

URBAN POLICY TRENDS

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WHERE SHOULD THE CITY OF CALGARY SPEND ITS MONEY?

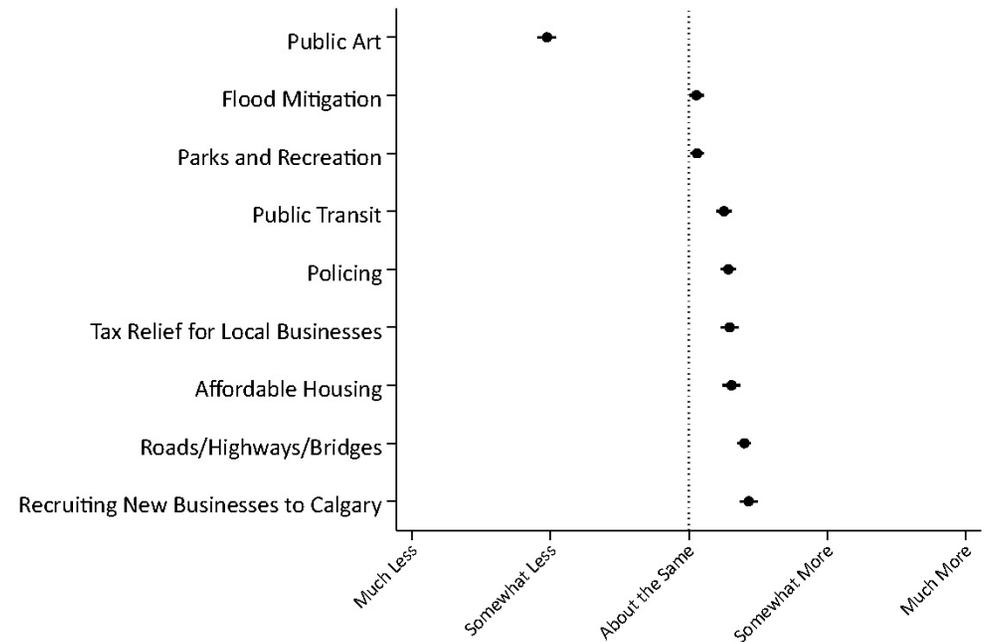
By Jack Lucas

The day after Calgarians voted to end the city's bid for the 2026 Olympic Games, city council quietly began work on a much larger project, one whose price tag – \$19 billion – dwarfed the cost of the Olympic games several times over. Unlike the Olympics, this project was not widely reported in the national newspapers, and there were no televised debates at the new Central Library. What was this enormous project? The city's four-year budget.

“Restrained and constrained” – that's how City Manager Jeff Fielding described the budget environment facing City Council as they made plans for the next four years. Even at the best of times, cities must make hard choices among competing budget priorities. But when revenues are tight, as they have been in Calgary for several years, the trade-offs loom even larger.

So where do Calgarians think the money should go? To answer this question, The School of Public Policy partnered with the Canadian Municipal Election Study to ask 2,001 Calgarians about their municipal spending priorities. The survey was carried out by Forum Research between November 14 and December 13, 2018. Our results are weighted by gender and age.¹

We didn't try to ask Calgarians about every possible area of municipal spending. Instead, we chose nine policy areas – listed in the figure – to capture a wide range of municipal policy areas, including arts and culture (public art), social policy (affordable housing), infrastructure (flood mitigation, roads and bridges), and economic development



(new business recruitment). For each policy area, we asked Calgarians how much the city should spend: much less, somewhat less, the same as now, somewhat more, or much more.

Figure 1 reports the results of these questions: each black circle marks the average response, and the lines on either side of the circle are 95% confidence intervals.

On average, Calgarians are hoping for modest spending increases in most policy areas, with most respondents choosing either “about the same” or “somewhat more” spending in areas from public transit to new business recruitment. In the areas of parks and recreation and flood mitigation, Calgarians are more content to maintain current spending rates. In just one area – public art – are Calgarians clearly keen to reduce spending. These results suggest an atmosphere of general fiscal caution among Calgarians – and indicate an especially challenging climate for advocates of public art in Calgary.

¹ For technical information including margins of error, weighted and unweighted analysis, technical documentation, data, and replication files, please visit <https://dataverse.scholarsportal.info/dataverse/jacklucas>