



DRAFT round table topic area descriptions

These are in draft form because we know there will be lots of opinions on how we've described these areas. That's fantastic. They will live on the web so we can continue to make them better and more reflective of our work. These descriptions aren't the whole story – they are conversation starters designed to give a good, if not complete, understanding of each area.

Contact roundtables@guelph.ca if you have suggestions or catch any mistakes. We won't be able to include everything and still keep them relatively short, but we'll try.

Here are the round table topics. They aren't listed by priority; it's just the order that we wrote them.

Policy
Administration
Program and Project Management
Budget
Open Government

Our People
Communication
Technology
Citizen First – Customer Service
Asset Management
Intergovernmental Advocacy

1. Policy

There are countless policies created by City employees. These policies guide our actions, the way we work and they profoundly affect the lives of our residents. Most policies are formal and have been documented and approved by management or City Council. Some policies are informal and based on historic working practices that have not been formally adopted. Some policies guide big things, like how the City will attract businesses to Guelph and some policies guide smaller things like how people are expected to behave in a City pool. We are also affected by policies made by federal and provincial governments and other public services, such as the police.

Policies are brought to life by creating procedures, guidelines, rules, regulations, by-laws, strategies and processes.

There are so many policies that it can be confusing to know which ones to apply to our work, understand how they are created, and whether policies are successful in achieving their goals. How can we make the process of developing, managing, applying and reviewing policy more consistent and transparent to City employees and our community?

Visioning Question

If we were completely successful in this round table process, solved the issues and capitalized on the opportunities, what would our policy process look like at the City of Guelph?

2. Administration

Administration is about how we run the City, make sure things get done, and that plans and decisions are put into action. Administration is the way we organize how we work and provides the tools, resources, processes and systems to do it. Council recruits the CAO (Chief Administrative Officer) who is responsible for making sure that the City has an effective administration.

All departments at the City have administrative work to do. Administration might be processing a charity's application to host a major event in Riverside Park, or it could be filling out and submitting a timesheet to human resources.

The City has to balance and meet the needs of lots of different people. As a result, our administration must have standards, be consistently applied, clear and fair. It is also affected by the rules and regulations imposed by other levels of government.

Processes are series of actions and decisions that can be repeated over and over again. Business systems should make it easier for processes to run well. The City needs processes and systems that make work easier. Sometimes when processes and regulations take precedence over the needs of employees and the community, the system gets in the way. When this happens residents and employees get frustrated with all the 'red tape'.

Residents want to access services quickly and easily. Employees want to deliver services quickly and easily. We all want the same thing. So why is it so hard sometimes?

Visioning question

If we were completely successful in this round table process, solved the issues and capitalized on the opportunities, how would we better manage our administrative processes and needs at the City of Guelph?

3. Program and project management

Programs and projects are in addition to normal day-to-day operations and have a definite start and end. They are designed to achieve a one-off or specific purpose. To be successful, they need managers and teams who can stay focused on the end goal, keep on target, on time and on budget.

Projects have a defined scope and resources. Because the work isn't routine, project teams often include employees from across the organization who might not usually work together. Examples of projects include software development for an improved business process, the construction of a building or bridge or the relief effort after a natural disaster.

Program management includes managing multiple, related projects at the same time and ensuring that we have the resources needed to meet set targets.

Without clear objectives and supporting tools, teams, projects and programs can stall, go sideways or right off the rails. It can be difficult to track progress or understand where things went wrong or why a project didn't meet its objectives.

Almost every department, division and crew at the City works on projects and programs in one way or another. It's important to manage our projects and programs consistently across the organization so everyone knows what's going on, and we can manage the impact of all these projects on the City's limited resources.

So how can the City better manage all these projects? What resources do we need to perform at full throttle? How can we make sure that everyone knows what's going on and is clear about the part they play? How can we communicate better about projects, their progress and their intended goals?

Visioning Question

If we were completely successful in this round table process, solved the issues and capitalized on the opportunities, how would programs and projects be managed at the City of Guelph?

4. Budget

Everything we do has a cost. The money we spend comes from just a few sources including: property taxes, service charges, developer charges, facility revenue, fines, programs and other levels of government. We spend that money through four budgets: capital; tax-supported operating; non-tax-supported operating and capital; and local boards and shared services.

Employees across the organization work hard to determine what the City needs to spend its money on and the budgets needed to make everything work. Senior leadership weigh priorities and financial realities to propose a final balanced budget to City Council.

Councillors consider what they've heard from the community, make changes and approve the budget.

It's a long process because there is a lot at stake. Our budget is a reflection of our direction, our strategies and our vision. It's how we intend to meet the needs of a growing and changing Guelph. It's complex and time intensive. It's a perpetual cycle and balancing act.

How could we improve the process – make it easier for residents to get involved and help decide what gets funded and how? How can we make such a complicated process easy to navigate, understand and explain? How do we connect budget and strategic planning? How do we fund the things that need doing now while making sure there is enough in the pot for the future?

Visioning Question

If we were completely successful in this round table process, solved the issues and capitalized on the opportunities, how would the budget process work at the City of Guelph?

5. Open government

Open government isn't just a nifty catch phrase, it's not purely academic and it's not mysterious. It's about working with the people not at them.

On the one hand, it's about public servants being open with citizens about our work, our processes and our results. On the other, it's an invitation to the community – our citizens, business leaders and stakeholders – to get involved in our priority setting and decision making. Open Government is about providing opportunities for our community to use our assets, data and services to their advantage. It's about transparency and accountability. And it's about allowing citizens to shape the future of our city in partnership with each other and their local government.

When we work together, we can harness the skills, experience and talent of the community.

We can speed things up, make sense of all our data and simplify service delivery by using existing and emerging technology to solve problems. We can take the mystery out of the bureaucracy and get things right the first time.

Sounds good, right? But it's big. How do we get there? What do our people need to get there? How do we balance privacy with transparency? How do we shift our culture? How do we encourage, reward and make time for innovation? How do we embrace and learn from failure instead of hiding from it? How do we engage our neighbours, our media, our institutions and businesses in helping open our government?

Visioning Question

If we were completely successful in this round table process, solved the issues and capitalized on the opportunities, what would open government look like at the City of Guelph?

6. Our People

Our people are our employees, elected officials and volunteers. Our people are our greatest asset. We want to make sure they have the support they need to continue doing remarkable work for our community. They want to be recognized for their contributions, trained to be even better and compensated for their work.

Our people are diverse and they are leaders with great ideas. Diversity is about acknowledging and recognizing that no two people experience the world in the same fashion; we are all unique. There are small and big ways we can recognize, accommodate and celebrate that diversity.

We need to shift our thinking to enable people to use their skills, grow in our organization, communicate with each other and be well. We need to consider our people practices, our unions, our recruitment strategies and our organizational structure.

After two engagement surveys in 2012 and 2014 we continue to have relatively low levels of employee engagement. And after a recent restructuring we'll have to work even harder to build a sense of community among and across our teams.

What are the best tools at hand to nurture our culture, encourage collaboration and open government principles? How can we recognize accomplishments and support our employees through their mistakes? Is our workforce reflective of our community? Do we have gaps in skills or diversity?

Visioning Question

If we were completely successful in this round table process, solved the issues and capitalized on the opportunities, how would our people be supported and celebrated at the City of Guelph?

7. Communication

Everyone communicates all of the time. At the City we consider internal, stakeholder, crisis, media and marketing communications through work by a centralized communications group and peers in various departments.

How we motivate and inspire, defuse and rebuild, empathize and inform should be consistent. Communications should also be habitually included in planning across the City. When communication efforts fall short, people don't understand the "why" behind our decisions and policy, they don't know about service changes, miss deadlines, are surprised by construction delays and on and on. Public frustration and a lack of trust and confidence in their government follow that path.

When communication is seamless, the public are engaged and well informed. They may not agree with every decision, but they can appreciate how we got there. And they can navigate our services and their city with ease.

We have a lot of spokespeople available depending on the situation and subject matter. We have three new service areas and are committed to regular face-to-face communications.

We're in a small media market with an intense level of media scrutiny. We're also nervous about making mistakes in the public realm, but we want to continually test new ideas and do our best for our citizens.

What do our employees, from front-line ambassadors to senior leaders, need in order to share information with the right people, in the most effective way and at the right time? Are there new ways to use technology to our advantage? How do we decide when to communicate and on what issues?

Visioning Question

If we were completely successful in this round table process, solved the issues and capitalized on the opportunities, how would the City of Guelph communicate with its citizens, businesses and stakeholders?

8. Technology

Technology and innovation are understandably closely linked. It is important, however, to see technology as a means to an end rather than the solution for all our problems. We first need to understand what the problem is – what issue are we trying to solve for our employees, citizens and businesses. When we know that answer, technology can be remarkably useful as a way to improve processes, provide direct access, create once and share widely.

Successful organizations, private, non-profit and public sector alike, are similar in their flexibility, their ability to recognize changing expectations and match them with emerging technologies to create problem-solving solutions.

That level of flexibility requires expertise, resources and an organization-wide strategy that can manage everything from the boring and mundane to the “we’ve never thought that would be possible”.

What do we need to do as an organization to better integrate and think system-wide rather than silo deep? What training do employees need to understand how processes can be simplified with the technology already at hand? How do we respect what technology can bring without becoming overly reliant on or reactive to the next big thing?

Visioning Question

If we were completely successful in this round table process, solved the issues and capitalized on the opportunities, how would technology be leveraged, shared, resourced and managed at the City of Guelph?

9. Citizen-first and customer service

Our citizens are the start, the middle and the end of why governments exist. Citizens are people who live in Guelph or own a business here, regardless of their legal status in Canada. Our citizens are remarkably diverse and some are new to Guelph and Canada. Citizenship, however, goes past these things – it implies a deeper relationship with community and government. Citizens contribute beyond their own self-interest and support their neighbours and community.

That level of commitment must be matched and met by government. It's in our own self-interest to include citizens in our priority setting and decision making. We end up with better relationships and better policies that are more readily followed. And we're much more likely to get it right the first time than if we worked in isolation.

Our relationship between local governments and their communities has shifted. Citizen expectations continue to change and increase. They use social media to gain direct access to decision makers. They are clear about their needs, they are savvy and they are also willing to roll up their sleeves to help make things better.

Municipal governments are being challenged to deliver customer service as one seamless and consistent experience with an "any counter, any service" approach. That level of customer service has implications that cut across all service areas, departments and divisions as well as across all platforms including websites, social media, email, phone and in-person conversations.

How much do we know about our citizens? How do we learn what they really need and set meaningful standards to ensure their needs are met each and every time? How do we appreciate the vocal minority and still understand the broader consensus? How do we measure "citizen-first" – how will we know when we get there?

Visioning Question

If we were completely successful in this round table process, solved the issues and capitalized on the opportunities, how would citizens be invited, involved, engaged and served by the City of Guelph?

10.Asset Management

Assets are things of value to the City. Asset management is how the City makes sure it has effective physical assets that are safe, well maintained, meet regulatory requirements and are fit for purpose.

What are some examples of physical assets?

- Public buildings like recreation centres and City Hall
- Equipment like loader tractors, bobcats or snow plows
- Public infrastructure like sewer pipes or transit
- Office and IT equipment like laptops, PCs and printers

Asset management is a complex business, carrying out a mixture of planned and unplanned work and managing the assets we already own and planning for the new ones.

Think about all the assets you come in to contact with in the City. Each asset has to be logged, tracked, properly maintained and repaired as needed. This work carries a lot of risk and things have to work and be safe. The logistics of planning and carrying out this work is complex, and ensuring that sufficient budget is available to fund the work is critical. Just treading water by maintaining the existing infrastructure is a significant challenge even without factoring all the things that go wrong when things get old. You may have heard the phrase “aging infrastructure” and this is what the City is facing.

The City also has to be agile enough to respond to unexpected needs and emergencies, ensuring that there are funds available when it matters most.

To add further complexity, the City constantly has to plan for the future and the expanding needs of the community. Often there is a gap between the things that need to happen and the money available and this is called “the infrastructure gap”.

This hive of activity requires many different parties to work together. It requires the City and other layers of government to work in concert. More often, others in the community such as the not-for-profit sector and business leaders are being invited to work with the City to find ways of ensuring that Guelph has the assets and amenities it needs to be the best it can with limited resources.

How are we going to successfully bridge the infrastructure gap? Do we have the systems and processes in place to manage our complex mix of assets?

Visioning Question

If we were completely successful in this round table process, solved the issues and capitalized on the opportunities, how would the City manage its assets?

11. Intergovernmental Advocacy

To build a city the municipality and other levels of government have to work together efficiently and effectively to get things done and plan for the future. Each level of government has its own powers and responsibilities. There are very few areas of municipal work that provincial or federal governments don't impact or play a role in. We all have to collaborate, otherwise it can be difficult, if not impossible sometimes, to achieve our community's goals.

A number of things are needed to ensure that the City is positioned to work effectively with other levels of government and able to access the funding and support required to continue building a great city. The City has to work with the local community to create a clear vision for Guelph and to identify the most important priorities for action, local improvement and growth. Other levels of government can only do so much, and it's important to be clear about the most important things to focus on.

It is also important to develop the right networks and build positive relationships with other levels of government so that opportunities for championing and promoting local priorities are created and seized. Our citizens aren't interested in what level of government is responsible for what service. So when responsibilities overlap, we have to work with our government counterparts to make service delivery as seamless and connected as possible.

It is also important for the City to be leading the way with new solutions to difficult issues and letting others in government see that our plans for the future are achievable and worth getting behind.

Some of the topics the City currently advocates on are regional transportation including Two-Way GO, infrastructure, jobs and the economy.

Without effective intergovernmental advocacy and all levels of government working together, it can be difficult, and in some cases impossible, to achieve our goals.

Are we working effectively with our partners at the provincial and federal levels? Are there opportunities for collaboration we haven't yet pursued?

Visioning Question

If we were completely successful in this round table process, solved the issues and capitalized on the opportunities, what kind of relationship would the City have with other levels of government?