

2024 Municipal Pre-Budget Submission

Brandon Chamber of Commerce
January 25, 2024



INTRODUCTION

The Brandon Chamber of Commerce is an independent, membership funded, not-for-profit organization that represents Brandon businesses at the grassroots level. The Chamber is dedicated to encouraging growth in the Brandon community by fostering a progressive business environment, favorable to enhancing existing businesses and attracting new ones.

2023 has proven to be another challenging year for our business community, as they continue to deal with uncertainty following the pandemic, including interrupted supply chains, labour issues, persistent inflationary pressures, and continued interest rate increases throughout 2023. On top of these varied, and significant pressures, the Government of Canada's CEBA loan re-payments are due this month, in January 2024. Our business community has been dealing with significant, and unforeseen issues since the outset of the pandemic in March 2020, with no end in sight.

The City of Brandon faces its own unique challenges, with the last quarter of 2023 highlighting some significant and ongoing challenges to the management of our municipal government finances and how our community will fund growth in the years ahead.

City of Brandon Council and administration have an important and difficult task ahead of them in the budget deliberation process, as property tax increases are debated, services delivery is maintained, and our community commits to an achievable plan for growth and development into the future. Our comments have become more urgent this year, as recommendations from the Chamber of Commerce have seemingly not been taken into serious consideration in the budget deliberation process, placing our community in a precarious position of experiencing significant tax increases, while cost charges potentially sky-rocket and significant concern for how our community can remain on a path of growth into the future.

The Brandon Chamber of Commerce is committed to continuing to promote Brandon as the province's second largest City and we will work with municipal government to ensure that our business sector is given the tools to succeed within a community that is poised to grow sustainably into the future.

The Brandon Chamber of Commerce is committed to working as an active partner in the process of building, and deliberating, Brandon's municipal budget. We want to ensure that a meaningful and productive budget deliberation process is in place so that City Council, management, stakeholders and the citizens are able to be engaged in crafting a financial plan that will allow Brandon to grow and prosper into the future.

As City Council considers the 2024 Budget, we encourage Councillors to:

- 1. Provide a multi-year plan for tax increases** that will allow our community to sustain services and manage modest growth, while enabling our citizens and businesses to budget for the increases. As the MNP report has outlined, Brandon is no longer able to enjoy modest tax increases. Brandon Chamber of Commerce expects that reasonable, defensible tax increases will be planned over the coming years, allowing our community's citizens and businesses to plan accordingly.
- 2. Provide a comprehensive plan for re-building reserves** so that our community can grow and build into the future. Clearly, we are no longer in a position to borrow from reserves to reduce property tax increases as this practise has left large capital projects underfunded, and in some cases unattainable. A multi-year, staged approach to replenishing the City of Brandon's reserves is an absolute requirement, which starts in the 2024 budget process.
- 3. Labour is always a concern, with 50-60% of the budget going towards human capital** and the top-heavy nature of emergency services salaries. The Chamber suggests that at a time when our entire community is needing to "tighten our belts" to get through these times, salaries of our civil servants should fall under scrutiny as well. The Chamber suggests that strategic hires, such as the Grant Writer identified in the MNP Report, be retained as soon as possible to access diversified revenue streams and program funding.

Moreover, in alignment with recommendations from the MNP Report, we advocate for strategic staffing decisions, both with new and existing positions. One example is to look at how the City hires engineers, yet still pays to hire a consultant for engineering

projects. We also want to highlight the importance of promptly hiring a Grant Writer to capitalize on diversified revenue streams and program funding opportunities. This proactive approach aligns with the community's collective effort to navigate these challenging times efficiently.

4. Provide a capital plan that meets today's needs and poises our City for growth;

prioritize capital projects that inject money into our local economy and supports Brandon's contractors and tradespeople. We encourage a focus on initiatives that are designed and constructed by local businesses so that funding, from any source, is fully leveraged at the local level. We need our dollars to stay here and be reinvested in Brandon. We need our local businesses to be involved in all stages of infrastructure so that it creates a domino effect with the money flowing through multiple sectors, industries, and pockets. It will also encourage and support the retention of skilled labour.

5. Focus on developing transparency and accountability in communications internally,

and with stakeholders and citizens. Develop a sense of collaboration between City Council and administration, in an effort to look cohesively at the future of our community. Build open and honest dialogue that allows us to avoid circumstances like we find ourselves in as a community, going into 2024 budget deliberations. We applaud the development of the inaugural 4-year budget introduced this year, to provide longer-term financial visioning for our city.

CONCLUSION

We encourage City Council to listen carefully to stakeholders, and the information contained in the recent MNP study. While tax increases are never palatable, the City of Brandon must put in place a long-term plan for responsible, incremental tax increases and budgeting that allows the corporation, our business community, and citizens to plan for their financial future. We loudly encourage the City of Brandon adopt a responsible fiscal plan to replenish the corporation's

reserves in the coming years so that our community is able to embark on significant capital and development projects with committed funds in place.

With the significant financial pressures continuing on our business community and citizens, we ask City Council to approach these budget deliberations strategically, considering all revenue opportunities, staffing reductions and expense control possible. In these difficult times, we encourage the City of Brandon to work collaboratively, both internally and with all community stakeholders, to build a strong financial plan for our community.

Thank you.



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