

## COUNCIL MEMBERS QUESTION PRICEY BUDGET CONFAB

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FIRST POSTED: TUESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2012 06:44 PM MST | UPDATED: TUESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2012 06:54 PM MST



Some council members are expressing doubts whether city cash spent on budget consultations have been valuable.

The city spent \$900,000 on public consultations dubbed “Our City. Our Budget. Our Future” leading up to setting Calgary’s financial plan for the next three years.

Consultants were paid \$800,000, while the rest was spent on marketing.

Mayor Naheed Nenshi, who was pleased with data gathered from the talks, told a council committee Tuesday he’s not convinced the consultants hired to help the city in the process provided great value for what the city paid them.

“At the beginning I thought they’d be creating the content and so on,” Nenshi told bureaucrats.

“It sounds like it’s your team that created the content and the City of Calgary IT (department) that created the online tool.”

Whitney Smithers, who was heavily involved in the project, told Nenshi the consultants designed and implemented the program and produced the summary report.

"We provided some of the content in terms of what the city does for services, we provided the content that populated the budget allocator, but it was their work in terms of the design and implementation of the program."

Smithers pointed out that the process built a good relationship between the city and citizens, which could be a foundation for future consultations.

But Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart said a similar consultation wouldn't be necessary.

"What did come out of it are some high level, general themes about things, such as people like policing and more fire protection and so on," she said.

"To me, where we have to do a better job is on the issues that matter to the day-to-day lives of Calgarians."

Colley-Urquhart said the city spent a lot of money to hold open houses that attracted only a handful of people.

"It was a lot of money to pay to talk to each other," she said.

It's not immediately clear whether the city will conduct a similar consultation for the next three-year budget cycle.

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