

Backgrounder: 2017 Calgary Election Survey

This document includes a listing of the questions posed to candidates and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation's rationale for raising the issues included in our survey:

Q1: Will you introduce a motion (or support one tabled by a colleague) to scan and post council expense receipts online? (Just as the province does for MLA expenses)

Rationale: Currently, the [City of Calgary](#) discloses some details on its website about council members' expenses: a few words to describe the expense, the amount and date. For example, in 2017 one councillor expensed something noted as "ward gift inventory ... \$301." If taxpayers wanted to know more about these gifts that were purchased, they would have to spend \$25, file a freedom of information application with the City of Calgary and wait 30 days for a response. Conversely, the provincial government actually scans and places [each MLA's expense receipts online](#). This is a much more transparent process as it allows taxpayers to view expenses for free, without having to wait for a response.

It's true that council expenses are a small fraction of the city's overall budget. However, if council members spend those funds in a carefree manner, one can surmise how they make other, more costly spending decisions at the city.

Q2: Will you protect taxpayers from additional financial risk and excessive costs by introducing a motion (or support one tabled by a colleague) to place new city employees, and council members, in a less costly pension plan? (Defined contribution)

Simply put, pension costs at the City of Calgary have exploded over the years. This is due to the risky and expensive type of pension plan enjoyed by city employees and council members. For example, the amount taxpayers had to pay for the pension plan that serves most city employees grew from \$54 million in 2007 to \$152 million in 2016; a 181% increase. The solution is to start putting new employees, and council members in a less costly pension plan – [click here](#) to learn more.

Q3: Will you vote to reduce city employee salaries by 5% (or reduce total salary expenditures by 5%) – just as many employees in Calgary's business sector received during the recession?

During the recent recession, many Calgary taxpayers lost their jobs and saw significant pay reductions. However, we have yet to see any pay reductions for city employees. It's only fair to expect city employees to feel the pinch too.

Q4: Will you introduce a motion (or support one tabled by a colleague) to cap property tax increases at inflation? (Statistics Canada's CPI for Calgary)

Property taxes and fees in Calgary have exploded over the past decade. From 2005 to 2015, property taxes alone rose by almost three times the rate of inflation. Simply put, the City of Calgary needs to get its spending problem under control. And don't be fooled by this year's "freeze." It's not a freeze. Council raised taxes, but agreed to a [one-time rebate](#) to help homeowners. Unless such a rebate is provided again next year, you'll be paying for 2017's property tax increase, plus whatever increase council decides for 2018 property tax rates. This move would help protect taxpayers from rate hikes that are above the rate of inflation. [Click here](#) to see a CTF report on Calgary's out of control tax and fee hikes.

Q5: Will you support a motion to halt spending on public art until the city's unemployment rate is below the national average?

When families struggle financially, they don't go out and spend \$500 on a new painting or expensive vase. Instead, people focus on their needs – mortgage payment, electricity bill, food, water, etc. The City of Calgary should be doing the same right now – focussing on its essential services (eg. policing, road repair), not nice-to-have items like public art. That doesn't mean Calgary wouldn't have any new public art. Calgary could do what many other cities have done and that is to [use donations and corporate sponsorship](#) to pay for public art.

Q6: Do you believe a referendum should be held prior to council approving any bids to host the 2026 Winter Olympics?

As it stands right now, there's not a very good business case behind Calgary bidding for the 2026 Olympics. Should council wish to put forward a bid for the Olympics, taxpayers should be given an opportunity to decide. See this column for more details about the cost of hosting the Olympics – [click here](#).

Q7: Do you support reviewing city services and exploring activities that could be contracted out to save taxpayers money?

Cities can often save money by hiring a private company to perform a city service rather than the city providing the service in-house. While the savings can be a good thing for taxpayers, city unions typically oppose such a move and are sometimes successful at lobbying council members to vote against hiring outside firms. This report discusses some cost saving examples – [click here](#).

Q8: Do you support spending public funds on a new arena for the Flames?

The Calgary Flames are a private business and should not expect taxpayers to pay for their facility. See this column for several examples of NHL teams that paid for their own arena – [click here](#).

Q9: Have you accepted or will you accept financial or in-kind donations from the Calgary Flames, any of the team's owners or their companies?

The Calgary Flames proposal calls for the city to provide well [over \\$200 million](#) on a new arena. If a vote were eventually held on whether or not council spends millions of taxpayers' money on a new arena, it would be a conflict of interest for council members to vote on the matter if they have received funds from beneficiaries of such a project.