important things to keep in mind while reading this report\*...

1. *A citizen is anyone willing to get involved in his/her community.* While we use the term “citizen” frequently throughout this document, it is much more than a legal status. We view a citizen as a person who lives in a city or town, entitled to its privileges, and subject to its responsibilities.
2. *This report is written in plain language,* in a way that is inviting and accessible to different stakeholders. Seeing citizens’ unique insights and contributions is an invitation to others to get involved. We hope that anyone can easily read it, understand what it means for them, and join the conversation.
3. *The Budget Speak sessions were an experiment.* The 5 Urban Ward Councillors wanted to try something new – an alternative to the City’s traditional budget consultations. It was a pilot to see if a different way of engaging could inspire more involvement and interest in a subject matter that is complex, yet affects every person in our City. We hope this report has no ending, and that it is just the beginning of a different way of engaging with citizens.
4. *You are invited to become a part of the journey.* If you have ideas and recommendations regarding priorities for our City/wards, and how those priorities can be funded, join the conversation. Contact your Councillors about ideas that have broad impact, and make our City/wards more resilient, vibrant, and socially equitable.

Get in touch with your Councillor:

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This report is alive with passion and good ideas. We hope you are inspired by what you see and read, and that you add your voice to the discussions. Enjoy!

*\* L’Académie des citoyennes et citoyens est un organisme sans but lucratif qui fait tout en son possible pour opérer dans les deux langues officielles. Faute de ressources, nous ne pouvons produire le présent rapport dans les deux langues officielles. Nous vous prions de bien vouloir nous en excuser.*

*Citizens Academy is a nonprofit organization that does everything it can to provide information and services in both official languages. Available resources do not allow us to produce this report in both official languages. Please accept our apologies.*



## The Context

Citizens care about their City. For a topic that is often considered boring and complicated, the turnout and buzz in the room during the two Budget Speak sessions are a testament to Ottawa citizens' enthusiasm to take an active role in their community, and to weave stronger ties with their Councillors and neighbours.

Councillor Tobi Nussbaum, Councillor Mathieu Fleury, Councillor Catherine McKenney, Councillor Jeff Leiper, and Councillor David Chernushenko created an opportunity to meet with citizens in their wards in a creative and dynamic way, to help inform their deliberations about the City's 2015 Proposed Budget, as well as the term of Council's priorities over the next four years. The purpose of the sessions was to provide participants with a good understanding of the complexity and context of budget decisions, offer an opportunity to learn from neighbours in the room, and reflect on the trade-offs that must be made by Council when dealing with limited resources. Councillors were especially curious to hear their wards' suggestions on strategic priorities for this Term of Council.

That's a tall order to fulfill in 2 hours. Trying something new needs a certain appetite for risk and a willingness to hold the space for uncertainty. More than anything, it is an opportunity for all involved to learn, and get inspired for the way forward.

We were delighted to be inundated with so many brilliant and thoughtful ideas, spanning different subject areas, departments, geographies and more. The hardest thing to do was to cluster the ideas and share them in this report in a meaningful way. We are including a summary of the ideas and priorities participants want their city to embrace, as well as the key recommendations for allocation and revenue changes in the 2015 Proposed Budget. Because of the difficulty to contain all the insights and ideas, we finally decided to add an annex to this report, which includes all the ideas, brainstorming and suggestions in their raw, unedited form.

These ideas and these conversations are important for the 2015 Proposed Budget, and for Council's priorities over the next four years. Citizens' insights and engagement offer alternatives and expand the possibilities for our city.

*All life is an  
experiment.  
The more  
experiments  
you make,  
the better.*

Ralph Waldo  
Emerson



## The Participants

Over 80 people participated in the Budget Speak held on February 10<sup>th</sup> at Tom Brown Arena, and approximately 80 more participated in the Budget Speak held on February 11<sup>th</sup> at the St. Laurent Sports Complex. Below is the demographic data from the evaluation forms collected at each of these sessions.

Tom Brown Arena on February 10th (52 evaluation forms)				St-Laurent Sports Complex on February 11th (35 evaluation forms)			
<u>Age</u>				<u>Age</u>			
Under 25	1	1.9	Under 25	3	8.6		
25 to 39	13	25.0	25 to 39	5	14.3		
40 to 59	19	36.5	40 to 59	11	31.4		
Over 60	19	36.5	Over 60	13	37.1		
<u>Languages Spoken</u>				<u>Languages Spoken</u>			
One	19	36.5	One	8	22.9		
Two	23	44.2	Two	19	54.3		
Three	9	17.3	Three	5	14.3		
More than three	3	5.8	More than three	3	8.6		
<u>Years a resident of Ottawa</u>				<u>Years a resident of Ottawa</u>			
Less than 1	0	0	Less than 1	1	2.9		
2 to 5 yrs	5	9.6	2 to 5 yrs	5	14.3		
5 to 10 yrs	5	9.6	5 to 10 yrs	1	2.9		
10 to 15 yrs	2	3.8	10 to 15 yrs	2	5.7		
More than 15 yrs	43	82.7	More than 15 yrs	26	74.3		
<u>Your Ward or Councillor</u>				<u>Your Ward or Councillor</u>			
(12) Fleury	4	7.7	(12) Fleury	10	28.6		
(13) Nussbaum	0	0	(13) Nussbaum	16	45.7		
(14) McKenney	16	30.8	(14) McKenney	1	2.9		
(15) Leiper	25	48.0	(15) Leiper	0	0		
(17) Chernushenko	4	7.7	(17) Chernushenko	2	5.7		
Other	0	0	Other	2	5.7		

It was acknowledged that the demographics of the room were not as diverse as those of the population in the 5 wards. There was greater cultural diversity at the second Budget Speak and at least two tables deliberated in French that evening.





3. Dynamic Public Spaces for Civic Life/Civic Pride suggestions included:
  - Plan and speed-up implementation of complete streets.
  - Implement mixed zoning in new residential areas to include commercial, business and services at the community level.
  - Add public benches, water fountains, toilets in transit stations, and parks city-wide.
  - New developments should include bike lanes and racks, walkability to grocery store and public transit.
  
4. Address *Climate Change Plan* faster suggestions included:
  - Have a water strategy.
  - Move towards 100% renewable energy quickly for city facilities, and prioritize a city solar panel program.
  - Promote green roofs; make them a requirement on commercial buildings.
  - Promote permeable surfaces.
  - Maintain the existing tree cover, and expand urban forest and tree planting.
  - Use *Choosing Our Future* report recommendations.
  
5. Community-Driven Social and Health Services suggestions included:
  - City's planning should be participatory and collaborative. Their focus needs to be on vulnerable people, seniors, youth programs (afterschool and recreation), child-care, new immigrants and mental health.
  - More free recreation programs for children, such as swimming lessons.
  - Increased subsidized childcare programs.
  - Investing more in prevention / early intervention in order to reduce the use of high priced services such as paramedics, police and firefighting.
  - A secure food policy – Feed neighbours. Prioritize food security, community gardens, mobile food markets, and local food systems.
  
6. Invest in arts, cultural development, music, artists, etc. to attract the creative class.
  
7. Expand and improve libraries.

Note: For 8 of the 13 tables, the Ottawa 2017 celebrations were one of the least important priorities. Participants also had a mixed response to whether an internal function such as accountability and oversight should be a strategic priority for the city. While important, it was suggested that this is already expected and integral to how the City is managed.

## **Group Recommendations for Budget 2015**

### **Transit and Transportation**

- Keep transit fees low for increased accessibility. /HOW? With tolls for cars and increased parking fees; evaluate need for a better subsidy program; charge for transit to reflect the cost of long distance.
- Invest in active transportation as a top priority, *BECAUSE* it will keep people healthy and it's better for the environment. /HOW? Corporate sponsorship of active transportation routes, raise taxes and/or re-allocate \$\$ by lowering road maintenance/standards.
- Favour city transit, *BECAUSE* it will reduce road maintenance and reduce traffic in neighbourhoods.



- Include toilets in LRT stations, *BECAUSE* they are essential for people. */HOW?* A cost-shared capital cost or re-allocation from road maintenance.
- Bike lane on Bronson for safety. */HOW?* From capital budget for roads and increased development fees.
- Increased spending on transit service, *BECAUSE* people want more frequent service and to encourage more ridership. */HOW?* Increase property taxes; provide option to allocate to specific fund.

### **Community Services and Safety**

- Invest more in community services and public health, *BECAUSE* it will lead to reduced need for policing. */HOW?* Cut the police budget, set user fees for solid waste.
- Evaluate the quality of social services, and index growth to demand, *BECAUSE* the demand for services is growing, but spending without indexing is not keeping pace. */HOW?* Cut protective services and police budgets, seek cost recovery from feds for policing.
- Keep or increase community services such as housing and daycare, *BECAUSE* they contribute to equality. */HOW?* See above, and increase parking fees.
- Recreation services must be more affordable and inclusive, *BECAUSE* we want better equality of access. */HOW?* From capital budget for roads and increased development fees.
- Increased subsidization of recreation fees, *BECAUSE* it will make services more accessible for those who really need it, but charge more for those who can pay. */HOW?* Increased recreation fees with a portion going to subsidization for those who need it.
- Reinvestment plan in community and social services: increase grants to community funding and services for homeless. */HOW?* Increase property taxes by 1% = \$14 million.

### **Housing**

- Invest more in housing, *BECAUSE* it will lead to reduced need for policing and improved health and well-being. */HOW?* With user fees for waste, and push provincial/federal governments to invest more.
- Increase affordable housing. */HOW?* Force developers to fund affordable housing in exchange for a density exemption.
- Encourage uploading of housing to the Ontario government.

### **Finance and Economic Development**

- Restructure planning cycle, *BECAUSE* of city's dependence on federal and provincial budget processes.
- Get rid of the 2% tax increase ceiling, *BECAUSE* it is an election ploy that is unduly limiting and introduces false restrictions.
- Improved by-law enforcement, with a distinction between urban and suburban, *BECAUSE* the system is flawed, ineffective, doesn't need increased dollars, but different working methods.
- Residential zoned properties that are income generating (e.g. rooming houses) should be taxed at the commercial rate, *BECAUSE* they generate income as a commercial property. */HOW?* Increase property taxes.
- We need more revenue at the municipal level for obvious reasons. */HOW?* Road pricing and higher percentage of gas tax.
- Charge for garbage and don't subsidize waste management. */HOW?* Increase user fees
- Reduce capital formation budget to 5%. */HOW?* Take away money from any road building in this budget. Do not cut the building of community centres, no cuts to other aspects of capital budget, etc..



## City Administration

- Don't cancel programs with staff that already exist, *BECAUSE* reinvesting and restarting programs is more costly than sustaining them; the municipal job strategy should not be to lay off people.
- Rework budget categories to reflect common sense, *BECAUSE* this will facilitate authentic input into trade-offs and increase buy-in to results */HOW?* This doesn't cost much, it calls for a change in culture and accounts (for example, make forestry oversight distinct from that of road and traffic as in the past).
- Empower staff to share expertise publicly.
- Political buy-in to support staff to study best practices internationally/nationally, *BECAUSE* Ottawa needs to adopt best practices to avoid bad management of outcomes like the bridge on the airport parkway. */HOW?* Cultural change, no funding involved.
- Independent budget officer to provide a challenge function over all Standing Committee budgets, *BECAUSE* For better decisions, more efficiencies, to highlight failures. */HOW?* It would pay for itself over time.
- Value for service, *BECAUSE* we need a clearer budget process with explicit identification of publicly owned assets. */HOW?* Revenue neutral. Reshaping of existing practices.

## Environment

- Make forestry oversight distinct of that of road and traffic as in the past (e.g. Ottawa Forestry and Green Space Advisory Committee).

## Forestry

- Increase fines for illegal removal of trees.
- Increase forestry implementation of rules, *BECAUSE* canopy cover increases sustainability and tourism with a positive environmental impact. */HOW?* Raise tax on industries to cover cost.

## Health Services

- Maintain prenatal and postnatal care, *BECAUSE* it builds communities and provides vital assistance for young families (i.e. vaccines). */HOW?* Re-allocate funds.

## Libraries

- Invest in Rosemount Library and spend earmarked funds of \$100,000, *BECAUSE* it builds community and increases prosperity. */HOW?* Revenue neutral, just use funds allocated.

## Open Voting

In the closing plenary, the group explored other tables' suggestions to fund their priority recommendations. Participants were asked to vote, as individuals, on these revenue-sourcing ideas. The three voting options were: Totally agree, totally disagree, and unsure/need more information. Here is what we heard and saw:

**Question 1:** Who would increase taxes to fund the recommendations you have proposed?

- Majority of the room answered in the affirmative.

**Question 2:** Who would increase user fees, either transit or recreation, to fund the recommendations you have proposed?



- Majority of the room was against this option. There was interest in keeping services affordable for those who could least afford the services.

**Question 3:** Is there a better way of providing a sliding scale so that services are subsidized for those who can least afford them?

- This was a suggestion that came from the audience, and was well received. Others suggested increased water rates, to encourage better water use

**Other questions and ideas that were suggested by the audience:**

- Public toilets in all LRT stations
  - The majority of the room answered in the affirmative.
- A further suggestion was to have a user fee attached to the public toilets.
  - About 50% of the room answered in the affirmative.
- Introduce user fees for garbage disposal
  - Majority of the room answered in the affirmative.
- Introduce tolls for driving into the urban core.
  - Majority of the room answered in the affirmative.
- Introduce land trusts as one way of increasing affordable housing.
  - Majority of the room said they were unsure or needed more information.

There was general alignment in the room on certain topic areas. Overall, people were more supportive of raising property taxes than fees, and they favoured subsidizing transit over cars. In general, they wanted more transparency and better information to make informed decisions and recommendations.

**Bike Racks / Porte-vélos**

Participants were invited to “park” ideas and questions in bike racks throughout the evening. Councillors have been asked to try and answer these questions, as a follow-up to the event

1. Why don't we see NET as opposed to GROSS figures? For example, rather than total expenditure on transit operations, what about cost minus revenue from fares, etc.?
2. What is the rationale for lumping forestry with roads?
3. What are the percentages or dollars of support for housing and homelessness that come from federal and provincial governments?
4. It is proposed to increase recreation fees by 2%. How much will this raise fees? Will it ensure that the existing level of programs offered is maintained (e.g. services offered, hours of operation, no new fees)?
5. More discussions on increasing ODSP and OW and affordable housing -- ODSP and OW and affordable housing need to increase. People are struggling to make ends meet.
6. More (real) bike racks
7. Can we get iPADS?



## News Media, Social Media and Live Blog

The Budget Speak events generated notable media coverage, before, during and after the sessions.

The **Op-Ed in the Ottawa Citizen** about the event co-authored by the 5 urban ward Councillors generated positive responses, curiosity and discussions.

Link here: <http://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/op-ed-a-new-kind-of-budget-consultation>

Councillor Nussbaum and Citizen Academy's Manjit Basi took part in a radio interview on **CBC's Ottawa Morning show**, entitled "*How to talk about budget consultations without people's eyes glazing over*"

Link here: <http://www.cbc.ca/player/AudioMobile/Ottawa%2BMorning/ID/2653015308/>

**Zachary Bradley**, a student from Carleton's undergraduate journalism program attended Budget Speak's West Ward event as part of a class assignment. He wrote a short introductory piece, and provided live blog commentary throughout the evening.

Link here to blog: <http://zacharybradley.com/2015/02/12/ottawas-budget-discussed-with-residents-in-fun-new-way/>

Link here to live blog:

[http://carleton.scribblelive.com/Event/2015\\_Budget\\_Speak\\_Community\\_discussion\\_exploring\\_the\\_citys\\_budget](http://carleton.scribblelive.com/Event/2015_Budget_Speak_Community_discussion_exploring_the_citys_budget)

Most importantly, participants and councillors themselves engaged with the events through other mediums, and were especially active on Twitter. The majority of social media comments and pictures have been captured in the **Storify board** here:

<https://storify.com/CAOttawa/budgetspeak>

## Observations & Recommendations:

The Budget Speak experiment succeeded at doing what all experiments do – opening a door into new possibilities. Citizens came curious and open to engage in a complex subject that affects our collective future. Everyone involved, Councillors and their teams, Citizens Academy, participants, and other stakeholders learned from the process and the outcomes. We received terrific insights from participants who filled out the evaluation forms.

Overall, the sessions were a refreshing alternative to learn, deliberate, have a say, get engaged, and connect with others. Although there were concerns at the initial stage of planning whether there was ample time and information to host Budget Speak, if we hadn't given it a try, we wouldn't have seen and heard all we did. We know now that "another way" is welcomed. Citizens are willing to test new things and spend time deliberating issues to affect positive change and contribute to making our city the best it can be.



The following are observations and recommendations by Citizens Academy's, participants and Councillors.

### **By Citizens Academy**

#### **Key Observations:**

- Citizens have an appetite for learning about the budget process. They want to deliberate, discuss and make informed decisions to influence revenue and expenditures. Participants want more of this kind of event, and more often. They want to see that their voices and input are heard and valued, even if it cannot always be implemented.
- Two hours is insufficient time to learn about budget process, deeply discuss priorities, and deliberate revenues and expenditures.
- The way in which the proposed Budget is organized and presented by the City is not helpful for citizens to appreciate what real choices or trade-offs are being made, and what impact can be anticipated for individuals, or for the city as a whole. Many participants had questions about which specific budget lines were being affected from prior years, and that kind of information is not made available to the average Ottawan.
- The budget consultation should begin much sooner. Participants felt uninformed, and pressured to review all the materials in a very short time frame in order to take part in the City's formal budget consultation process.
- More detailed and specific information is required about expenditures and revenues, and what they represent, to be able to deliberate allocations. As well, some City priorities did not necessarily correlate with increased expenses or spending. Eg. Difficult to compare multi-million dollar expenditures to small projects that could have big outcomes.
- Councillors have a great rapport with their constituents.
- All parties involved were open to work together to create something new and take some risk.

*"The men of experiment are like the ant; they only collect and use. But the bee...gathers its materials from the flowers of the garden and of the field, and transforms and digests it by a power of its own."*

Leonardo da Vinci

#### **Key Recommendations:**

- Create a budget engagement strategy that keeps the conversation open and consistent: learning sessions on the budget and the process; dialogue sessions for uncovering priorities and actions citizens deem important; working sessions to crunch numbers and make recommendations on services/programs or Ward specific capital expenditures.
- Engage and work with the City's Finance team to prepare appropriately detailed documents to support deliberation.
- Deepen and widen outreach efforts to attract more diverse constituents.
- Follow-up with prompt report-back to participants and to the wider community. Ensure there are more opportunities like this, and more often.
- Consider an online platform in addition to in-person sessions. An online citizen budget platform would extend the reach and engage those, especially youth and parents with young children, who are less likely to show up to in-person sessions. A variety of platforms exist; Citizens Academy has had initial conversations with possible partners to conduct an Ottawa pilot.



- Consider growth: What resources and collaborations are needed to host sessions by Ward? What possibility exists for citizens to deliberate on “real \$\$ amount” available for their Ward?

So, in the end, was the effort worth it? We’d say so!

## **By Participants**

### **Key Observations:**

- Interactive small group discussions work well to generate ideas.
- Recognition and appreciation of the experimental concept.
- Subject matter too complex for a two-hour session.
- Greater clarity on strategic level of the conversation and purpose of the sessions is required.
- Too much paper, too much information, and yet somehow not enough information.
- Balance the information delivery and group discussion time. Less presentation from the front of the room.
- Energy and speed of the session worked.
- Appreciation of the collaborative nature of the sessions.
- Appreciation of the bilingual nature of sessions.

### **Key Recommendations:**

- Provide Budget 101 as a half-day workshop/full day workshop or conduct series of sessions.
- Consider options for participatory budgeting that will allow for deeper discussion and deliberation instead of commenting on something that is already proposed.
- Make background information available on an on-line platform as preparation for an interactive session.
- Create more specific and synthesized information to support group discussions.
- Provide follow-up.
- Continue having such sessions. Consider sessions on specific focus areas such as affordable housing, transit, environment etc. Expand!
- Consider hosting such sessions early in the budget process – a worthwhile exercise.
- Consider offering use of iPads during future events

## **By Councillors**

### **Councillors’ Key Observations:**

- Residents are ready, and have a thirst, to learn, to be engaged and share their opinions about the City’s budget priorities.
- The consultation format gave residents the opportunity to hear a multitude of perspectives and ideas, which enabled them to understand the complexity and compromises necessary when budget making.
- Throughout the process, we heard from participants that Budget Speak was innovative and a worthwhile exercise, but more direction with clearer objectives and guidelines was needed.



- When the City undertakes consultation, it is important to ask residents specific questions so that we get appropriate and specific feedback.
- Residents wanted more time to discuss, engage and take part in the group work.

#### **Councillors' Key Recommendations:**

- Begin the consultation process earlier in the budget cycle and get more residents involved through social media, communications and media.
- Provide an online engagement tool for residents to have their say on budget priorities and trade-offs if they cannot attend the session.
- Expand the length of the consultation to ensure that all opinions are heard, discussed and documented.
- Involve City staff in consultations to hear directly from residents and be available as a useful resource.

#### **Councillors Next Steps:**

- Share report with Mayor, Council colleagues, City Treasurer, and City's Executive Management.
- Post report on website, social media, and share with community associations before the budget is approved on March 11<sup>th</sup>.
- Have a discussion with the City to revisit format of future City-led budget public consultations in advance of 2016 budget.
- Plan for next year!

## **Next Steps**

Since Budget Speak was an experiment, the next steps are a work in progress. This report and annexes are a way of sharing the information with the larger community. The Councillors will use the insights, ideas, and recommendations to inform their deliberations for setting the City's Strategic Priorities for this Term of Council. The recommendations on specific types of spending will be taken into account during budget deliberations. We hope some participants will choose to take their ideas to one of the City's Committees, in order to advocate for the specific changes they want.

## **Annexes**

The entirety of participants' comments and raw data collected from Budget Speak has been made available in annexes. For ease of viewing and printing this report, the annexes have been provided in a separate document.



## Acknowledgements and Thanks

We would like to acknowledge and give special thanks to all those involved in designing and organizing the Budget Speak sessions, the thoughtful individuals who helped develop the content, and the tireless work of those involved in collecting the data and drafting this report.

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Citizens Academy is an Ottawa based, volunteer-led organization with a mission to inspire new ways for people to engage with and create change in their cities. It promotes civic engagement and innovation through public dialogues and civic education.

In 2015, it is Ottawa's local convenor for the Cities for People initiative.

