

Citizen Control of the Citizen's Business

TORONTO'S CITIZENS CAN CONTROL TORONTO'S AFFAIRS ONLY THROUGH FREQUENT, PROMPT, ACCURATE AND PERTINENT INFORMATION WITH REGARD TO TORONTO'S BUSINESS.

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THE CITY BUDGET ESTIMATES

Cutting According to Plan

versus

Slashing at Random

A Parallel

Did you ever attend a dinner of ten courses?

THE APPETIZER looked good and you drank it.

THE RELISH looked good and you relished it.

THE SOUP looked good and you absorbed it.

THE FISH looked good and you finished it.

THE ENTREE looked good and you disposed of it.

THE SALAD looked good and you sampled it.

THE DESSERT looked good and you stayed with it.

THE COFFEE looked good and you found you needed it.

THE NUTS looked good and seemed to fit your mood.

THE SMOKES looked good and they allayed your distress.

Then you paid the bill.

If you had realized what was coming, from the start, you would have done a more scientific job and felt better when you got through. A realization of this has put the long-distance dinner out of business. The wise man first gauges his capacity, then studies his menu carefully before making his choice, and stops before all the slack is taken up.

This is not so, however, at the annual civic budget festival. The estimates come on single file. The first comers fare pretty well. Then follow, in easy and variable stages, mild approval, bored tolerance, mild disapproval, dyspeptic rage, regurgitation and reconsideration of previous courses, somnolence.

Then the citizens pay the bills.

What is a Commissioner of Finance For?

Among other things:

To determine the financial capacity of the community.

To compile and submit to the Board of Control and City Council—with recommendations and supporting data—the annual budget estimates of the city.

To advise the Board of Control and City Council how best to fit the budget requirements to the financial capacity of the city.

The work of a Commissioner of Finance is not simply to find money.

A Commissioner of Finance cannot discharge these functions unless he receives explicit directions and authority to do so and unless, in actual practice, he receives at all stages the active moral support of the elected representatives of the citizens and of the citizens themselves.

Outline of Suggested Stages in Preparing and Passing the Estimates, to Replace the Present Procedure

1. Department heads send departmental estimates of capital and current expenditure for the ensuing year, on September 15th of each year, to the Commissioner of Finance.
2. The Commissioner of Finance, after compiling these estimates, transmits them in printed form, as draft estimates, to the Board of Control with supporting documents and general recommendations, prepared in conference with department heads. (October 15th.)
3. Board of Control revises these estimates and presents them to the Council as tentative budget estimates, embodying the Board's suggestions as to the ensuing year's financial programme. (November 15th.)
4. The Council considers the tentative estimates, holds budget hearings of citizens and passes the tentative estimates, with whatever changes it thinks desirable, subject to the action of the Council of the ensuing year. (December 15th.)
5. The Mayor, Board of Control and Council for the ensuing year are elected. (January 1st.)
6. The new Board of Control considers the tentative budget estimates and forwards them to Council with recommendations. (January 30th.)
7. The new Council considers the tentative budget estimates, passes the budget and strikes the tax-rate. (February 15th.)

(Note.—A change in the date of election day would, of course, modify the suggested schedule.)

What Advantages Would Such a Method Secure?

1. The city's policy would be determined by the city's needs and resources, not by the needs or lack of resources of any local special interests.
2. Budget discussions would turn on impersonal facts, not on biased personal theories.
3. Elections would tend to turn on policies for making cities better places in which to live, and not on personalities.
4. More people would know what they were paying taxes for through a regular avenue for budget-making co-operation.
5. The small taxpayer would be put on a more equal footing with the large taxpayer, who can, if necessary, afford to pay for whatever information he may require.
6. The whole city's programme would come to be settled by the whole city.
7. The citizens would more cheerfully bear the burden of government.

It has been said that it would be dangerous to give citizens an opportunity to discuss the estimates before election, as the ward system, now in vogue, would bring sectional interests into violent play and lead to an orgy of extravagance. This is an argument not against citizen participation in their own affairs, but against the ward system which, even under present conditions, is an enemy to economy and efficiency. In any event, this much is certain, that the draft estimates, with the recommendations of the Commissioner of Finance, should be ready in printed form for the incoming Board of Control and Council at their first meetings.