

# City eyes council ward allowance hike



By: [Joyanne Pursaga](#) Posted: 6:21 PM CDT Wednesday, Jul. 14, 2021

A call to significantly boost councillors' ward allowances will be considered during the City of Winnipeg's 2022 budget process.

The executive policy committee cast a final 6-1 vote Wednesday to explore if each councillor's existing \$84,924 annual office fund should increase by \$45,000.

Coun. Janice Lukes (Waverley West) said the current rate is far too low, which makes it very difficult to retain executive assistants — staff who engage with the residents of each ward on a daily basis.

"It is so costly to get staff, to train them, to invest in them and then lose them. We have over a 50 per cent turnover rate (in the last three years)," said Lukes.

She said such turnover hinders a councillor's ability to promptly respond to citizen requests and complaints.

A city staff report notes Winnipeg councillors receive \$1.66 per capita, based on the average number of residents per ward, to cover everything from executive assistants to office supplies. The report says Ottawa, Toronto and Calgary city councillors all receive higher per capita rates, as do Manitoba MLAs.

"We've got the lowest funding for office... (and) every city in Canada offers their staff a pension and we're the only one that doesn't," said Lukes.

The motion also calls for council to fund benefits and pensions for assistants, as well as provide more communications support to councillors.

Mayor Brian Bowman cast the sole vote against the change Wednesday.

Bowman told media he doesn't believe increasing ward allowances is a key priority for taxpayers while the local economy struggles with deep COVID-19 pandemic losses.

"Right now, I don't believe this should be the priority for city council. I think we're in the middle of a pandemic, there are many other needs in our community, for businesses and not for profits. That's my priority and my focus," he said.

Overall, the mayor said it also appears councillors have been able to attract hard-working staff to serve Winnipeggers within existing budgets.

However, Lukes said COVID-19 has increased the need to raise the allowance to ensure councillors can promptly address the needs of those suffering due to the pandemic.

"If ever there was a time to improve service delivery for responses, it's now."

The ward allowance level has proven controversial in the past.

Council raised it by \$40,000 in 2013, citing similar concerns. That increase arrived as the city cut non-profit grants and raised taxes, which sparked public backlash.

Council then cut the number by \$37,000 in 2014, though annual inflationary increases have increased it since.

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Born and raised in Winnipeg, Joyanne loves to tell the stories of this city, especially when politics is involved. Joyanne became the city hall reporter for the Winnipeg Free Press in early 2020.