

Eric: [00:00:00](#) Hello everyone and welcome to the city of Burlington's pre-budget consultation virtual town hall meeting. We are live tonight with the mayor of Burlington, Marianne Meed Ward. In addition, we are joined by thousands of residents from throughout the city listening in. To ask a question live tonight, simply press three on your phone's keypad. My name is Eric and I'll be moderating to town hall this evening. During this live virtual town hall, we encourage you to get involved and to ask some questions and give your opinion by voting on a few of our survey questions. Mayor Meed Ward chose this format as this is an interactive town hall with you, which means we want to hear from you tonight. Mayor Meed Ward and the city of Burlington have made it a priority to engage and connect with you and fellow residents, to get your input on the upcoming budget.

Eric: [00:00:50](#) This town hall is a way for the mayor to personally and directly hear your feedback and opinions. It's also an opportunity to share some information about the budget process. Tonight, our intention is to get as many questions about the budget as possible. You can ask a question at any time by pressing three on your phone's keypad during the town hall this evening. At that time, someone will take your name and place you in the question queue. Now again, we're still having people join us, welcome and hello to everyone listening. This is the city of Burlington's pre-budget consultation virtual town hall meeting. We are live tonight with the mayor of Burlington, Marianne Meed Ward. In addition, we're joined by thousands of residents from throughout the city listening in. We want to remind everyone tonight that if you have a question about the budget, you can ask it at any time by pressing three on your phone's keypad.

Eric: [00:01:36](#) We'll also be doing a few survey questions throughout the event so you'll have a chance to vote live using your phone's keypad, as those questions come up. Now at this time I'm going to introduce Mayor Meed Ward so she can open up the town hall. Mayor Meed Ward, welcome. Tonight is a very important virtual town hall for the city of Burlington. In addition to hearing recommendations at council, the city has decided to use this town hall as a means of engaging and connecting with residents to hear their feedback and priorities for the upcoming 2020 budget. I know that there are a number of members of the executive team with you and at the moment we have quite a few people joining us. So Mayor, please go ahead.

Mayor: [00:02:14](#) Well good evening everyone. Thank you so much for spending an hour with me and with each other you'll have a chance to

listen in to your neighbors questions as well. So thank you so much for being part of this conversation about our 2020 budget priorities. So we want to use this opportunity to hear what your priorities are and what's important to you. Last year when we tried this format, we had more than 1200 people participate in the town hall. And we hope this format provides you a convenient option for learning about what's happening with your city's budget for 2020 and of course to get your feedback. In the room I do have a number of members of our leadership team and if a question comes up for one of them, I will introduce them by name and title. Even though the budget preparation only comes around once a year, I'd like to reiterate that this is not the only time that we take feedback and will potentially make changes.

Mayor: [00:03:08](#) We are always trying to listen to you and make adjustments throughout the year. And based on what we've heard from the community, we have recently altered and expanded our transit routes. For example, we approved a new splash pad last year for Brad Hills. We created a pilot program for free transit for seniors at off peak hours. And early indicators are that, that has been wildly successful. So that's great news. And we also added additional funding to protect our tree canopy. So the conversation that we want to have with you this evening will be around the services that we offer, such as parks and recreation, roads, snow clearing, transit of course, floodwater protection, fire services, bylaw enforcement and planning and building permits. It's important to note that the city is not responsible in our budget for delivering garbage recycling or green bin collections, drinking water, wastewater, public health education, paramedic and police services.

Mayor: [00:04:10](#) Those are all delivered at the regional level and we have separate discussions at region for that. So we're just going to focus tonight on city services and the city budget. Our new approved Vision to Focus plan provides a framework for the decisions that we are going to make as a council on where we spend our money. That's our four year work plan for this term of council. And by linking our Vision to Focus work plan with the budget, it provides accountability to you between what's achieved and the cost to you, our citizen and taxpayer. So there are five focus areas in Vision to Focus. The first is increasing economic prosperity and community responsive growth and development. Improving our integrated city mobility, supporting sustainable infrastructure and a resilient environment, building more citizen engagement community health and culture and finally delivering customer centric

services with a focus on efficiency and technology transformation.

Mayor: [00:05:16](#) So these are the focus areas and key priorities for city investments. And you'll see the budget is laid out that way. We have two parts to our budget, a capital and an operating budget and we will be discussing both of those together leading up to December when we hope to vote and approve on a final budget. So spending for the capital budget is for infrastructure that you see throughout the city, such as developing new parks, new or existing roadways and storm water drainage or revitalizing our recreation facilities. The operating budget for the city is the day to day cost of delivering services such as fire protection, transit, park maintenance, and providing recreational programming. So this year the proposed 2020 budget plans to invest \$86 million on the capital program and \$265 million in the operating budget. So I'm very excited to have you join us. We will be using the time tonight to highlight a few key areas of the proposed 2020 budget and take as many questions as possible.

Mayor: [00:06:28](#) All of the questions that we get tonight, including those we're not able to respond to on the call will be posted on burlington.ca/budget in the coming days and before I hand it back to the moderator, if you do have a question about your neighborhood or something specifically that's happening in the community that is not budget related, we definitely want to hear from you. So I invite you to email me at mayer@burlington.ca and we can handle your question that way so that tonight we can turn our focus to budget. So I'm going to turn it back over to the moderator.

Eric: [00:07:05](#) Thank you very much Mayor for opening up the town hall. Now we're still having some new people join us and I just want to let them know how they can ask a question on the town hall this evening about the upcoming 2020 budget. If you have a live question about the budget you'd like to ask, press three on your phone's keypad at any time over the course of the town hall, someone will take your name and place you in the question queue. So we're actually going to go to our first live question. This is a question from Lynn about affordable housing. Lynn, welcome to the town hall. You're joining us live.

Lynn: [00:07:45](#) Thank you. Good evening Mayor Ward and the executive committee that is there. I thank you for this opportunity to speak to you. Mayor Ward, I voted for you and I think you're doing a great job and I'm glad that you're our Mayor. So my

question is in relation to all the condos that are being built in the downtown area of Burlington, they're all springing up very quickly and they're all very high end condos, very expensive. There is no affordable housing being built anywhere. There are no rentals being built anywhere. So people who are on their own, who don't have \$1 million income can't afford to live in Burlington now. I have to sell my condo because my condo fees have gone up 19%, I know the town doesn't have any control over that because they're private, but they're pretty brutal and I can't even rent an apartment in Burlington. So I want to retire, but I don't know where I'm going to go.

Lynn: [00:08:48](#) All my family and friends are here, but Burlington is getting extremely expensive to live in. So is there anything going forward? Looking at encouraging some builders to build a condo, will a certain number be a lesser price or something in the way of rentals that are not over \$2,800 a month. So that's my question.

Mayor: [00:09:12](#) Great question Lynn. Thank you so much for joining us. I'm delighted to be your Mayor too, so thank you for that. Yeah, we do have a couple of tools to deal with affordable housing in the city and we have asked for builders to include some affordable housing units, certainly in the larger condos downtown. As part of what we negotiate through a Community Benefits Program, I can tell you that the paradigm high rises that went in at the Ghost station, we did negotiate 15 units of assisted housing.

Mayor: [00:09:47](#) Those are going to be owned and operated by the region through the Halton Community Housing Corporation and we do have some rental housing that is on the books in various places of not only downtown Burlington but other parts of the city. Where affordability really relates to our budget and property taxes, particularly where we need to keep affordability in mind is that the faster we grow, if we don't stick pretty close to our growth forecast, growth forecasts are tied to our infrastructure spending, they're tied to our parks and recreation spending. We we only collect about 80 cents on the dollar for the new services that we have to fund through property taxes from the new property tax payers. And that means the difference between what we can collect in new property tax and what a growing community needs. There is a difference that is picked up by the taxpayer.

Mayor: [00:10:47](#) If we also wildly go beyond our growth forecast, we're not collecting enough in development charges and those are again related to infrastructure, parks, community services, all of those

things. So it's really important to this council and our staff here that we are as close as possible to our growth forecast because if we are not the difference in what it actually costs to serve a community in Burlington in terms of the services they need and what money comes in the door has to be picked up by the taxpayer. So we're very alive to this concern and we know that through our planning process, which is a separate process from our budget, but of course the two are related that we need to secure more rental, more affordable and more assisted housing. That is something that the council has done.

Mayor: [00:11:42](#) I can tell you in my eight years as a city council member got 40 units just in ward two, but clearly not enough. We want to make sure Burlington is inclusive for everyone in our community at all income levels. So you're right to raise that as a concern and we need to keep that in front of us at all times. Thank you for the question.

Eric: [00:12:08](#) Lynn. Thank you again for that question. Just before we get to another question, we're going to do a quick survey. So for everyone joining us on the line, you can indicate your response using your touch tone phone. We want to know, overall are you satisfied with the services provided by the city of Burlington? If yes, please press one. If no press two and if you're unsure or don't know, please press three. Now Mayor, there's a topic that's on a lot of people's minds is climate change and what is the city doing to address climate change?

Mayor: [00:12:52](#) Great question. Thank you so much for that one. We're doing a number of things. So this has been something that's been in front of our staff at the city for some time. We have a sustainable development committee, a citizens' committee that helps us with making sure that development is low impact, which helps the climate. Our staff do the Take Action Burlington report where we talk about what the city's doing, but also what steps the residents can take. And there's a webpage online that you can go to, Take Action Burlington. But we also as a city declared a climate emergency earlier this year and the effort was to point our efforts much more in a much more focused way on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, doing everything that we can to prepare for the impacts of changing climate.

Mayor: [00:13:50](#) So we have in our budget this year a proposal for continuing the climate action plan. So we asked our staff to come back with a new plan. So that is a business case that this the council where will consider it is \$60,000 to make sure that we are doing everything that we can to plan for changing climate. And you

know the bottom line is that we want cleaner air, clean water and we want to be protected from flooding, and those are the reasons why we do all of this. And so we have been doing a lot of work in the city and we'll continue to do that through this budget.

Eric: [00:14:51](#) We're going to go now to [Jean 00:14:53] who has a question about Community Gardens. Jean, welcome. You're joining us live.

Jean: [00:14:58](#) Thank you. Good evening Mayor. I'm pleased to talk to you. My question really is about beautifying Burlington. I think the gardens in the road are lovely. And talking about climate change as well, any plants that are growing, are obviously good for the climate, good for everybody really, good for enjoyment. And I'd love to see more gardens in the road and particularly one upper middle road and Augustine drive. There's a big area there that would look lovely and to have one or two trees there that it's lovely. And I think Burlington citizens really enjoy these gardens. So I wonder if we could have more.

Mayor: [00:15:45](#) Great question. Thank you so much Jean. And I agree with you. I think that the plantings in the roadways not only beautified, but they actually save you tax dollars. So there has been studies done that if you plant a tree near a roadway and it shades the asphalt, then you actually extend the life of that road so we don't have to repave it as often so that saves you money while also beautifying and providing shade, and I certainly know that walking or driving along a tree-lined road is much more pleasant than the alternative. And our Community Gardens Program in the city, we have expanded it several times.

Mayor: [00:16:26](#) I can tell you they are wildly successful and residents line up to try and bid on a plot. And we've also worked with some local churches and other areas to get additional community gardens. I think we can continue to do more on that. But I'm going to ask our director of transportation, who is also with us tonight, Vito Tolone, to talk about how staff make the decision about where we're going to put planted medians in the roadway and if you have a specific request. So we've noted the specific requests that you have put forward, but just how that decision is made and what you can expect to see going forward on some of our roadways. Vito.

Vito Tolone: [00:17:10](#) So we review any requests that come forward with our roads and parks forestry department as well because it's not just about constructing them but also maintaining them, watering

them and ensuring that they're kept up. So we review them from a transportation standpoint just to ensure that we don't create issues in terms of visibility. And then our director of roads and parks forestry also has a say in terms of whether it would be and whether or not we have the ability to maintain them. Perhaps there's areas we can irrigate them automatically through attaching irrigation from the roadway. So it's that type of review that we do, but we do a cooperative [inaudible 00:18:03] with our roads and parks forestry.

Mayor: [00:18:05](#) Thanks Vito. I am joined also this evening by [Mary Battaglia 01:00:03:03] who is our director of roads, parks and forestry to offer any additional comments on a tree planting in and around our roadways. Go ahead.

Mary Battaglia: [00:18:18](#) Thank you for the question. Our staff take a lot of pride in the work that they do, especially those median plantings because they really are enjoyed by so many people. One thing that residents may not think about much is that one of our first considerations has to be the safety of our staff so when we are looking at specific sites we need to gauge whether there is room on the road for a vehicle to be able to stop and safely perform work. Several years ago we did have a terrible accident where we had staff that were hit in the road and that caused us to take a step back and really look at some of these locations in terms of the safety of our staff. So that is one more of the considerations that go in and we are trying to work with transportation and capital works and look at spreading them around the city as much as possible.

Mayor: [00:19:11](#) Thanks Mary.

Eric: [00:19:14](#) Jean, thank you again for that question. We have our next live question coming up. We're going to go now to [Moselle 00:19:28] . Moselle welcome to the town hall. You have a question regarding tourism.

Moselle: [00:19:33](#) Yes. Thank you so much. This is such a great idea. Mayor Meed Ward my question is can we please have some money towards tourism? I know we're in the process of trying to get a new tax that will give some money towards it, but meanwhile we have a magazine that's called the DayTripper and there's just so much in there about all the areas around us, but there's absolutely nothing about Burlington. Evidently because we don't have the budget to put all the stuff that we provide.

- Moselle: [00:20:17](#) Also, another thing could be walk arounds. When the new hotel is built, it would be nice to have someone on staff that could be called just to do walking around showing all the artwork, stuff like that. I think it was last year or year before I actually took some tourists up to Crawford Lake because there was absolutely no way they could get up there without transportation. And that's one of the only indigenous areas to see. And that's what they were interested in. So I'd really like to see some money going towards tourism because we have so much here and everything else I see in the DayTripper is nothing compared to what we have in Burlington. Can I add another one thing?
- Mayor: [00:21:11](#) Go ahead.
- Moselle: [00:21:14](#) I'd like to see a few more memorial benches. Not necessarily benches but maybe some fancy seats, like one chair or just a double one. Just a few different ones around the town where people can sit. Because when I tried to get a bench in Spencer Smith Park, it's \$5,000 so I'd like to see something a little more affordable if possible.
- Mayor: [00:21:46](#) Thank you so much Moselle, great to hear from you. And I agree with what you're talking about. You did mention the municipal accommodation tax, so we are looking in December to make a decision one way or another about whether we're going to go forward with that. It's proposed as a 4% tax on accommodation, so hotel rooms in the city and the proposal is to split the difference between tourism Burlington and the city of Burlington to direct towards tourism or tourism related projects and the quantum is in the neighborhood of about \$750,000 that would be divided, so it's a good chunk of change. The hotel industry is behind it. Tourism Burlington is behind it. We had a good discussion about it at council so that would provide some additional dollars. I will say that council does provide a \$400,000 grant to tourism every year.
- Mayor: [00:22:52](#) So we do fund at least in part their tourism activities. I will certainly pass on the feedback about the DayTripper. I don't know that magazine but I can find out about it and we'll see if we can put a plug in... We are the number one city in the country. We know that. So we should be getting lots of free coverage and actually our staff are working on a plan to communicate that and kind of shout it from the rooftops and we're also the number one city to raise a family according to a claim. So I'm so happy to continue that effort. With respect to walk arounds, we do have a number of those currently

happening. So our heritage Burlington folks do a heritage walk once a year during heritage month in February and those are wonderful.

Mayor: [00:23:51](#) I always learn something new about the community but they're also all online. So anybody that wants to go online and find out what's going on and take a self guided tour and there are heritage places around the city. If you want to do more of a driving tour, you can find out about that. I myself earlier this year, led a culture walk downtown, we had a good turnout is about 40 or 50 residents came and we visited various cultural and artistic... Actually it was a public art art walk. So we are doing some of that but happy to have more suggestions and I know transportation is an issue to get to our conservation areas. You mentioned Crawford Lake that is run by Conservation Halton and I'm very passionate about making sure that residents have access to our natural spaces, so that might be something we can think about in terms of those tourism dollars is providing some shuttle services so folks can enjoy everything Burlington has to offer.

Mayor: [00:24:59](#) The final thing that you wanted to talk about was the memorial benches. We have different ways that we can fund benches. One is memorial and that is the one that you mentioned Moselle that we ask residents to contribute to that, to name a bench in memory of somebody, but a little known fact is that every year in budget there's \$25,000 that we dedicate to new benches and your ward counselor gets to pick the location in conversation with staff. So we always put one new bench in every ward a year on top of the benches that we install. So if you have a location for your ward, then get in touch with your council member, let them know where you'd like to see it. That doesn't cost you a cent, it's just a good idea. So, please get in touch with your counselor about that.

Eric: [00:25:54](#) Moselle thank you very much for that question. Now we have another live question coming up, but quickly we're going to do a survey question. So for everyone joining us, you can use your touch tone phone to indicate your response on the following question. And some background. Infrastructure renewal is a priority in the city's budget. Roads, bridges and facilities like arenas and community centers need repairs and updates to maintain existing service levels. Over the last number of years, significant investments have been made to support growing renewal needs like the revitalization of Nelson Pool, repaving of our roads and the renewal of our parks. As you may know, there are trade offs between investments in things like services and

infrastructure and property tax levels. Due to the increased cost of maintaining current service levels and infrastructure, the city must balance taxation and service delivery levels.

Eric: [00:26:44](#) Which of the following options would you prefer the city to pursue: if it's to maintain property tax increase at inflation, 2.5%, to maintain service levels. If this option, please press one. Increase property taxes higher than inflation to enhance the service levels. If this option, please press two. To reduce property taxes by reducing service levels and or eliminating services. If this option, please press three.

Eric: [00:27:50](#) We now have another live question. This one's going to be coming up from [Marie 00:27:53] . Marie, welcome. You're joining us live.

Marie: [00:27:59](#) Hello? [crosstalk 00:28:03]

Eric: [00:28:07](#) Yes. Hi Marie. Welcome to the town hall. You're joining us live on the line.

Marie: [00:28:10](#) Okay. I have some questions about the roads. I went out last Saturday and walking my dog up to lake shore and I walked home with two black eyes. The roads were terrible. They're still terrible. They have been for quite some time. I have worked for the city of Burlington for 16 years as a crossing guard and I walked from my building to the school every morning, every afternoon, and slipping and sliding. This south side of the road is never [inaudible 00:28:50]. Never. So now you people are saying that you worry about your workers. Well what about us people?

Mayor: [00:28:59](#) Thank you-

Marie: [00:28:59](#) Us people need some protection too. And the roads people are getting paid to do the roads. Why aren't they done? Come down this way and see the [inaudible 00:29:10], you can't even walk.

Mayor: [00:29:15](#) Thank you Marie for that. I am so sorry to hear about about your fall and your black eyes. Of course we want to make sure nobody has a situation like that. So we do actually spend the majority of our capital program on our road repair in terms of sidewalk and roads. We also have increased our snow service in terms of clearing on sidewalks. We did that a few years ago and there's a business case coming up again in this year's budget that we can discuss that would add service to sidewalk snow clearing. We also added our trails, which weren't part of the

program at that time because we know a lot of people use our bike paths and trails to get around in the city, and we know that's really important for people when we want to encourage active transportation, we have to make sure that the sidewalks are safe for folks.

Mayor: [00:30:20](#) We do have levels of service around snow clearing and I'm just going to turn it over to Mary Battaglia, our director of roads, parks and forestry to talk about when we clear snow and the difference between our arterial and local roads. And so you might be seeing some of those differences in snow clearing even in the recent snowfall. And you may be wondering why that is. So I'm just going to let Mary walk you through the levels of service and I do appreciate the question because if you think our service levels should change, let us know. Do you want enhanced snow clearing service on local roads, on sidewalks? That's exactly why we're having the conversation tonight. We need to hear your feedback that would cost additional dollars. And I'm on for that. I've always voted for increased service for residents, so let us know, but I'll let Mary walk you through what the different service levels are.

Mary Battaglia: [00:31:18](#) So thank you for that question. And on our roadways, we have three different levels of service. So our primary roads are all the major arterial roads that really gets people across the city. Those are the ones that will be done first in a snow storm. Followed by secondary roads, which are those roads that connect all of the residential roads through to the primary roads. Lastly, we do our residential areas and they are maintained to a different service level. So where primary and secondary roads, our objective is to get to bare pavement. On residential roads we do allow for a snow pack to accumulate and that service level is fairly consistent across most major municipalities. I know that when we have a year like we did last year with a lot of freeze thaw, it does become more concerning to residents as to the condition that builds up on those residential roads.

Mary Battaglia: [00:32:17](#) In terms of sidewalks, we did have a more stuff added to our budget which will become effective and you'll start to see a noticeable difference in sidewalks for clearing, starting this year. So we should be able to have staff and contractors out 24/7 looking after sidewalks. So where it used to take us up to three days or longer in some cases, we do expect that we will be able to have all sidewalks done within 48 hours. So that is after the snow stops falling, if we get re repeating storms that can take a little longer. But I do think people will start to notice the

difference. We will evaluate that difference at the end of next year to determine whether more resources are necessary. And if so, then we will put in a further budget request.

Mayor: [00:33:08](#) One of the reasons that we do have differing levels of standards on the arterial and the local and allowing for that snow pack is to reduce our use of salt because we know that has an impact on the environment. So if we can safely get people on those local roads that move a little slower, there's less volume and we do sand to prevent the ice, which is a little better than the salt. So we try to be very careful about our salt use for environmental reasons as well, so we want to be safe but also look out for that. So thank you for that question.

Eric: [00:33:48](#) Thank you again for that question. We now have our next live question coming up from Steve. Steve, welcome. You're joining us live.

Steve: [00:34:08](#) Hi, thanks very much Mayor Ward. Thank you for holding this public town hall. I think it's a terrific idea. My question is maybe not so much about specifically the 2020 budget but maybe more kind of strategically moving forward is as I listened to the comments being made around the capital budget, I think it was 85 million and take into account road repairs, sidewalk repairs and infrastructure [inaudible 00:34:38] . I was curious as to how the city is handling the planning for strategic infrastructure, specifically with respect to the energy plant.

Mayor: [00:34:51](#) Great. Thank you very much for that. So I can tell you on infrastructure generally, and that includes not just our roads, that also includes our community centers, our public facilities, our parks are part of that and we are also looking more closely at green infrastructure. So our creeks and our trees considering those as part of our overall infrastructure because they do help us with all of the things that we want infrastructure to do, which is protect from climate change mitigation, protect us from flooding and that sort of thing. So we have a infrastructure levy every year that is 1.25% it adds about \$2 million a year to the budget in additional funding. We have some catch-up to do, for a number of reasons, our needs in a growing community are growing faster in some cases than we can keep up.

Mayor: [00:35:52](#) We also, for a a number of years in the 90s had 0% tax increases and while it may sound terrific at the time you pay one way or the other for your infrastructures. And so we've haven't accumulated an infrastructure deficit, which is the difference between what our annual funding is and what our needs for

renewal and upkeep are. We are trying through the infrastructure levy now to get caught up and we're doing well, but it's an ongoing journey. In terms of energy, we do have a goal in all of our facilities to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. And I can give you an example, most recently the discussion that council had around the Skyway Arena renewal. That's in the Southeast part of Burlington near Lakeside Plaza. We have an arena in there that is cooled by Freon and that is being phased out by 2022 and so we knew we had to do something with that facility and so we could've just replaced it with better cooling system, but our staff came forward and said we should really do something that reduces our overall impact on greenhouse gases.

Mayor: [00:37:18](#) And so we approved a new plan that would see that happen. And I'm going to let our director of recreation services, Chris Glenn, just talk a little bit more about what we're doing at Skyway and really in all of our facilities to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and our impact on energy. And then I'll talk about a couple of other areas in the city where we're addressing that. But Chris, do you want to speak to Skyway Arena?

Chris Glenn: [00:37:47](#) Certainly. Thank you Mayor for including me. We're adding geothermal or at least that's the plan right now. We're coming back to council with the final costing to talk about adding geothermal to that facility. That will certainly help us in overall operation but will have a positive impact on our carbon footprint going forward. That's probably the bigger one, but the smaller one perhaps but more significant in longterm is electrifying our fleet. The Zamboni's that are in our arenas right now, we're looking to go to an electric one in this particular operation and we will pilot that and see if we can't carry that across the rest of our inventory over time. And an even smaller one, but just as important there are edgers as an example in an arena that go around the ice and their gas powered. We're going to go to electric on those too, so I gave you a couple of examples of something very large infrastructure geo, kind of medium with the Zamboni's and smaller you'll see us do smaller things to get out of using fossil fuels and that will carry across the entire inventory as a couple of examples.

Mayor: [00:38:44](#) That's great. I can tell you that we are trying and we do have some electric vehicles in the city fleet of vehicles. I myself have a plug-in hybrid and rarely have to use gas, which is a beautiful thing. You don't realize how much time you spend at a gas pump until you don't have to go there anymore. We also, a

couple of years back invested in switching the city lights to led and that was a \$6 million investment at the time. A huge number to crack at the beginning. But we are starting to see the payback, not only in our energy impact but dollars back in your pocket. So one of the great things about trying to be environmentally friendly, trying to reorient our efforts around climate change is that it saves you money and gives you cleaner air and cleaner water and all of the other good things. It's so important for us to do and we are doing those things. Thank you for the question

Eric: [00:39:50](#) Steve. Thank you again for that question. We have our next live question coming up now. It's going to be from Amy. Amy, welcome to the town hall. You're joining us live.

Amy: [00:40:00](#) Great. Thanks very much. Thanks for this great opportunity. Marianne Meed Ward. I just had a question about the budget and if the city would be having a fund or grant system available similar to what other municipalities have, where they support local nonprofits who do impact for work to help the environment?

Mayor: [00:40:25](#) Thank you so much Amy for the question, for joining us tonight and for your ongoing passion for community advocacy around environmental issues. So we do actually work very closely with our nonprofit groups. For example, working with Burlington Green, we were able to start the Community Garden Program that we talked about earlier this year. We also have Burlington Green helping us with our community clean up and so we do provide funding for various initiatives. Those are just a couple that the city has partnered with some of our local groups around. In terms of broader nonprofit funding, we do that primarily through the region. So they have a a Community Investment Fund Program with criteria that that folks can apply to, but we also have something in the community that I'm going to actually ask Chris Glenn again to talk about from our director of recreation services that there are two separate funds, Community Development Fund that we do provide funding to community groups.

Mayor: [00:41:35](#) You don't have to be organized. You can be an individual or a group and so Chris is going to talk to us about what money might be available to citizens who are trying to do great work in their community around the various initiatives.

Chris Glenn: [00:41:48](#) Thank you very much again, Mayor. Really it's under our Community Investment Program. We have a number of

opportunities. One that was mentioned here was with respect to our Community Development Fund and that's a fund that we have in place that supports organizations in doing various initiatives to support the community but also to maybe help them with some of the work that they need to do internally as well. Another program we have is our Matching Fund, which is more geared towards neighborhood interest, but we look to have all kinds of opportunities there. Some could be environmentally focused and that's a program where we have what's up to \$10,000 of support from the city.

Chris Glenn: [00:42:23](#) That can be matched by a community organization. It doesn't have to be a formalized not-for-profit but it can be matched and it can also be matched in terms of volunteer time. So an example could be, and I'll link it back to trees, if there's an interest in putting trees in a particular area, the city may find the funds for the trees and the volunteers might support the planting of the trees. So I'll use that as an example at this point. So if you have ideas for ways you can improve our community, we're more than interested in hearing and seeing what we can do to help.

Eric: [00:42:54](#) Amy, thank you again for that question. Now we're going to do another survey question. So again, you can use your touch tone phone to indicate your response on the following question. A clear focus and priority in this year's budget is providing investments to enhance Burlington transit infrastructure. The 2020 budget proposes adding four new buses and one new handy van to provide more frequent and reliable services. Do you support an increased investment in Burlington transit? If yes, please press one. If not, please press two and if you're unsure or don't know, please press three. We have another live question coming up from [Biloa 00:00:43:45]. Biloa welcome. You're joining us live. Please go ahead.

Biloa: [00:43:50](#) Hi, thank you much for taking my call. I want to say thank you so much for having this debate. It's very informative. It's one of the first one that I've ever joined. But actually I want to ask you, Mayor and your council, the questions are coming at you saying what people like to see. But my question to you and the council is what you would like to see from the citizens of Burlington to make this city even better than it is today.

Mayor: [00:44:14](#) Well you've taken the first step already Biloa by just joining the call. So one of the things I love to see is residents getting involved and taking the time to learn about what it is that we do here at city hall, on your behalf, how we spend your money, and

listening in. So the gift that you have given us of your time, and your interest is already a first start. And I do think it's a responsibility of good citizenship in a democracy. So I do appreciate that. I think the thing that we can benefit most from residents, we all recognize around this table and in the city that we don't have a corner on all the good ideas. We don't have all the answers. We have a lot of things that we can contribute.

Mayor: [00:45:03](#) But I've always believed that more minds are better than one. And so some of the best things that we have done have been in response to citizen input. Our Community Garden Program came from a community group. Residents asking for a free transit prompted us to deliver free transit. The interest in the climate emergency declaration, this came from residents. The initiatives that you see in the budget really are a reflection of what we hear around council table from residents around what you would like to see us doing for you in terms of services and how to direct best your dollars. So it is a lot of work to be an engaged and informed citizen. I can tell you the budget book that I'm looking at, which you can't see, but it's about two inches thick. And that's just part of what you can read.

Mayor: [00:46:00](#) There's a stuff report which is many pages long and it takes a lot of effort and your time to learn about what's happening and to follow up with your feedback. And that is the most important thing I think that you can do is just share with us your good ideas because it matters and we appreciate it. And you will see, and I certainly have seen in my coming up to nine years around this table, that we do implement in many cases and sometimes not the first time you ask. So I can tell you with free transit, it took three asks of two different councils to make that a reality. So don't give up on us, stick with us, keep at it, and stay engaged in your city. It is your city. And the best thing about our city is you, the people of Burlington.

Eric: [00:47:05](#) Biloa. Thank you very much for that question. We have another live question from [Geraldine 00:47:05] . Geraldine, welcome to the town hall. You're joining us live.

Geraldine: [00:47:10](#) Thank you for this meeting and Mayor Ward. I just want to tell you, I think you are a terrific mayor and I feel like I'm beating a drum all the time about transit. And I've come to this city to live, 30 years ago, the transit is pits. It still hasn't got too much better. The timing of it is like Saturday for example, the number four bus that goes from downtown and takes us past the Burlington mall is now hourly. What the heck good is that when people are shopping? And the other thing is it's not really

customer friendly and it's not just me saying that there's an awful lot of people think Burlington transit is the absolute pits and I know you try your best.

Geraldine: [00:48:01](#) I don't know who it is who designs the times or designs the routes, but they really are awful. For me to try and get up to Appleby Line from downtown is dreadful. The one bus they caught that went to Appleby Line went all around the town practically, before it actually got to Appleby Line. By which time I'd missed the bus that I should've taken to get me where I wanted. So that was no good at all. I don't know why you can't have direct routes up these main avenues like that just go straight there and back. I'm probably not making any sense to you but I just think it's catching the bus in Burlington is not easy and it's not customer friendly at all. Excuse me [inaudible 00:48:48].

Mayor: [00:48:46](#) Thank you so much Geraldine for that feedback and that's exactly what tonight is about. I really do appreciate that and as luck would have it, actually planning would have it, we do have Sue Connor, our director of transit here to speak to your specific concerns, but I will say that there have been some changes made in the fall. We are moving towards more of what we call a grid system, which is your direct routes to get away from those meandering routes that take too much time. Looking at 15 minutes service on our major routes and in this budget, as you heard earlier during the polling question we have in the budget, the proposal should council accept it four new buses, which will again help with that frequency one new handy van because the demands there are significantly escalating. And that's on top of the buses that we added last year and in previous years. So we are aware of... Well we have a desire, I would say this is a very transit friendly council. We want to have a transit system that works and my goal would be that it works better than driving. That's where we need to get. But I'm going to turn it over to Sue to speak specifically to some of the things that she's got going on and coming to speak to the very issues that you've raised.

Sue Connor: [00:50:13](#) Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this Mayor. I'm sorry to hear that you find your frustrations with using our service but we are working towards improving the service. We have asked for four additional buses to put in service for year and I do recognize that the service on Saturday, the levels are extremely low. We recognize that and we're working with council to add equipment and operators to improve those services. We actually did increase service quite a bit significantly on Saturdays in September. Unfortunately the service hours only

go so far, so as we get additional hours we will be looking to see what the ridership is on the new routes that we've put in place and deciding where we need to add service so that we can accommodate the writers that we have.

Sue Connor: [00:50:59](#) We're also looking at potentially an on demand service that we will be working on next year implementing software that would allow people to have trips where we don't necessarily need a 40 foot bus and that would bring people to the conventional service that is operating at the time. So we've got a number of initiatives but I'd encourage you to contact us directly with your concerns because we do take and look at the feedback we get from our passengers in making our service changes and looking at decisions we need to make. We'll be doing that on an annual basis and so once we budget approved we'll be starting in the spring to put together our thoughts on where the best bang for the buck is with the investment that's being made in 2020

Eric: [00:51:45](#) Geraldine thank you very much for your question. We're quickly going to do another survey question. So again everyone joining us you can use who are touch tone phone to indicate your response. The city of Burlington has declared a climate emergency. We are finalizing our climate action plan and key program areas. And key program areas will help the community transition away from the use of fossil fuels, particularly for buildings and transportation. Do you think the city should be investing additional dollars to support climate change initiatives such as additional tree planting and protection conversion of buildings to be carbon neutral? If yes, please press one. If not, please press two and if you're unsure or don't know, please press three. We now have a live question from Anne. Welcome. You're joining us live.

Anne: [00:52:50](#) Thank you very much for taking my call. My question to you is, as I drive around the city and our fellow towns like Milton, I see a lot of roundabouts going in, which most certainly keeps the traffic flow moving a little better than the vast number of traffic lights that Burlington seems to have. Is there any plans to start putting in roundabouts in Burlington so we can get our gridlock traffic moving? Thank you for taking my question.

Mayor: [00:53:24](#) And thank you so much for the question. I personally love roundabouts. I don't like the stop and go traffic of the alternative. And you mentioned Milton, those are road expansions and we had the ability through and that's part of Halton region. So that comes to regional council. Of course all yours members of city council also sit at the regional table. We

had the opportunity to acquire the necessary land around a roundabout. They take up a fair bit of room to retrofit an existing, a highly used roadway, like a [Fairview 00:54:04] is a little more complicated, not beyond the realm of contemplation. I'm going to ask our director of transportation to comment in a minute on this as well. But you do need to acquire land around an intersection because the roundabouts take up some rooms. So I'm just going to turn it over to our director of transit transportation, Vito Tolone to speak to what might be possible in Burlington city limits.

Vito Tolone: [00:54:31](#) Thank you. Just to the Mayor's comment. Obviously when we have a greened area it's a lot easier to implement in a growing municipality. Unfortunately for Burlington we are built out so those options become limited. Having said that though, we are undertaking an integrated mobility plan starting in early 2020 which will examine all of the possibilities. So there are some areas of the city where a roundabout could be contemplated, but we have to weigh that off against everything else and van prices the way they are, these devices become extraordinarily expensive and we have to weigh that off against the potential benefits. So we're going to certainly consider them as an option going forward and we look forward to input from residents as well.

Eric: [00:55:27](#) Anne thank you very much for that question. We have another live question coming up now from Doug. Doug, welcome to the town hall. You're joining us live.

Doug: [00:55:35](#) Thank you for taking my question. Mayor Ward, you earlier indicated that operating expenses seem to be increasing faster than revenues before an increase in taxes. Could you maybe touch on the top one, two or three things that are driving operating expenses higher and in fact going higher than revenues at this time?

Mayor: [00:56:01](#) For sure. My earlier comments were actually about funding our infrastructure deficits that when we have an aging roads, aging community centers, that sort of thing, the revenue that we bring in through property taxes isn't enough to maintain those or hasn't been enough so that is more related to the capital budget actually, but the operating budget, I'm going to turn it over to [Joan Ford 00:56:55] , Our chief financial officer here at the city of Burlington to walk us through what the primary items in the operating budget. I can tell you the biggest single investment that you make is in the people that deliver the services to you. So our human resources cost would probably be

the biggest single line item in the operating budget. But I'm going to let Joan speak to sort of what the big drivers are.

Joan Ford: [00:56:54](#) Thank you Mayor and thank you Doug for your question. More specifically to what the Mayor has added, in addition to the human resource costs, we have commodity costs or utility costs just like homeowners have. That would include heat and hydro water, wastewater, gasoline, diesel at the current time, before we can change over to all electric vehicles as an example. Also we have some contracted services to enhance our snow plowing that our city staff do for example, and those costs are increasing over time as well as other commodities such as salt and sand. Also in terms of our tax increase overall, we have one and a quarter percent as the Mayor is indicated for increased funding towards our renewal program to keep our assets in a good state of working condition. I will say though that in order to reduce our costs where we can, I personally with the finance staff do a line by line review of every single budget in the city and each year I am finding roughly a million dollars in savings, whether that be through increased revenues or real savings.

Joan Ford: [00:58:08](#) Also just to let you know that we did receive \$250,000 from the province for Provincial Audit and Accountability fund and we are undergoing four service reviews right now with that funding and it has to be done by an independent third party consultant and that information will be made available to the public by the end of the year on those four service reviews. So again, we're looking for opportunities to reduce our costs into the future as well.

Mayor: [00:58:40](#) I will also add that Joan mentioned commodity and construction. We do a lot of constructing in the city and the increases for those on the market are well more than inflation and part of that is being in a growing community and a region where the services are in high demand. Also some of it relates to when we have trade with the United States or other places where there's currency fluctuations, so those things are actually well above the consumer price index level of inflation that you might see and we have to absorb that in our budget as well.

Eric: [00:59:22](#) Thank you very much for that question. Now Mayor Meed Ward, we're just about reaching the end of the town hall. We had a lot of great questions this evening. With the last couple of minutes remaining. Are there some closing remarks or final thoughts you'd like to share with everyone joining us?

Mayor: [00:59:38](#) Well, first of all I want to thank everyone who joined the call and is still on the call with us. Thanks for hanging in there. I really appreciate your feedback. I think the questions were terrific tonight. They were really all about what matters to you and that's what matters to us. If you didn't get a chance to ask a question, you can get in touch with my office at mayor@burlington.ca. I want to thank you for the feedback you've given us so far. In terms of the next steps around the process, there's still opportunity for you to give us your feedback so you can contact me or your City Counselor. You can also come to our budget discussions so we will be deliberating on the budget in December and hopefully making a decision so you'll have a chance at the committee meeting in December.

Mayor: [01:00:30](#) The reports will be going out in the next week or so. So you can see what proposals come forward and your City Councilor and the Mayor have an opportunity to request changes to the budget based on the feedback that we hear. And I can tell you we do that every year. We do bring forward changes to add or subtract items from the budget. I can tell you [inaudible 01:00:53] will be some additional free transit for students under 12 and that will be to align with what Metrolinx is already doing. So hopefully council will support that and if you have thoughts around that, please let me know. Very interested in tree planting.

Mayor: [01:01:09](#) I certainly support the transit investments and so those are just some of the things to watch for that are on my list of things that I want to bring forward and some of them are already in the proposed budget so... We're not done yet there's still lots of time to give us your feedback. If you didn't get a chance to ask a question you can go to getinvolvedburlington.ca, so the budget book is there. We will be listing this town hall, a full audio recording will be posted on the Get Involved website in the coming days. And again, any question that you might have, we will endeavor to get an answer to you and show you what others have asked. A copy of the proposed 2020 budget is available on getinvolvedburlington.ca and we also have an open budget tool on that site that will allow you to play with the budget, if you are a member of council how you would allocate or reallocate money.

Mayor: [01:02:17](#) There's some graphs and charts that are available in terms of how we construct the budget, where we get our revenue sources. Property taxes is only one, so that's what we've been focused on tonight, but we do get other sources of revenue from government grants as well as from rates and fees that we

charge in the city. So again, we appreciate your feedback and keep talking to us and keep listening.

Eric:

[01:02:42](#)

Thank you again to everyone for joining us on the town hall this evening. If you still have any questions or any feedback on the 2020 budget that you would like to share, I want to remind you that you can do so by emailing them to the city at mayor@burlington.ca. Thank you again to everyone for joining us and have a great night.