



Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of February 6, 2025

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** January 23, 2025
From: Sheldon Johnson, Director of Communications and Engagement
Subject: 2025 Draft Budget Public Input

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive this report for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the October 24, 2024 Committee of the Whole Meeting, Council directed staff to invite the public to provide input on the 2025-2029 Draft Financial Plan (2025 Draft Budget).

Starting October 25, the 2025 Draft Budget Public Input Opportunity was made available on the City's online Have Your Say engagement platform. The community was invited to provide input on the draft budget in writing by email, mail or drop-off at City Hall or by submitting a video up to five minutes in length by November 17, 2024.

On Thursday, November 14, 2024, Council extended the deadline for public input until December 20, 2024.

The 2025 Draft Budget public input opportunity/deadline extension were communicated via the City's Have Your Say platform, website, stakeholder email, social media channels, print advertising and a public service announcement, resulting in local media coverage.

The City received 187 items of written correspondence over an eight-week period (October 25-December 20, 2024). Analysis of this public input identifies topics that are top of mind for those who chose to provide feedback and the percentages of those who support or oppose each topic.

The top five areas of concern include the **police budget increase**; **increase in property taxes**; **community well-being services**; and **housing initiatives**; with **beautification projects** such as Centennial Square and Government Street and **increasing/maintaining grant funding for community initiatives** tying for fifth place.

The public input augments the engagement that took place from June 3 to August 28, 2024 to identify the community's priorities for investment in 2025. The previous public consultation included a scientifically valid random Ipsos telephone survey with 700 City of Victoria residents and a series of focused budget community conversations co-hosted with eight equity-seeking groups and 86 members of the community they serve.

A public engagement summary, which included the Ipsos Budget Survey report and detailed community conversation meeting notes, was presented to Council at the October 24, 2024 Committee of the Whole for consideration.

PURPOSE

To share the results of the public input received on the 2025-2029 Draft Financial Plan (2025 Draft Budget) to help inform Council's budget decisions.

BACKGROUND

Each year, the City of Victoria establishes funding priorities through its annual budget. Council sets service levels and allocates funding for all City services, programs, projects and initiatives. Council budget decisions are informed by community input on priorities for investment.

Public engagement on the 2025 Draft Budget has included:

- Ipsos Telephone Survey – third-party, scientific sampling of 700 City of Victoria residents, asking about their priorities for investment in 2025 based on Council's Strategic Plan; survey used a combination of land and mobile phone lines (June 2024)
- Community Conversation Series – focused discussions co-hosted with eight equity-seeking organizations, with 86 members of the community participating (July/August 2024)

The co-hosting organizations provided diverse and varied perspectives from across the city and included Silver Threads Service, Victoria Native Friendship Centre, City of Victoria Youth Council, Victoria Disability Resource Centre, Victoria Pride Society, Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness, Peers Victoria Resources Society and Our Place Society.

- Public Input Opportunity – invited the community to provide feedback on the 2025 Draft Budget in writing or video by December 20, 2024, resulting in 187 items of written correspondence over an eight-week period (October 25-December 20, 2024)

At the October 24, 2024 Committee of the Whole Meeting, Council directed staff to invite the public to provide input on the 2025-2029 Draft Financial Plan (2025 Draft Budget).

Starting October 25, the 2025 Draft Budget Public Input Opportunity was made available on the City's online Have Your Say engagement platform. The community was invited to provide input on the draft budget in writing by email, mail or drop off at City Hall or by submitting a video up to five minutes in length by November 17, 2024. Council extended the public input deadline to December 20 at the November 14, 2024 Committee of the Whole Meeting.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

Analysis of the public input identifies topics that are top of mind for those who chose to provide feedback and the percentages of those who support or oppose each topic.

The methodology for this analysis included staff reviewing each item of correspondence and logging items of mention in a spreadsheet, to calculate the number of times a topic was mentioned and corresponding percentages in support and opposed to each topic. Details and re-occurring comments were also noted.

What We Heard

Five topics that are top of mind in the written correspondence are:

1. **Police budget increase**
2. **Increase in property taxes**
3. **Community well-being services**
4. **Housing initiatives**
5. **Beautification projects and Increase/maintain grant funding for community initiatives**

A significant number of respondents **support funding**:

- Community well-being services (i.e., health and mental health, harm reduction and support for people who use drugs)
(90 per cent of the 61 mentions)
- Housing initiatives
(96 per cent of the 49 mentions)
- Increase/maintain grant funding for community initiatives (i.e., community gardens, arts, venue spaces, etc.)
(87 per cent of the 46 mentions)

A significant number of respondents **oppose funding**:

- Police budget increase
(83 per cent of the 81 mentions)
- Increase in property taxes
(92% of the 76 mentions)
- Beautification projects
(98 per cent of the 46 mentions)
(Of these 46 mentions, 35 respondents specifically referred to the Centennial Square Revitalization Project, of which 34 (97 per cent) were opposed to funding the project.)

Who We Heard From

Of the 187 correspondence items received:

- 130 (69 per cent) identified as Victoria residents
- 31 (17 per cent) did not specify.
- 17 (nine per cent) were submitted on behalf of a local group or non-profit organization
- 9 (five per cent) identified as business owners

The 17 organizations that provided input include:

- Belfry Theatre
- Canadian Federation of Independent Business
- Capital Bike

- Compost Education Centre
- Fernwood Community + Arts Association
- House of Owl: Creation Lab
- Kaleidoscope Theatre
- Ministry of Casual Living (a non-profit)
- Oaklands Community Association
- Open Space Arts Society
- Pro-Art Alliance of Greater Victoria
- Post Entertainment
- Sanctuary Youth Centre
- Theatre SKAM
- The Other Guise Theatre Company
- Victoria Downtown Residents Association
- Victoria Urban Food Table

Please see Attachment A for the written correspondence and Attachment B for the Topic Analysis Table.

CONCLUSIONS

Engagement on the City's 2025 Draft Budget, which included statistically-valid polling by the nationally-recognized firm Ipsos, focused budget conversations with eight equity-seeking groups and a public input opportunity for the community to provide feedback, demonstrates clear support for Council's priorities in their Strategic Plan, with the top two being Housing and Community Well-Being and Safety.

This three-prong engagement approach provides valuable feedback for the City's 2025 and future-year budget planning, in addition to meeting the statutory requirement for consultation.

Respectfully submitted,

Sheldon Johnson
Director, Communications and Engagement

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager

List of Attachments:

ATTACHMENT A – Written Correspondence
ATTACHMENT B – Topic Analysis Table