



Gearing up for growth

Recommendations for the City of Calgary to support the continued recovery and resilience of businesses

One Calgary 2023-2026 Service Plans and Budgets



Gearing up for growth

The City of Calgary's (City's) 2023-2026 Service Plans and Budgets, One Calgary 2023-2026, set to be released in Fall 2022, will be pivotal to Calgary's sustained economic recovery and long-term resilience. Municipal Service Plans and Budgets have a profound impact on the business community, developing a strategy and allocating spending to ensure our city thrives.

One Calgary 2023-2026 presents an important opportunity for the municipal government to be the gear that spurs action and alignment among businesses and Calgarians, developing a shared vision and action plan for Calgary's future. Building a vibrant and prosperous Calgary requires collaboration, meaningful consultation, and the development of thoughtful policy solutions to address shared issues. As convenors and catalysts for business, the Calgary Chamber has worked alongside our members to provide an opportunity for businesses to voice concerns and priorities directly with City Council and Administration.

Our lens

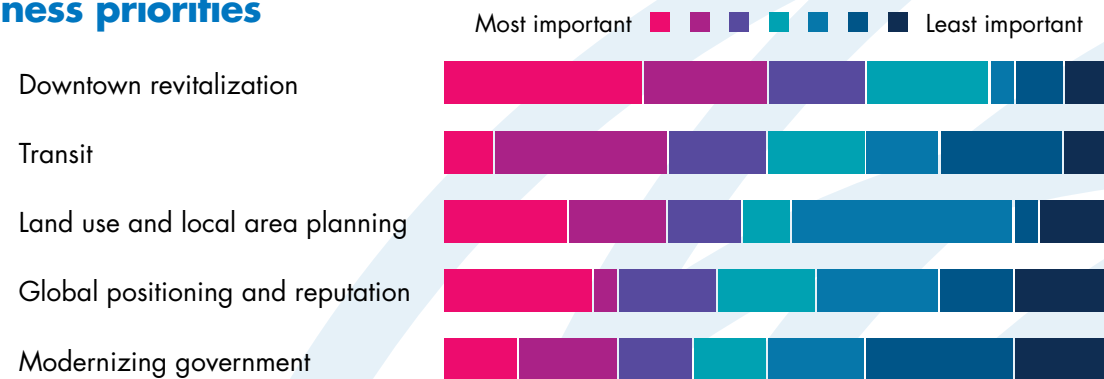
At the Chamber, we believe public policy is far-reaching in both influence and impact. Therefore, all policy should:

1. Facilitate investment and economic growth and provide certainty and stability for businesses.
2. Encourage and enable collaboration among all orders of government and leverage tools to realize the full potential for economic growth.
3. Encourage and enable collaboration among all orders of government and leverage tools to realize the full potential for economic growth.

What we heard

To inform the Calgary Chamber's recommendations, we surveyed businesses through a Business Pulse Check Survey in May 2022, asking businesses to rank the City's priorities from most important to least important to their business. The top five responses are included below and reflected throughout the recommendations included in this submission.

Top business priorities



Developing the City's next four-year plan is a key opportunity to put Calgary into sixth gear, accelerating our growth and positioning us to thrive today and tomorrow.

Through a survey of the business community, several roundtables, and secondary research, the Calgary Chamber heard businesses' concerns, the City's plans, and our shared priorities for One Calgary 2023-2026. From these conversations, four critical priorities emerged. With input from our business community, we've crafted policy recommendations that outline a guide to help achieve our shared goal: a vibrant, inclusive, and prosperous Calgary.



One Calgary 2023-2026 recommended priorities

Based on consultation with the Calgary business community, four priorities emerged as critical to Calgary's continued recovery and resilience:

- 1. Develop Calgary's narrative nationally and internationally**
- 2. Attract, retain, and invest in talent**
- 3. Build a safe and secure Calgary**
- 4. Reduce barriers and costs of doing business**

The importance of partnerships

For One Calgary 2023-2026 to be successful, it must be informed – and executed – in partnership with key organizations. We envision One Calgary 2023-2026 as the gear that helps spur action among businesses, post-secondary, and civil society organizations that are ultimately responsible for the success of our city.

In Calgary, our unity is our strength. By working together, we can harness the economic potential, strategic investments, and passion of all organizations working to improve Calgary, ensuring we are interconnected, aligned, and making progress.





Priority 1:

Develop Calgary's narrative nationally and internationally

Our vision

We envision Calgary's story is shared around the world, attracting talent and businesses that aspire to invest in a city where the future is bright and the possibilities for growth and prosperity are the best in the world because of the economic opportunities and quality of life.

Context

For Calgary to succeed, the City, businesses, and Calgarians must work together collectively to develop and amplify a new narrative that reflects our diversity, informed by our history and cognizant of our future. This narrative must accurately depict the Calgary of today: we are inclusive, optimistic, opportunity-ready, and future-focused.

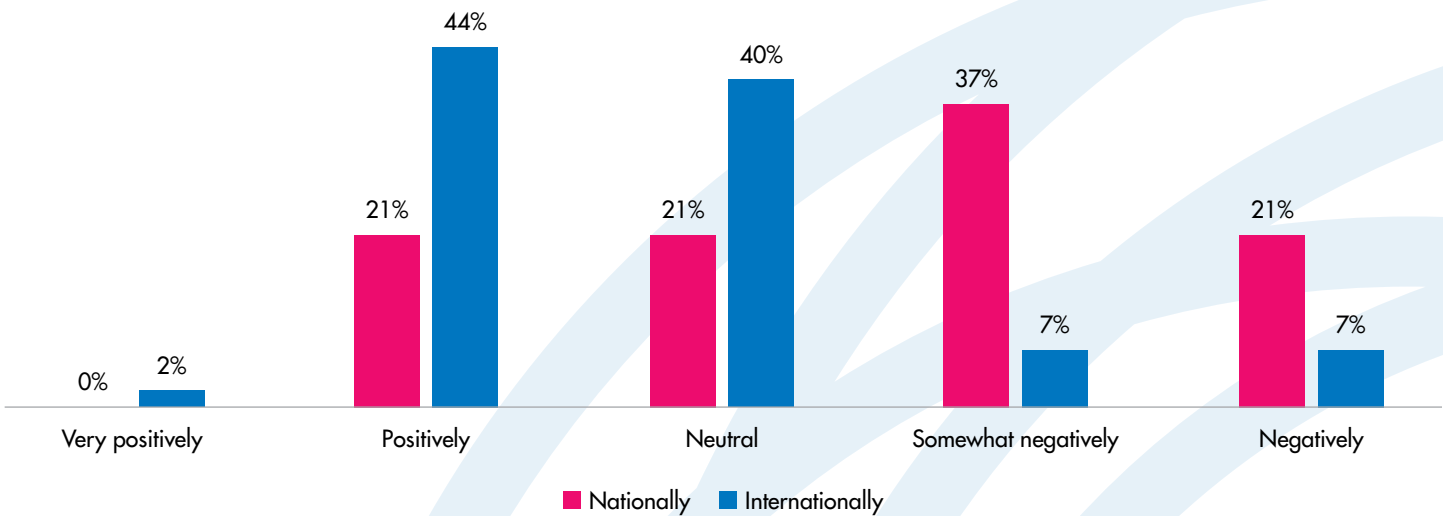
Our identity is clear. Calgary is diverse both socially and economically. Calgary is the third most diverse major city in Canada, with 54 per cent of newcomers to the city arriving from outside the country.¹ Economically, Calgary has the highest concentration of head officers per capita in Canada,² led the province in Q2 2022 venture capital investment (\$433 million),³ and ranks as a top 20 fintech hub globally.⁴ The energy sector remains the largest investor in clean technologies in Canada. Now we need to share and amplify our identity to align our reality with perception.

Amplifying Calgary's wins beyond regional echo chambers will attract the investment, talent, and partnerships we require to succeed. This is only possible when the City, businesses, and other stakeholders are unified in the story we tell about Calgary's future from coast-to-coast-to-coast. We need to be strategic in where and how we share our story – the story that resonates in Vancouver or Toronto is distinct from the story that will resonate in Mumbai or Paris.

In the Calgary Chamber's May 2022 Business Pulse Check Survey, respondents indicated that Calgary has a strong reputation internationally, but has significant work to do nationally: 46 per cent of respondents feel that Calgary is perceived positively internationally, compared to 21 per cent within Canada.⁵

One Calgary 2023-2026 presents an opportunity to recognize the importance of building a cohesive Calgary story through the solidification of business partnerships and funding commitments.

How do you think Calgary is perceived?



Gearing up for growth

1.1 Develop a unified vision and narrative for Calgary, working with business and other partners to promote Calgary's story nationally and internationally

Calgary's long-term success hinges on our ability to align our brand with our identity; we need to widely share our diversity, optimism, forward-looking mentality, and focus on sustainability. This requires the continued development of a new, cohesive story and a dedicated effort to promote this story nationally and internationally, in order to attract the capital, talent, and partnerships required for sustained growth and long-term success.

- Convene City officials, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, Calgary Economic Development, Tourism Calgary, Invest Alberta, and other contributors to Calgary's story to review strengths and opportunities to support each partner in individual and collaborative efforts that articulate and amplify Calgary's story.
- Allocate funding within One Calgary 2023-2026 for the creation of a Calgary marketing campaign and associated materials and resources, similar to work undertaken by [Destination Toronto](#).
- Allocate funding within One Calgary 2023-2026 to create a business support program through which Calgary businesses and the City's intergovernmental team collaborate on identifying and accessing federal and provincial funding that supports global marketing efforts.
- Broaden and diversify events where the City has invested significant marketing dollars to ensure alignment with the future direction of the city.

1.2 Build lasting communication partnerships between the City and businesses

Telling Calgary's story is a shared responsibility with shared benefits. The City and businesses must collaborate to build long-term communication partnerships for the betterment of Calgary as a whole.

- Evaluate the resource requirements necessary to create a Joint Communications Office within the City's Customer Service and Communications business unit to spearhead messaging and communications on public-private partnerships between the City and businesses.
- Create a Communications Committee to enhance and amplify the City's communications and branding initiatives.
- Collaborate with businesses and other stakeholders to develop key messages that can be used universally by organizations and individuals when discussing and promoting Calgary.

1.3 Amplify the diversity of employment opportunities in Calgary's business sector

Once synonymous with energy only, the Calgary of today is taking a leading role in the growth of industries such as aerospace, agribusiness, and technology. The diversity of opportunities represents our future and these opportunities must be communicated to ensure all Calgarians – current and prospective – see a future for themselves here.

- Create a "Spotlight On" program, for the City and its partners to amplify employment opportunities with innovative Calgary businesses.
- Create opportunities for work-integrated learning within the city that supports students, newcomers, and people facing barriers to employment.
- Equip small and medium-sized businesses operating in the city with the resources they require to participate in work-integrated learning opportunities.

Downtown

Calgary's Greater Downtown Strategy is a great success story still being written. The Strategy makes key investments in liveability, infrastructure transformation, and improvement, and is visionary in reimagining Calgary. With mentions of Calgary in the BBC⁶ and national news, our downtown revitalization is bolstering our brand globally and nationally, helping attract talent and investment.

The plan has the support of the business community too – according to the Calgary Chamber's May 2022 Business Pulse Check Survey, 72 per cent of respondents believe a vibrant downtown positively impacts the broader city, with only seven per cent disagreeing.





Priority 2:

Attract, retain, and invest in talent

Our vision

We envision a vibrant Calgary that develops, retains, and attracts talent from all backgrounds, enabling our city and businesses to have the skills needed to thrive in the economy of today and tomorrow.

Context

Calgary's total population is growing,⁷ yet, it continues to experience a shrinking 20 to 24-year-old demographic,⁸ critical to the city's talent pool and business' ability to grow. This shrinking demographic is often cited as attributable to lack of economic belonging and opportunity.⁹ Compounding this, Calgary is grappling with an aging population¹⁰ and systemic barriers to fully utilizing immigrants' skills and expertise upon arrival.¹¹ Taken holistically, Calgary is facing a growing labour shortage.

43.8%

of businesses are worried labour challenges will limit business growth, and

64.8%

say recruiting and retaining staff is more challenging than it was 12 months ago¹²

Calgary's economic health is dependent on our ability to solve the talent equation. If we can, our ability to attract and retain talent will not only facilitate business growth, but will also contribute to economic diversification, higher workforce productivity, and increased investment in our city.

Calgary has unique competitive advantages compared to other municipalities when it comes to talent attraction. We rank as the third most liveable city in the world,¹³ are seeing investment across all sectors of our economy, and are on the forefront of embracing an innovation ecosystem driven by digital transformation.¹⁴ Collectively, these advantages are quickly making Calgary a destination of choice for the world's best talent and companies.

Calgary ranks as the third most liveable city in the world.¹⁵

Despite these advantages, more work is required to ensure Calgary has access to the talent necessary for long-term growth. With a diverse talent pool and significant depth in STEM disciplines, Calgary's talent constraints can be alleviated with the right institutional support.

Gearing up for growth

2.1 Invest in upskilling and reskilling programs to match employers' talent needs with the talent pool

The pandemic has accelerated Calgary's shift toward a digitized economy, with virtually all sectors changing the types of skills required within their workforces. To ensure Calgary's economy remains competitive, and that businesses can grow, we need to reskill, upskill, and increase the size of our skilled workforce.

- Utilize regional labour market studies to identify current skill and competency requirements and labour force gaps across industries, and develop concrete solutions based on findings.
- Collaborate with the provincial government, post-secondary institutions, businesses, and community-based service providers to enhance training and rehiring programs.

2.2 Facilitate partnerships between businesses and educational institutions to showcase Calgary's employment opportunities and streamline hiring

Calgary's universities, colleges, and technical schools are among the best in the world.¹⁶ The University of Calgary recently ranked top five in the U15 research university cohort in Canada - the youngest to achieve that ranking. As businesses transition toward digital operations, focused on innovation and automation, post-secondary institutions will be fundamental in producing the next generation of talent our city requires.

- Develop a City-run municipal student work experience program, similar to the Alberta [Municipal Internship Program](#) or the [Federal Student Work Experience Program](#), to promote student workforce participation and training within Calgary.
- Work with post-secondary institutions locally and nationally to move, open or expand campuses and residences within the downtown core.
- Work with the provincial government to provide stable funding for post-secondary institutions, aligning new funding to programs anticipated to fill workforce skill gaps.

2.3 Fully engage underrepresented segments of Calgary's workforce

Evidence shows the pandemic has more acutely impacted underrepresented segments of the population, particularly based on gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.¹⁷ With recent events further highlighting the requirement for governments to address systemic injustices, racism, and oppression faced by Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized groups, Calgary has an opportunity to step up and become a leader in economic equity and inclusion.

- Direct One Calgary 2023-2026 funding towards the immediate implementation of the City's [Diversity and Inclusion Framework](#), including the execution of the [Gender Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#).
- Allocate funding within One Calgary 2023-2026 to support organizations providing scholarship opportunities to communities that have been underrepresented or marginalized, such as the [Calgary Black Chambers Scholarship Fund](#).
- Within the Greater Downtown Strategy and One Calgary 2023-2026, create additional childcare spaces that are accessible and state-of-the-art to help retain early childhood educators, and by extension, facilitate increased labour force participation of parents.
- Allocate One Calgary 2023-2026 funding – in conjunction with provincial and federal funding – to the expansion of affordable childcare. Align municipal bylaws and regulations to ensure childcare spaces are created and available where and when needed.
- Maximize community benefits on infrastructure projects, such as local and social procurement, and targeted hiring practices for equity-deserving groups, through the creation of Community Benefit Agreements.

2.4 Collaborate with all orders of government to reduce employment barriers and create meaningful employment opportunities for newcomers

Our economic growth is predicated on Calgary's ability to attract newcomers and provide them with meaningful economic opportunities once they arrive. With the right support, Calgary can become Canada's destination of choice for newcomers seeking opportunities.

- Work with provincial and federal government counterparts to identify and reduce institutional barriers to obtaining Canadian credentials of foreign trained professional and skilled workers.
- Direct One Calgary 2023-2026 funding toward social infrastructure projects and affordable housing developments – such as mixed-income housing – to support new arrivals to Calgary, including immediate-term housing for those who have just arrived.
- Expand the City's existing [Calgary Local Immigration Partnership](#) program, identifying opportunities to further partner with and support Calgary-based social service organizations providing settlement assistance to newcomers.
- Work with arms-length organizations of the City to group sponsor immigration applications for newcomers seeking employment opportunities, reducing pre-existing immigration wait times and facilitating access to talent for early-stage companies.





Priority 3:

Build a safe and secure Calgary

Our vision

We envision a Calgary that is safe, secure, and vibrant, enabling people to live, work, play, and conduct business with confidence.

Context

Through consultation, businesses raised public safety as a major concern. A lack of safety – perceived and real – has severe consequences for businesses, for instance:

- People may avoid certain areas or change habits.¹⁸
- People may develop negative perceptions of a business, reducing repeat visits or length of stay.¹⁹
- Businesses may face challenges attracting and retaining staff if they do not feel safe commuting or while at work.

Businesses emphasized the immediate need for the City to address safety, particularly on Calgary Transit and in the downtown core. This is supported by Calgary Police Service analysis, showing downtown and areas along C-Train lines are more prone to certain types of crime than other areas.²⁰ In both cases, businesses noted safety concerns impact their ability to attract customers and talent and affect their bottom line through vandalism and theft. Left unaddressed, many felt safety concerns posed risks to their growth potential, long-term viability, and Calgary’s continued economic recovery.

Public transit is currently a key limiting factor for businesses, with many citing issues with employees unable to commute safely and efficiently to work, particularly during off-peak hours. With unsafe, lengthy, or expensive commuting options, businesses are choosing to reduce their hours of operation to avoid jeopardizing the safety of employees. For many coffee shops, breakfast places, and bars and restaurants, this significantly impacts their bottom line.

In a recent Business Pulse Check Survey more than

50%

of businesses cited public transit as important to their business, and over

25%

cited transit as very important

Emerging from the pandemic, Calgary has shown promising signs of recovery, with some of the highest levels of downtown foot traffic in Canada²¹ and many businesses reporting an expected increase in the size of their workforce.²² However, taking advantage of this rebound requires dedicated effort to address safety concerns and their impacts on businesses.

Solving safety concerns requires an understanding of the systemic issues which contribute to social disorder. The City must collaborate with businesses, community safety partners, and other stakeholders to identify and address root causes, such as homelessness, mental health, or addiction issues. Calgary’s Poverty Reduction Strategy²³ and initiatives around affordable housing²⁴ are a start, but more work is required.

Gearing up for growth

3.1 Prioritize and fund safety through the Calgary Transit Relaunch Strategy

To enable long-term business growth, the City must support a safe and secure public transit system that ensures Calgarians, and visitors feel safe while commuting for work and pleasure.

- Fund supplementary transit safety initiatives such as increased lighting, CCTV cameras, wayfinding infrastructure, and 24/7 site activation through the federal government’s [Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program](#).
- In collaboration with existing street-level community safety partners, coordinate specific social support programs and services to address the underlying causes of safety issues on Calgary Transit.
- Encourage positive engagement and interactions in transit spaces through local business inclusion, such as adding market and retail space, art installations, and performance spaces to Calgary Transit locations.
- Make the City of Calgary’s [Transit Recovery Strategy](#) iterative and easily accessible for stakeholder feedback and consultation.

3.2 Work with businesses to identify gaps in public transit schedules impacting the ability of Calgarians to safely commute to and from work

For businesses to attract the talent they require to grow and succeed, public transit must enable employees to safely commute to work.

- In collaboration with businesses, review existing transit route schedules and operating times to identify gaps in service for users who must access their place of work during off-peak hours (e.g. midnight to 5:00 a.m.).
- Informed by the route schedule review, allocate additional funding within the City’s Transit Relaunch Strategy to ensure available transit service more closely aligns with employee working hours.
- Examine the addition of ‘on-demand’ transit services to neighborhoods.

3.3 Collaborate with businesses, social services, and community security partners to address systemic issues impacting the safety and security of Calgary’s downtown

Systemic issues such as homelessness and addiction impact the safety – real or perceived – of our community. These issues require strong collaboration between the City, community, security partners, and other levels of government to address their underlying causes. If root causes are not addressed, we risk concealing these issues rather than addressing them.

- Increase funding beyond the \$5 million already allocated within the City’s [Greater Downtown Plan](#) to revitalize the [9 Block Program](#) and support the long-term success of Community Safety Hubs, including the [Stephen Avenue Safety Hub](#) and [East Village Safety Hub](#).
- Work with downtown and other impacted Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) to understand on-the-ground security concerns and identify solutions to systemic issues impacting downtown safety, such as addiction treatment and mental health resources.
- Allocate funding within One Calgary 2023-2026 for a Community Safety Partnership Program, similar to the [Saskatoon Community Support Program](#), to empower BIAs to address unsafe activity within their communities and increase collaboration between businesses, not-for-profits, and the Calgary Police Service.
- Evaluate the feasibility of implementing a BIA security budget matching program within One Calgary 2023-2026, whereby the City shares the costs of BIA’s annual public safety & social issues budgets on a 1:1 basis to alleviate the burden on businesses.

3.4 Develop and invest in modern, user-friendly methods of alerting security partners to safety issues in real-time

Addressing Calgary’s safety challenges requires the City and its security partners have access to relevant and reliable data on crime. Businesses have expressed hesitancy to report crimes due to a lack of timely follow-up. Implementing modern, technology-enabled methods of crime reporting that provide information and status updates on reported issues will encourage Calgarians and businesses to report safety issues in real-time, allowing the City to collect better data and address key issues accordingly.

- Allocate funding within the Calgary Transit Relaunch Strategy to develop and implement modern, technology-enabled methods of reporting safety and security concerns on Calgary Transit, such as a mobile app.
- Investigate the feasibility and cost of developing a unified crime reporting system for use by Calgarians and businesses for reporting non-emergency crimes to the Calgary Police Service, similar to the [online reporting tool in use by the London Police Service](#).
- Using existing Calgary Police Service funding, develop a police report tracking system to provide businesses and Calgarians with relevant and up-to-date information on the status of police reports they have filed.





Priority 4:

Reduce barriers and costs of doing business

Our vision

The ability to conduct business in Calgary must be simple and straightforward, with minimal barriers to obtain licencing and permits. Starting and maintaining a business in Calgary should be easy and cost-effective. The development of this ecosystem is dependent on effective collaboration with the City on existing and emerging issues.

Context

Businesses require an operating environment that stems from smart regulation, fostering competitiveness and innovation. While business licenses and permits are required to ensure Calgary businesses follow proper regulations and safety rules,²⁵ our system must allow them to spend more time focused on running and growing their businesses. To provide this, City processes must be clear, simple, and efficient.

According to the Calgary Chamber's Business Pulse Check Survey in May 2022

81%

of respondents think the City should invest in modernizing its processes to enhance service

Currently, businesses are facing rising costs everywhere – from record inflation to higher wage expectations, and higher property taxes to paying down debt. Businesses are being forced to do more with less.

During the pandemic, the average business saw a

48.9% decline in revenue

making it even harder to operate in a context of rising costs²⁶

These challenges come after nearly a decade of periods of economic and social hardship, generating a profound impact on Calgarians and local businesses.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of local Calgary businesses in sustaining our economy. Concurrently, it showed many City processes remain time-consuming and expensive.²⁷ The challenge remains balancing the need for business regulation, while reducing the barriers to doing business in Calgary.

Gearing up for growth

4.1 Facilitate direct communication between businesses and the City

Providing businesses at all stages of growth with a simple and straightforward means of contacting Administration is essential to ensuring access to timely, accurate information and reliable advice when needed.

- Allocate funding within One Calgary 2023-2026 for the expansion of the City's existing [Business Experience Representative](#) pilot program beyond restaurants, breweries, and urban agriculture.
- Provide City Administration with training on business processes and operations to ensure they understand and can fully support businesses accessing the [Business Experience Representative](#) program.
- Allocate funding within One Calgary 2023-2026 to develop and maintain a City officials directory, similar to the federal [government electronic directory system](#) and provincial [government staff directory](#).
- Develop an online system for businesses to access updates on their various applications and notifications when Administration has reviewed or actioned their submission.

Property tax

A ratio of 2.8:1 will alleviate one of the significant costs faced by businesses. This ratio will reduce the burden shouldered by Calgary businesses, provide businesses with predictability on their tax bills, and ensure Calgary continues to offer a competitive businesses environment. Ultimately, a 2.8:1 ratio will cement Calgary as an attractive place to start and grow a business, driving economic growth and vibrancy.

4.2 Identify opportunities to reduce administrative burdens and costs to businesses

Businesses require a stable operating environment to succeed. The City must provide certainty on the costs businesses will face to comply with municipal regulations and programs.

- Within One Calgary 2023-2026, commit to modifying the non-residential to residential property tax rates, making [incremental adjustments to achieve a 2.8:1 tax ratio](#) by 2026.
- Create an online portal for businesses to provide feedback on which regulations are particularly challenging to navigate, redundant or inconsistent with other regulations, or can be streamlined and simplified.
- Building on lessons learned from waiving business licensing fees, conduct a review of existing administrative costs imposed on businesses by the City, identifying which can be cut or reduced without significant impact on municipal revenue generation.
- Provide financial support to local early-stage companies to facilitate affordable or free access to vacant B and C class office space in downtown, alleviating one of the most significant costs to start-ups, facilitating vibrancy, and making use of underutilized space.
- Address barriers to local procurement within the [New West Partnership Trade Agreement](#) as a means of enhancing the City's [Benefit Driven Procurement Strategy](#).
- Update and modernize the City's existing website, creating user-friendly webpages and prioritizing the removal of obsolete information.

Getting into gear

One Calgary 2023-2026 will be an important guide for our city's continued recovery and resilience, and will set the stage for a new Calgary, a city that:

- Has a unified story it is proud to share, showcasing Calgary's diverse opportunities
- Invests in attracting and retaining talent, building a future-ready workforce
- Is safe and secure, encouraging personal and business confidence
- Offers a simple, straightforward, and competitive business environment

As the voice of Calgary businesses, the Calgary Chamber will continue to work towards ensuring these priorities are reflected within One Calgary 2023-2026 and related City plans.

We encourage all businesses to continue sharing their voice with the City and with the Calgary Chamber as a voice for Calgary's business community.





About the Calgary Chamber

The Calgary Chamber exists to help businesses thrive. As the convenor and catalyst for a vibrant, inclusive, and prosperous business community, the Chamber works to build strength and resilience among its members and position Calgary as a magnet for talent, diversification, and opportunity. As an independent, non-profit, non-partisan organization founded and funded by our members, we build on our 131-year history to serve and advocate for businesses of all sizes, in all sectors, across the city.

For more information on joining the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, visit calgarychamber.com



References:

