

Big G in Conversation: Growing Pains: November 3, 2020

Transcript

Host: Wendy King

Tara Baker, City Treasurer, and General Manager of Finance

Krista Walkey, General Manager of Planning and Business Services

Jennifer Rose, General Manager of Environmental Services

Wendy King 0:00

Welcome to Big G in Conversation, the podcast from inside Guelph City Hall. Hi, I'm Wendy King. And on today's show, we're talking about growing pains, all the good and maybe some challenges that come along as the city grows. Welcome to the Big G in Conversation where we talk all things city of Guelph and budget. We're going to talk about the impacts of a growing city on a budget and the community. With me is Tara Baker, treasurer and general manager of Finance. Tara is one of our podcast regulars. So welcome back, Tara.

Tara Baker 0:38

Thanks. Good to be here again.

Wendy King 0:40

And new to the conversation is Krista Walkey, General Manager of planning and business services. And Krista, I understand you're fairly new to your role.

Krista Walkey 0:49

Yes, thank you, Wendy. I've met the city for three months now.

Wendy King 0:53

Awesome. So thanks for joining us. And rounding out our panel today, Jennifer Rose, who's the general manager of environmental services. Hi, Jennifer.

Jennifer Rose 1:01

Hi. Great to be here today.

Wendy King 1:04

Just let me point out first of all, girl power. I mean, really big roles, big departments. A lot of responsibility for you, ladies. So congrats on that for sure.

Guests 1:14

Thank you.

Wendy King 1:17

So I was looking at the city website. And I know this population now is about 135,000. And that you're bracing for a population boon over the next 30 years. So Tara, with that in mind, how do you set up the city to grow in the right way?

Tara Baker 1:36

So thanks, Wendy. I think that that that's exactly the the challenge, I think that we are trying to get across through this budget is that we are growing. And when we grow we have a lot of different planning considerations in terms of the infrastructure and the you know, the types of things we're going to have to deliver service wise to those growing populations and the new businesses in the city. And and so the city does a lot of planning for that. And and both Jennifer and Krista can talk a lot about what those planning processes look like and and then at the end of the day, how those processes lead to the costs in our budget.

Wendy King 2:28

So it sounds like a real population explosion is expected. So I guess, Krista perhaps to you, how do you start to figure out how you're going to handle all that.

Krista Walkey 2:42

Thanks, Wendy. So the the city is currently planning for its population to 2051, actually right at the moment. So we're undertaking in an Official Plan exercise combined with many master plans, such as the water master plan, the transportation master plan, the parks master plan, and all of those tied together to plan for our growth to 2051. Right now, as you said, our population is around 136,000 people, and we're planning to grow to 203,000 people by 2051. So that's approximately 60,000 people are going to be accommodating within the city of

Guelph. And we're also applying for a job increase. We're planning for 34,000 more jobs in that same time horizon. So with our master plans and our growth management work through our Official Plan, update, we are we're thinking long term and and how we accommodate the population and the growth that has been occurring historically in Guelph plus what we anticipate in the future.

Wendy King 3:37

Forgive me for my ignorance, but can somebody kind of just explain really basically, to me what the mass what a what a master plan is?

Krista Walkey 3:47

Well, master plans are they're really forward thinking documents. So they're completed regularly and updated to determine our long term capacity and the design for our growing community.

Wendy King 3:59

So you know, we always hear about growth, but then you can also hear about urban sprawl. So one is really good ones maybe not so good. So you have to have the right kind of growth. So how do you figure out that how you want it to look?

Krista Walkey 4:16

Well, in the province gives us some guidance on that as well. So 50% of our growth, so 50% of that population, we're going to accommodate within our existing built up areas. And then the other 50% is in what we call Greenfield development are those areas within the city limits that aren't developed yet. So we'll be taking 50% of that growth within the within the built up area, and the other 50% in the existing Greenfield area all within the city limits, though.

Wendy King 4:43

So looking at growth, just in general, when I think of that first you think about housing. So you got to figure out where people are going to live. When I met I imagine a mix of what kind of housing units you're going to have. Is that true?

Krista Walkey 5:00

That's that's absolutely true. So we've been undertaking an exercise recently of where we're going to grow and how tall are we going to grow? And is it in the downtown? Is it in the nodes and corridors? Or is it an existing built up areas, and it's probably a combination of all of those in order to accommodate that population, as well as our mix. I think if we've seen from, you know, the 80s, to where we are now the city has been transforming from mainly single detached dwellings to now we have more of a mix of townhouses and apartments, and how does it How does it all balance to meet those growth targets?

Wendy King 5:35

And Tara, maybe this one is for you, I just I heard Krista say something about within the city limit. So that means you're not planning, expropriation or growing outwards? Is that right?

Tara Baker 5:46

Um, so at this point, I know when we plan, we plan for what land is currently in our city limits. But what Krista had just said, had said about, like, the different types of mixes and where will the density be located? That's really where then the connection with the masterplans is really important. And Jennifer's teams right now are really like trying to look at some of those factors. Because you, you're going to need different sized pipes in different, you know, capacity for these things, depending on where the people and the density is. And so I don't know if Jennifer, want to explain a little bit about how that process works.

Jennifer Rose 6:27

Sure, I can do that. So. So my department primarily looks after water and wastewater and solid waste. So I can speak most knowledgeably about water and wastewater master planning. There's a variety of different master plans. And they're all focused on how do we support the growth that's coming? So we talked to Krista's team about what's coming? What are their plans, where's the development going to happen? How much and and we look at from a water perspective, we look at the first thing we look at is water supply. So do we have enough water supply in order to service the growth that the province has mandated for the city, and that's planned by Krista's area. So the city of Guelph is a groundwater community, as we get all of our water from the ground, we don't have the Great Lakes nearby, in order to pull water. So water supply is actually a really critical factor for growth in the city. We also look at the pipes under the ground, as Tara mentioned, so we need to look at the size of the pipes. in water, we're particularly particularly interested in fire flow, making sure the firefighters have something to put out fires

with and then wastewater side we're really looking at the size of the pipes and capacity. So can we handle all the flow that comes from the new subdivisions or, or other businesses and things like that, we have to look at it from a holistic perspective, which I think makes it really interesting because all the pipes are connected, we can't look at growth, just where it's happening. But also, where's it gonna go through in the already built parts of the city? So those are the, those are two, I can talk about other ones later on if you'd like.

Wendy King 8:09

Yeah, that's really interesting. I, you know, it's one of those things like you just think about, wow, there's going to be more people. So we're going to need more jobs, we're going to need more housing, but then there's all that stuff under the ground and stuff that we you know, you're not going to get too far without a water supply.

Jennifer Rose 8:24

That's absolutely right. And that's part of the beauty of my work is everything is hidden and underground. And people kind of forget about it until like you see a big water main break or sinkhole or something like that. But it's just it's so very interesting to look at, I guess the science behind it, because we use modeling with population numbers, to determine the size of pipe when we look at, you know how, how fast the flow of wastewater, for instance, can get to the treatment plant. We look at at the treatment plant, we look at the what's going into our river, because that's mandated by the Ministry of the Environment, conservation and parks, we got to make sure that the what we've treated that's going to the river can handle can handle it. So it's all like it's so sciency it's so very interesting. And I love talking about it.

Wendy King 9:10

It's great, because it's all connected, everything is connected, literally everything's connected, right?

Tara Baker 9:16

Yeah. And then if you think about kind of taking off from where Jennifer is, is then once they identify those needs, how big the pipes need to be and and how about the capacity of the plant? And do we need to expand the the treatment plant and you know, some of those those conversations Do we need a new groundwater well, and then, you know, that completely translates into our budget and the long term

planning for how we're going to pay for those pretty significant investments in infrastructure. And so that's really where that comprehensive budget pulls all of those pieces together, because there's all the services that we provide are impacted by this growth. that's occurring.

Wendy King 10:01

Jennifer?

Jennifer Rose 10:02

If I could just add to that, I think a really important point too, is it's not it's not just the infrastructure that needs to go in the ground, the capital. But what goes for capital projects, it's the operating costs behind those that people sometimes forget about, we need to continue to operate, maintain the pipes and the treatment plants and the and you know, the wonderful water towers that we see the hydrants, everything we need to maintain them. And people often forget about that side of the coin with respect to the budget. And I think we do that very well here in Guelph, by having a forecast for our operating through our multi year budgeting that we're starting.

Wendy King 10:38

Right. So okay, so we've sort of covered that a little bit, I want to hit lots of different topics, if we can, and then we can always go back, but Okay, so then we're going to have more people, therefore new jobs. What are you planning for? How do you know what new jobs you're gonna be able to have for people?

Krista Walkey 11:01

Wendy, I think we, you know, I think we're taking a little bit of an approach right now, and thinking a bit long term, I think COVID has made us rethink perhaps traditional planning and how we accommodate for the changing world, and what a pandemic might could be, but just, you know, to have options, so we're really looking at being resilient to our design, and, you know, healthy and sustainable as well, but trying to make sure that we plan for flexibility and mixed use and in a variety of opportunities through the planning process. So we are really looking long term at the changing world and how you know, jobs and typical jobs have changed over time, and what we can do to to kind of be prepared for that and be forward looking.

Wendy King 11:42

I wanted to ask that too, because obviously, COVID is impacting everything, and everyone. So as you were saying, We don't even really know what our jobs are gonna look like. I mean, look, we're all sitting here in our homes. Right? We're not at our office at the moment. So how do you plan for something which you really don't know, is coming?

Krista Walkey 12:05

No. And so we've had lots of talks around the table about that. And certainly even on the master plan work, you know, how do we design to be that resilient community that can be prepared for for whatever kind of comes our way and it's looking at it from our transportation master plan, and making sure we have walkable and complete communities that have jobs plus residential plus commercial? So that's kind of the path we're on right now is, is being that vibrant, urban community that we are, but having that resiliency lens as well.

Wendy King 12:36

And just in general, how do you pay for growth? Does growth pay for itself? Or where do you get the money to even expand these things?

Tara Baker 12:46

So I can start here, we have a lot of different revenues in the city that kind of come together to pay for growth. So we talked a little bit on the capital side, Jennifer was talking about the the capital infrastructure there, we have what's called an Ontario Development Charges. And these are fees that are levied on new development and redevelopment to pay for that expanded population and the expected capital costs on on certain projects, the really legislative process and an open and transparent process to set those fees. And we do that every five years, legislations change, we have some changes coming as a new charge called the community benefit charge, that's going to add a little more flexibility into the types of costs that we can include in that growth calculation. So that is something over the next two years that staff will be working on. But we know that that capital, revenue doesn't fully pay for the cost of growth. And that's when we start to look at the other sources of revenue. And as there's new, new properties and new businesses, that also means new property tax revenue, and it also means growing rate revenue. And those operating revenue increases are then matched to the new operating costs, for the most part is is really that matching principle that we're trying to get to keep hole. There's also other revenues in the city to like in Krista's area, we do have development application fees, and there's building permit fees. And those are really cost recovery

mechanism for growth related costs as well. And so we're kind of looking at all of those sources of revenue and matching those to the costs over over that forecast period.

Wendy King 14:57

So I know you have a lot of major projects Next on the go, we've talked in other podcasts about the new library and, and you're going to probably be doing a lot with transit, etc. So, um, could you talk about some of the major projects that are related to growth?

Tara Baker 15:16

So I can start, you did mention, the big one that was just approved with was our south end recreation center. So that is a recreation facility in our south end that is essentially 100% related to the growth down in that area of the city. It's really for the entire city, but because of of the Clare mobian, and the development that's happened in that area, that the need was identified to have recreation facilities. And in that area. We've also like you mentioned, part of the library and Baker district is absolutely related to the growth that's expected in the downtown. Beyond that, there's I don't know if Jennifer, if you've got specific examples for some of the infrastructure and water wastewater side?

Jennifer Rose 16:11

I don't from a big project perspective, because it really is, like pipe based, it's kind of, you know, where do we need the pipes? Where do we need the hydrants? Where do we need the maintenance holes? Where do we need water tower storage facilities? Where do we need some new wells? So we're doing, we're doing work right now on our water supply master plan, looking for new sources of water for the city, on doing that kind of work, but it's not as big as like a community center or a library. But it's, it's still very essential work.

Tara Baker 16:42

I think that the other major I project that is kind of over the longer term, but it's in our transit system, we do have some targets to you know, enhance or enhance the modal split and get get out of your car and more into the public transit system. And so through the forecast, there's there's a lot of investment in in transit at this point. And that's really growth related as well or partially growth related.

Wendy King 17:15

Krista, did you want to jump in there?

Krista Walkey 17:17

Yeah. And I think Tara quickly mentioned the Claire molefi on neighborhood. And so that is one of the Greenfield areas of the south end of Guelph that is being planned out to serve our population for the long term. So that'll obviously have a lot of capital and budget implications and cost going forward and help serve and provide usage for the residents of the south end rec center. And the Claremont B neighborhood, when we're talking about trying to accommodate that 60,000 people that's going to accommodate about 16,000 people just kind of in that one community, which isn't anticipated to come forward probably around the 2025 mark. So that's one of the longer term growth scenarios as well.

Wendy King 17:58

This is, you know, one of those questions, it's just kind of how do you even answer it, but it's all growth good?How do we view that?

Tara Baker 18:10

I feel like that's a bit of a maybe a Krista question.

Krista Walkey 18:16

You know, I'll jump in and I think having a positive growth rate is is really good. You know, we've certainly, you know, from my, my place, I've seen cities and municipalities that have a negative growth rate and what that negative growth has the implications on a municipality, as far as still providing that level of service but having a negative growth rate is isn't is an impact. So having a positive growth rate is is excellent. And you know, it allows us to do things in Guelph that other municipalities that maybe aren't growing don't have the same opportunities for.

Wendy King 18:49

And Jennifer How do you see it?

Jennifer Rose 18:51

I totally agree I think growth brings a vibrancy to the city that's that's needed the people who who are living here love having the amenities that we have here in Guelph and that's that's due to growth so I totally agree with everything that Krista just said.

Wendy King 19:08

Yeah, no, I was just gonna say it sounds like it really an exciting we need some good news and and all this it you know, it sounds really exciting and it's a it's a good time to live and work in Guelph, obviously. Thank you to my guests today, Tara, Krista and Jennifer, for explaining the challenges of growth and for now and into the future. And I think Guelph is in good hands. Ladies. Thank you so much.

I'm Wendy King and this has been Big G in Conversations.

I'm Wendy King with the city of Guelph Big G in Conversation podcast. Thanks for joining me. If you have ideas for a show or comments, you can email, BigGpodcast@guelph.ca. Until next time, take care and let's keep the conversation going.

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