

Chamber outlines budget concerns

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By Andrew de Souza

paNOW Staff

The city's Chamber of Commerce is hoping for more transparency, less debt and lower taxes for the city and its businesses in the future.

During public budget presentations on Monday, Prince Albert and District Chamber of Commerce CEO Bergen Price brought forward concerns from the more than 500 member businesses.

Transparency of city-operated sites

The first issue brought up was the chamber wanted to make it mandatory for city-operated facilities to disclose financial statements before they could make funding requests. Price said the intent was to ensure the facilities would try harder to find other sources of revenue.

"Our membership expects these businesses to be creative and responsible so that expenses are covered by revenue rather than by taxpayers," said Price.

Councillors agreed in principle with Price's suggestion but Coun. Martin Ring said even with greater transparency, there wasn't much room for increasing revenues.

"We're already being told by a number of groups that say we charge too much yet we're operating them at 65-70 per cent cost recovery," said Ring. "I don't know of a city out there that runs facilities at 100 per cent cost recovery and I don't know that we can afford it."

Deal with debt

Price then called for the city to deal with its growing debt and create a reduction strategy.

"The chamber would recommend city administration and council develop and publically disclose a strategy to service the long-term debt while maintaining infrastructure in the city that needs upgrading," said Price.

Mayor Jim Scarrow said the city's debt was manageable. He said there were some things that the city simply had to go into debt for, particularly water treatment.

The type of debt we have is ideal debt," said Scarrow. "First of all most of the debt is legislated and required by law and if you want to have a Walkerton, we could do what was done in the past and ignore the water treatment plant."

Scarrow also clarified that the city had an unused \$12-million line of credit that while untapped, counted towards the city's liabilities.

Keep taxes low

Lastly, Price said he wanted the city to be cautious with its proposed tax increase, especially when it came to the commercial tax. He said keeping low would help keep the city competitive.

"With increases in CPP, and other federal taxes being paid by our local businesses, a high mill rate would detract from the momentum gained in 2010," he said.

City councillors will be debating the city's 2011 budget on Jan 14-15.

adesouza@panow.com

Prince Albert

Comments Welcome

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Jstiglitz ★ 01/12/2011 02:05 PM

#1 - Especially external agencies that request funding from the City. The City needs to quit trying to hide the actual amounts that are being provided to places like the Rawlinson Centre. Sure the grant is about \$130,000 - but they are not making it clear that on top of that they also pay their utilities to the tune of about \$120,000. SO really they are being funded closer to 300,000!!!! Let's start making this clear Mr. Mayor!

#2 - I am astonished... that we don't already have a document in place that shows what this plan is. Mr. Scarrow this is to you - if this debt is good debt and it is so managable...please show us the plan that you have cleverly put in place to handle this debt. How can you possibly say debt for the Field House is good debt and then turn around and not be able to assist with the funding of homes to look after our elderly...this issue did not just pop up over night - you have known about this for a long time. I actually think this was first brought up in the Cody era. This magnitude of debt is NOT GOOD for the citizens no matter how you paint this picture and you know it. We are just about maxed out debt wise and we have much more pressing issues to deal with than the field house which you so cleverly built under a "under funded" budget knowing you would need to dump money by way of a "levy" every year in order to finish it the way it should be finished. No way do I buy that the showers or the sink in the canteen was forgotten in the original plan..this stuff and much more was cut out to bring the cost down with the clever plan of adding it later - WE ARE NOT STUPID.

#3 - Go ahead...keep working on your legacy at the expense of the blue collar worker here in Prince Albert. Just be assured though...your legacy is NOT the Fieldhouse or the little park by Court House - your legacy is DEBT and lots of it!!

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Mike ★ 01/12/2011 02:40 PM in reply to Jstiglitz

Here here , I like the way you worded this , especially the "this magnitude of debt is NOT GOOD" . I don't see where any type of debt is "ideal debt" to quote Mr.Scarrow. I personally think if we ,as a ,city were going to build a facility we should have made it an even more "multi-use" facility . Our city has no aquatic attraction for winter and for a "hockey town" we are missing out on being able to have a venue for the families that are between games when waiting .

As for the little park mentioned by JSTIGLITZ , I have driven by that little "legacy" in summer and have seen it overgrown with weeds and littered with garbage . Now when the city has something with the

current mayors name attached to it , I would hope they would want to have it looking as immaculate as possible. Also while this little park is overgrown , the city is handing out warnings to local businesses about how they should have their property grass cut so as not to be an eyesore , or wlse they will cut it for them and be sending them a bill for the work needing to be done .

The taxpayers of this city are NOT blind and do know full well that the debts incurred for public facilities are not able to be avoided , however the magnitude of debt is . Overspending , or underbugeting , whatever you want to call it , is an absolute disgrace when you are having people with so many letters behind their names and so much experience forgetting something like showers in a sports facility. Uhhhh probably not , lets just try honesty for once and not think that the people that vote the powers that be into office are ignorant and blind.

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PA Taxpayer ★ 01/13/2011 12:59 PM in reply to Jstiglitz

I'll vote for you as mayor in the next election.

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3 people liked this. Like ReplyReply



PA Taxpayer ★ 01/13/2011 12:57 PM in reply to Jstiglitz

Well said. I think you should run for Mayor again in the next election. I know for a fact that you have a lot more support this time than last. You also need to keep getting your comments out in this forum and every other media outlet that is available.

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just a thought ★ 01/12/2011 02:40 PM

Under Mr Scarrow's *leadership* we have seen the city sink deeper and deeper into debt..I find it disturbing for the mayor to say..we need to spend money on the water plant...we sure do and i agree 100% on that one and debt for that is *good debt*....however the debit that *we can do it better Jimmie* has put us in is for a group of his special interest friends who wanted the field house....now we

get a huge tax increase and a *we can do it better* ..levy for the white elephant field house...IIm you have to find some other place to work ...why not go manage the field house and let the city see if it can recover from your incompetent leadership

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PAGUY ★ 01/12/2011 01:39 PM

I understand this forum to be a place for raising issues and attempting to find solutions. In the spirit of this purpose I implore the citizens of Prince Albert to take a LONG hard look at our Mayor and Council. In the past few months (some may say years) we have seen poor judgement from our Mayor and what is best for our city.

Most recently, the request to raise our taxes 9.9%, which is absolutely absurd. We're already paying exorbitant property taxes (for what we get), not to mention the levy's placed on our water bills for projects that many seem extravagant wastes of money (ie/ Field House). Further, a promise to renovate Pineview care home has now fallen through, leaving our elder in deplorable conditions. Meanwhile, the Mayor and Council get new Ipads which average \$600 a pop. So, we can't afford to help our elderly, but we can afford to build facilities that are only attainable by the upper-middle class (soccer, acting, dance)...AND we can afford to spend several thousand dollars on iPads? I fail to see the forward thinking of a leader in any of the decisions our Mayor and Council have made.

Furthermore, almost half of the councillors were not elected, they simply ran unopposed in the last civic election. This is not democracy...sadly it is a display of complacency and apathy.

As this forum is intended to provide strategies for alleviating the problem, I have one...and I hope everyone reading this will refrain from flaming myself or others who may participate in this discussion, but rather provide suggestions to effect change and have our voices HEARD.

My strategy (and I would ask all reading to do this).... call your ward councillor. The website attached here will bring you directly to the city website that has a map and name of each ward and councillor in the city. Express your concern to your councillor...write letters, to your councillor, MLA and MP, don't give up...write again and again. Go to city council meetings and express yourself in that forum as well. We NEED to REMIND the Mayor and Council that WE are the people they answer to....and WE are the ones that HIRE them through votes....They are PUBLIC SERVANTS in the most basic definition and right now, they ARE NOT serving us...they are serving themselves and their friends!

The website for councillors is [http://www.citypa.ca/CityHall/...](http://www.citypa.ca/CityHall/)

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we'll see... ★ 01/12/2011 03:35 PM in reply to PAGUY

I agree that something needs to be done, but as you said it's complacency and apathy. 1000 comments on a website; no one attending council; no letters written to council. Everyone's a political animal when they don't have to do anything other than type.

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Richard ★ 01/13/2011 06:39 AM in reply to we'll see...

Well put, I was just in the process of writing a similar response and then read yours. The debt is real, call it good debt, bad debt, manageable or not, really does not matter at this point. There is going to be a tax increase and in my opinion long overdue, not suggesting I like the increase but at this point there is no other option. The size of the increase is the direct result of avoiding and delaying infrastructure upgrades and maintenance for 5 plus years for a mayor and some councilors to get re-elected.

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Rohm ★ 01/12/2011 11:43 AM

Wow madatory for city-operated facilities to disclose financial statements befor applying for additional funding!!! What a concept! You would think the public/taxpayers deserve to know how tax dollars are spent. I know enough about city facilities to know they will never be self sufficient but we have every right to know how and how much money is being spent!

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William Shakespeare ★ 01/12/2011 06:56 PM

Folks, when Scarrow was "in charge" at Rawlco he ruled by the law of my way or the highway. He's the same way at the City. if it wasn't for his friends with deep pockets that got him re-elected we, the average blue collar tax payer, we might have had a chance. Do you folks have any idea how long it will take us to pay the debt incurred now let alone the future debt? If anyone knows Scarrow lives on Peversoff place. He's the first one out the door in the morning and the last one on the block home at night. Mayor Scarrow I'm thinking of inviting Sarah Palin to our City. She can sure stir up so s__t and maybe teach you about good old fashioned politics. Hey folks I remind you that the Mayor is speaking at the Chamber of Commerce State of the City Luncheon, Thursday, Jan 20. Mayor Scarrow ask Malcolm if you can use the Field house for lunch cause I think we'll need a bigger venue. Buy your ticket before they are sold out. Let's all line up and hear the lies, lies and more lies from one Prince Albert's least liked and never should have been elected Mayor. Gosh Riley's math was better than yours! How do you sleep at night? I've got a good stiff drink! What's a million more for the police when only you and councillor Dionne have seen the budget? Shoot may as well give everyone what they want. Oh darn what the heck let's build two fire halls for more fire fighters to sleep at night. I know one thing they get more rest than you do Mayor Scarrow. I can hardly wait Mayor Scarrow till you guys go to arbitration with those firefighters. Pay pay pay that's what your new song is going to be! Mayor Scarrow AND council you should be writing resumes now for your next jobs. First line, I can mismanage your money. I can hardly wait for Jan 20 but then again Mayor Scarrow will ensure all his "friends" will be there that should seat one table with Robert C., Greg D., Les K., Dale M., Ted Z., clap clap clap. Way to go Scarrow you really did it now!

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OMG ★ 01/12/2011 01:14 PM

Mayor Jim Scarrow said the city's debt was manageable. He said there were some things that the city simply had to go into debt for, particularly water treatment.

28 million "manageable"???

is Mr Scarrow a billionaire cause in my view 28 million debt for a population of roughly 45,000 is NOT manageable.

Also have you ever noticed how most City Officials including our City Manager do not even live in the City Of PA and do not contribute to the property tax base?

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truthhurts ★ 01/12/2011 07:50 PM in reply to OMG

Just a note on the location of residence. I personally own and operate a business in the city, and pay my chunk of taxes on it. I reside in the rural surroundings as I cannot and will not reside in a city or small town for that matter-personal choice. I do however do all my shopping, repair work, etc. in the city of PA. No I;m not defending the city manager, but just pointing out that although one doesn;t directly pay tax, we may still support locally.

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PA Taxpayer ★ 01/15/2011 05:15 AM in reply to OMG

i have to tell u that city manager lives in the city but some of the admin. staff don't

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Boot ★ 01/12/2011 03:02 PM

As for the little park mentioned by JSTIGLITZ , I have driven by that little "legacy" in summer and have seen it overgrown with weeds and littered with garbage .

Garbage for garbage leadership.

Time for this city to get a young mayor who has some pride for he city as a whole rather than simply a friend of Mr Jenkins to be his puppet on a string.

Mr Scarrow enjoy your last term in office because you have no chance in h**l of ever getting re-elected again.

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OMG ★ 01/12/2011 02:40 PM

Just me or does poor ole Robert look a tad stressed out in that picture?

Thats what you get for poor management I guess and simply being a puppet to the mayor.

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NoTaxIncrease ★ 01/12/2011 01:12 PM

We're already being told by a number of groups that say we charge too much yet we're operating them at 65-70 per cent cost recovery," said Ring. "I don't know of a city out there that runs facilities at 100 per cent cost recovery and I don't know that we can afford it."

Wow guess City Council should of thought about this before commencing construction.....DUH

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truthhurts ★ 01/12/2011 07:44 PM in reply to NoTaxIncrease

Ya it may be pennies in a bucket, but why do city operated rinks have bottled water for the staff, paid for by the city? The millions being spent upgrading our water treatment is not good enough? Not only this, but the company supplying at least three of these rinks is owned by someone who lives in Manitoba! Way to help support our city!

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1 person liked this. Like ReplyReply



PA Taxpayer ★ 01/12/2011 11:01 AM

Mr. Price great job!!

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concerned ★ 01/12/2011 03:53 PM

I have seen a lot of questions on here but not one answer! maybe city council needs to log on and view what the people actually think!!! Mayor.....any response????

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Jimjoe ★ 01/13/2011 12:53 PM

5 year budget wouldn't hurt. Then we'd know at least where we will be in the next 5 years. I'm not too sure of any successful business that doesn't forecast at least a couple years in advance. Then we can forecast sustainable tax increases and buy into a system that will allieviate debt and create a healthy outlook in Prince Albert.

Like my dad always says stick to the 5 P's

Prior, Planning, Prevents, Poor, Performance

Let's clarify where we are, lay it out, and figure out a plan for success!!

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Wgibbons ★ 01/12/2011 04:24 PM

If the chamber had any guts they would have told the mayor and council on television the way it is out there. But they wont because of friends on council. We the taxpayers are fed up. Budgets not open for scrutiny, books not being available, large pay raises. More senior management positions filled by inept people. Witness the city engineer didnt know which roads were priority snow removal routes (This isnt Toronto) Director of economic developement doesn't know about a CD available for council. Its a complete joke. Come on Mr. Hicke... Where is recall legislation?

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Orelthompson ★ 01/12/2011 04:29 PM

Attention Darryl Hicke. Is there a process in this province for removing mayors and city council and if not will this be in the spring session? Are you not a taxpayer in this city? This mayor and council has to go. We simply cant afford more of what we have been put through to this date.

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Richard ★ 01/13/2011 07:50 AM in reply to Orelthompson

Mr.Thompson, is this your answer to all of the problems? How is this going to change the current situation? Your response to everything is throw the works under the bus, then what??? The debt, infrastructure repair and replacement etc... will still be front and center regardless of who is in charge, whats your solution? No solution not knee jerk reaction.

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