

Backgrounder: 2017 Edmonton 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 Edmonton](#) discloses some details on its website about council members' expenses: a few words to describe the expense, the amount and date. For example, in 2016 one councillor expensed something noted as "Hosting - 8 Staff Meetings, Councillor & 1 Staff 207.28." If taxpayers wanted to know more about this expense, they would have to spend \$25, file a freedom of information application with the City of Edmonton 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 in a less costly pension plan? (Defined contribution)

Simply put, pension costs at the City of Edmonton have exploded over the years. This is due to the risky and expensive type of pension plan enjoyed by many city employees. For example, the amount taxpayers had to pay for the pension plan that serves most city employees grew from [\\$39 million](#) in 2007 to [\\$106 million](#) in 2016; a 172% increase. The solution is to start putting new employees, and council members in a less costly pension plan.

Q3: Will you vote to freeze or reduce city employee salaries – just as many employees in Edmonton's business sector received during the recession?

During the recent recession, many Edmonton 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 Edmonton)

This move would help protect taxpayers from property tax hikes that are above the rate of inflation.

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 Edmonton 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 Edmonton wouldn't have any new public art. Edmonton 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 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](#).

Q7: Will you proactively disclose a list of those who contributed over \$250 to your campaign (and the amount) prior to the October 16 vote?

This transparency initiative helps taxpayers understand if any special interest groups are funding a candidate's campaign.