

also included two open-ended, qualitative questions. The DVBA also encouraged businesses to share input directly with the City.

The written correspondence and video transcriptions (for privacy) are available in **Attachment A**. The DVBA's business survey results are available in **Attachment C**.

This report contains two streams of analysis. The input from written correspondence and videos, which is qualitative and self-directed, has been analyzed separately from the DVBA's eight quantitative survey questions, which have set response options.

Of the 292 individuals we heard from in the written and video input, the majority (70 per cent) self-identified as Victoria residents, with 10 as a local business, at par with last year's nine businesses that provided input on the 2025 Draft Budget.

Analysis of the written correspondence and video input identifies top-of-mind topics for those who chose to provide feedback and includes the percentages of those who support or oppose each topic. The top five topics include the **police budget increase, housing initiatives, property tax increase, arts, culture and events budget decrease** and **grant funding for community initiatives budget decrease**. This is followed closely by the **program budget decrease** (includes neighbourhood and community programs).

There was strong opposition to the proposed Police budget increase from 98 per cent (203 out of 208 mentions) of respondents. Many who oppose the Police budget increase would prefer that more money be invested in social programs to help vulnerable, unhoused residents, as well as other City programs such as arts, culture and events, community programs and climate action.

Please see **Attachment B** for the **Topic Analysis Table** that analyzes the key topics and percentages in support and opposed from the *written correspondence and video input*.

In **Attachment C**, the DVBA's business feedback package notes that it "reflects the realities of downtown business operations." Results partially align with what we heard from the public during budget engagement: **public safety is a key concern, which includes enforcement and a welcoming downtown environment**. When asked, which *three areas* are most important to the operation of your business today, DVBA survey respondents noted: 80.7 per cent **public realm, cleanliness and downtown conditions**; 79 per cent **public safety and enforcement**; and 67.7 per cent **downtown activation and vibrancy**.

The feedback on the updated 2026 Draft Budget collected this winter augments the engagement that took place from July 31 to Sept. 17, 2025, to identify the community's priorities for investment in 2026. That engagement included a scientifically valid random Ipsos telephone survey with 700 City of Victoria residents in 12 neighbourhoods and a series of focused budget community conversations co-hosted with six equity-deserving groups and 68 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 Nov. 3, 2025, Special Committee of the Whole for consideration. This information package is available on the [2026 Budget page](#) on the City's Have Your Say platform.

PURPOSE

To share the results of the public input received on the updated 2026-2030 Draft Financial Plan (updated 2026 Draft Budget) to help inform Council's budget deliberations.

BACKGROUND

Each year, the City of Victoria establishes funding priorities through its annual budget, which identifies the expected revenues and planned expenditures required to deliver the over 200 programs and services our community relies on.

Through Draft Financial Plan discussions and deliberations, City Council sets service levels and allocates funding for all City services, programs, projects and initiatives. Council budget decisions are informed by strategic and master plans, Council priorities, financial forecasts, legislative requirements and community input.

Public engagement to help inform the 2026 Draft Budget has involved a three-prong approach:

- **Ipsos Telephone Survey** – third-party, scientific sampling of 700 City of Victoria residents, asking about their priorities for investment in 2026 based on Council's Strategic Plan. The survey used a combination of land and mobile phone lines (July 31 to Aug. 19, 2025)
- **Community Conversation Series** – focused discussions on budget priorities co-hosted with six equity-deserving organizations, with 68 members of the community participating (Aug. 25 to Sept. 17, 2025).

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 Pride Society, Peers Victoria Resources Society/QomQem Coastal Connections and Our Place Society.

- **Public Input Opportunity** – open public feedback on the updated 2026 Draft Budget in writing or by video over a six-week period (Dec. 12, 2025 to Jan. 23, 2026). We heard from a total of **351** respondents: 282 items of written correspondence (representing **288** respondents), **four** individuals' videos and input from **59** respondents (56 businesses) through a business survey hosted by the Downtown Victoria Business Association to gather feedback to help inform Council's 2026 budget decisions.

At the Dec. 1, 2025 Special Committee of the Whole Meeting, Council directed staff to invite the public to provide input on the updated 2026-2030 Draft Financial Plan (updated 2026 Draft Budget) that reflected their initial budget deliberations.

Starting Friday, Dec. 12, the 2026 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 updated 2026 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 Friday, Jan. 23, 2026. A draft budget highlights summary was also available.

The public input opportunity was promoted through the City’s Have Your Say online platform, website, stakeholder email, two City e-newsletters, social media channels, paid online and print advertising, a City Hall slide and a public service announcement, resulting in local media coverage.

ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

This report contains **two streams of analysis**: the self-directed written correspondence and video submissions to the City and the DVBA’s business information package survey results.

STREAM 1: What We Heard – Public Input (Written Correspondence and Videos)

Analysis of the written and video input received from 292 individuals 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 key themes and comments were also noted.

Staff also used Microsoft 365 Copilot, a City-authorized AI-powered productivity tool, to supplement manual analysis of the budget feedback received.

Five topics that are top of mind are noted in the table below. Last year’s topics are included for comparison.

Five Topics Top of Mind – 2026 Draft Budget	Five Topics Top of Mind – 2025 Draft Budget
Police budget increase	Police budget
Housing Initiatives	Property Tax increase
Property Tax increase	Community Wellbeing Services
Arts, Culture and Events budget decrease	Housing Initiatives
Grant Funding for Community Initiatives budget decrease Closely followed by: -Program budget decrease (includes neighbourhood and community programs)	Grant Funding for Community Initiatives (support) tied with Beautification Projects (oppose) Closely followed by: -Infrastructure budget increase - Arts, Culture and Events budget increase

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

- **Housing Initiatives**
(99 per cent of the 106 mentions)
More funding to support housing projects, subsidized housing and non-profit/co-op housing .

While a significant number of respondents **OPPOSE:**

- **Police budget increase**
(98 per cent of the 208 mentions)
Many feel this increase is not affordable and does not tackle the real issues, with the money better spent on social and community wellbeing services, community and neighbourhood programs, housing, arts and culture, parks, etc.
- **Property Tax increase**
(98 per cent of the 89 mentions)
Many feel that a 10 per cent property increase is unreasonable and not affordable.
- **Arts, Culture and Events budget decrease**
(99 per cent of the 76 mentions)
Many said funding is needed for Victoria's arts and music scene and that cuts make it harder for artists to stay in Victoria.
- **Grant Funding for Community Initiatives budget decrease**
(99 per cent of 75 mentions)
Many expressed that Police funding should go towards community grant programs to get people off the street and into safety, and to support food security initiatives and non-profit community programs.

Following closely was **Program budget decrease**, which included neighbourhood and community programs, opposed by 100% of the 74 mentions.

Overall, there is a general sentiment in much of the public input **to fund programs and services that support community wellbeing.**

Please see **Attachment B** for details in the Topic Analysis Table.

STREAM 2: What We Heard – DVBA Business Information Package

The Downtown Victoria Business Association (DVBA) submitted a Business Feedback Package on the City's Updated 2026 Draft Budget, which captured feedback from **59** respondents (representing 56 local businesses) through an online survey that was open for 10 days during the City's public engagement period.

The DVBA was one of many stakeholders the City reached out to, asking for support in amplifying the 2026 Draft Budget public input opportunity. Although the DVBA's business survey was unsolicited by the City, the results will help inform Council's budget decisions.

The DVBA survey included eight quantitative questions, inviting business respondents to select their top concerns from a series of set responses. Feedback emphasizes business outcomes, focusing on safety, cleanliness, accessibility, predictability and operational efficiency to help inform Council’s 2026 budget decisions. All questions relate to existing City services and programs. The survey also included two open-ended questions.

According to the DVBA, response options were intentionally limited (selecting top priorities, for example) to reflect the reality that municipal budgets require balancing service levels with fiscal constraints. Questions were framed around what is most important to business operations rather than satisfaction or complaint-based language, which helps produce clearer signals about where service levels matter most to economic activity downtown.

DVBA developed the survey to increase participation from businesses, providing structured, actionable insights to complement the City’s engagement process. Survey responses were aggregated to identify trends and “reflect the realities of downtown business operations” the package states.

The DVBA’s business survey has five key takeaways:

1. **Safety and Cleanliness** – Prioritize visible safety, enforcement and clean public spaces downtown for a welcoming environment
2. **Function Before Transformation** – Improve how existing systems work before introducing further changes (e.g., transportation networks, streets and public spaces)
3. **Predictable and Reliable City Systems** – Clarity, consistency and timely processes are critical to business operations (e.g., dependable City systems that reduce uncertainty and support long-term planning)
4. **Foundational Services First** – Prioritize core conditions that allow downtown to function. Interest in activation, events and placemaking is strongest when foundational needs are already being met.
5. **Little Support for Tax Increase** – Only 14 per cent of survey respondents support protecting essential services if it results in a tax increase. The majority of respondents were divided between prioritizing lower tax increases and supporting a balanced approach based on the specific services affected.

Below are aggregated results from the DVBA's eight, quantitative survey questions, where participants chose from set response options. The top two responses are highlighted for each question. Full survey results are included in **Attachment C**.

Public Safety & Enforcement

Q1. Which public safety and enforcement services are most important to the day-to-day operations of your business? (Select up to 2.)

- 54.8% - Address repeat or chronic criminal activity
- 41.9% - Police presence and visibility
- 27.4% - Police response to reported issue

- 22.6% - Outreach and social supports in public spaces
- 16.1% - Active Bylaw enforcement
- 9.7% - Bylaw response to reported issues
- 9.7% - Coordination between Police and Bylaw services

Public Realm, Cleanliness and Downtown Conditions

Q2. Which public realm and cleanliness services are most important to your business, staff or customers? (Select up to 2.)

- 71% - General upkeep of public spaces (graffiti removal, broken fixtures, visible deterioration)
- 40.3% - Waste, litter and sharps removal
- 35.5% - Street and sidewalk cleaning (routine sweeping and surface cleaning)
- 17.7% - Maintenance of City-owned public spaces and facilities (plazas, parks, washrooms, public buildings)
- 11.3% - Accessibility of sidewalks, crossings, public spaces (curb ramps, crossings, sidewalk standards)
- 9.7% - Conditions of sidewalks, streets, and curbs (pavement condition, repairs, etc.)
- 6.5% - Street lighting and visibility

Transportation & Parking

Q3. Which transportation and parking topics are of most importance to you? (Select up to 2.)

- 62.9% - Improving how the existing street network functions
- 50% - Pausing or slowing policy-led street and traffic changes
- 24.2% - Parking management and enforcement
- 24.2% - City-funded transit services and programs (e.g., youth and student transit programs)
- 12.9% - Loading zones and commercial delivery access

Business Operations, Permitting & Licensing

Q4. Which City processes are most important to operating your business efficiently downtown? (Select up to 2.)

- 46.8% - Consistency and predictability of City requirements
- 40.3% - Timelines and clarity for permits and approvals
- 38.7% - Support for patios, outdoor retail, or flexible use of space
- 24.2% - Coordination across City departments
- 17.7% - Business licensing and renewal processes

City Communication, Engagement & Issue Response

Q5. Which aspects of City communication or engagement are most important to your operation of your business? (Select up to 2.)

- 59.70% - Opportunities to provide input before decisions are finalized
- 37.10% - Timely updates on issues affecting downtown businesses
- 35.50% - Advance notice of construction or service disruptions
- 17.70% - Knowing who to contact at the City when issues arise
- 16.10% - Clear communication about policy or bylaw changes

- 12.90% - Coordination of messaging across City departments

Downtown Activation & Vibrancy

Q6. Which downtown activation or vibrancy investments are most important to your business?
(Select up to 2.)

- 43.6% - Marketing and promotion of downtown
- 43.6% - Support for business-led events and activations
- 40.3% - Events and festivals
- 30.7% - Public space programming (plazas, streets, evenings)
- 19.4% - Seasonal activation (winter, evenings, shoulder seasons)

Overall Budget Priorities

Q7. Thinking across all the areas above, which **THREE AREAS** are most important to the operation of your business today? (Select 3.)

- 80.7% - Public realm, cleanliness & downtown conditions
- 79% - Public safety & enforcement
- 67.7% - Downtown activation & vibrancy
- 43.6% - Transportation, parking & access
- 16.1% - Business operations, permitting & licensing
- 12.9% - City communications & engagement

Property Tax Impacts

Q8. City budgets require trade-offs between service levels and property taxes. Based on the priorities you identified above, which statement best reflects your perspective on the 2026 property tax increase. (Select 1.)

- 38.7% - The City should prioritize limiting the tax increase, even if some services are reduced
- 38.7% - A balanced approach is needed, depending on which services are affected
- 14.5% - The City should protect essential services, even if this results in a higher tax increase
- 8.1% - Unsure/need more information

Open-Ended Questions

Below are key ideas shared in the DVBA open-ended, qualitative survey question: **Is there anything else you'd like to share about your perspectives on the City of Victoria's 2026 budget?**

The self-directed business feedback below mirrors many of the concerns shared in the written correspondence and video input the City received.

Key Ideas – Business Survey Input on City’s 2026 Draft Budget

- **Arts Funding** – do not cut; arts bring people downtown; do not cut to invest in police
- **Bike Lanes** – not every street needs a protected bike lane; start charging fees for bike lane use for revenue
- **City Staff** – reduce administration and staffing levels
- **Cleanliness** – keep downtown clean; clean up downtown
- **Crystal Pool** – construction cost concerns moving forward
- **Downtown Vibrancy** – invest in it, clean downtown streets and graffiti
- **Essential Services** – protect them
- **Governance** – focus on peace, order and good governance
- **Pandora Avenue** – leaving due to social and crime concerns
- **Parking** – Blanshard Street parking is “crippled” by City
- **Permits** – Streamline the process
- **Police Budget** – decrease it; reassign enforcement dollars elsewhere; put funding in social assistance programming and outreach such as Cool Aid, SOLID, AVI and more; more police presence is not helpful if other services not supported first
- **Policing Enforcement** – expand Beat Team to weekends; address downtown vagrancy and drug use to get people back downtown; keep downtown safe; remove habitual criminals (no more ‘catch and release’)
- **Property Tax Increase** – keep as low as possible; increase is not sustainable; reduce, limit or freeze tax increase; make budget cuts even if some services are reduced; tax rate too high for commercial properties; above 10 per cent increase is too high but need more police
- **Rent Increases** – Raising property taxes increases rents for downtown businesses; not affordable; businesses will close
- **Return to Office** – City staff need to return to offices downtown
- **Road Changes** – Money invested in road changes and bike lanes to date could have solved homelessness
- **Road and Sidewalk Maintenance** – needs attention
- **Social Service Providers** – need to be responsible for cleaning and bylaw infractions
- **Tourism** – homelessness, drugs and alcohol affect downtown businesses

In addition, the Property Tax Impacts question included a comment box for the 37.8 per cent of survey respondents who selected: **“A balanced approach is needed, depending on which services are affected.”**

Key ideas shared by business survey respondents include:

- Not to take money out of areas that impact tourism (flower baskets, downtown vibrancy, cleanliness, safety)
- Focus on cleaning up downtown (streets and graffiti)
- Every street doesn't need a bike lane
- Review staff productivity; how to do the same or more by working smarter – not cutting services
- Do not cut arts programming; it brings people downtown
- Address downtown vagrancy, drug use and crime to support business and get people back downtown
- Expand the new Beat Team to weekends; need more police
- Policing is not the answer to downtown issues; don't fund the increase

STREAM 1: Who We Heard From – Public Input (Written Correspondence and Videos)

The following is an analysis of **who we heard from** in the public input representing **292 respondents** through written correspondence and videos. While individuals were not asked to self-identify, of those who did, below are the results. The majority of respondents (70 per cent) identified as Victoria residents.

- **203** (70%) identified as Victoria residents (130 last year)
 - **57** (20%) did not self-identify (31 last year)
 - **14** (5%) identified as non-Victoria residents:
 - 1 Central Saanich; 2 Oak Bay; 4 Esquimalt; 7 Saanich
 - **10** (3%) identified as local business owners (nine last year)
 - **1** (0.3%) identified as a business representative from outside of Victoria
 - Porte Communities based in Vancouver
 - **7** (2%) identified as a local group, association or non-profit organization (17 last year)
- Total: 292**

Of the **203** individuals who self-identified as Victoria residents, **139** (68 per cent) shared their address or neighbourhood:

- Fernwood – **20** (14%)
- Fairfield – **19** (14%)
- James Bay – **18** (13%)
- Hillside Quadra – **17** (12%)
- Downtown – **15** (11%)
- North Park – **12** (9%)
- Oaklands – **11** (8%)

- Rockland – 8 (6%)
- Burnside – 6 (4%)
- Victoria West – 6 (4%)
- Gonzales – 4 (3%)
- Jubilee – 3 (2%)

Total: 139

Seven local organizations self-identified in their written input:

1. BC Black History Awareness Society
2. Creatively United for the Planet Society
3. Downtown Victoria Business Association
4. Fernwood Neighbourhood House
5. Oaklands Community Association
6. Quadra Village Community Centre
7. The LifeCycles Project

Of the 10 local businesses self-identified in their written input, eight shared their business name.

*Three of these businesses also participated in DVBA’s survey:

1. Art Ink Print*
2. Best Western, Carlton Plaza Hotel
3. Bishop’s Family Cycles
4. Colliers*
5. Kia Victoria*
6. Missing Link Analytics
7. Nugent Properties
8. One Net Agency

Form-type Email Submissions

Within the written correspondence, there was a re-occurring “form-type email” that was referenced by 59 of the 292 individuals.

The phrasing included: “As an artist ... and a renter ... and finally as a person with lived experience of mental health and substance use challenges...”

Not everyone claimed to be an artist, a renter or someone with lived experience; there were many variations of people using one, two or all three of the phrases to guide, yet personalize their input.

STREAM 2: Who We Heard From – DVBA’s Business Information Package

Below are the 56 local businesses (*59 survey respondents*) that participated in the Downtown Victoria Business Association’s survey to provide feedback on the City’s updated 2026 Draft Budget.

1. Artemis
2. Art Ink Print
3. Beehive Wool Shop
4. Berstein and Gold

5. Bows Coffee Roasters
6. Breakwater Pediatrics
7. BWG
8. Capital Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Victoria
9. Catawampus Fudge and Funk
10. Chocolate Favoris Victoria
11. Colliers (+ 2 respondents)
12. Cox Taylor
13. Cyclebeat Club Inc.
14. De Mode En Vogue
15. Downtown Victoria Massage Clinic
16. Dr. Lisa Polinsky
17. Family Eyecare Centre
18. Fat Sisters
19. Frontrunners/New Balance Victoria
20. Gala Fabrics
21. Greater Victoria Festival Society
22. Great Pacific Mortgage & Investments Ltd.
23. Guitars Plus
24. Hartwig Industries
25. InDro Robotics
26. Inn at Laurel Point
27. Invictus Commercial Investment Corp
28. Jawl Properties Ltd.
29. JC Scott eco Design Associates Inc.
30. Kia Victoria
31. Kwusen Research & Media
32. Luna Collective
33. Moe's Home Victoria
34. Oh Sugar
35. Off the Eaten Track
36. Oscar & Libby's
37. Pacific Beach Investments Ltd.
38. Pacific Pilotage Authority
39. Parkdale Enterprises
40. Proper Poke Piercing and Tattoo
41. Puzzle Lab
42. Reliance Properties
43. Rifflandia Entertainment Co. (+ 1 respondent)
44. Robbins Parking
45. Sorenson Books
46. South Bay Properties Ltd.
47. Springtide Whale Watching
48. Staerk Hair
49. Theatre SKAM
50. The Ginger Group Hair Salon
51. The Good Planet Company
52. The Other Guise Theatre Society

53. Vangenne & Company Law Corporation
54. Victoria Bead Town Designs
55. Vintage Spirits
56. West Coast College of Massage Therapy

The DVBA's Business Feedback Package is available in **Attachment C**.

CONCLUSIONS

The three-prong budget engagement included statistically valid polling by the nationally recognized firm Ipsos, focused budget conversations with six equity-deserving groups and a public input opportunity for the community to provide feedback on the City's updated 2026 Draft Budget.

This approach provides valuable public input for Council's consideration, indicates support for Council's Strategic Plan and specifically for the priorities of **Community Wellbeing and Safety** and **Housing**, 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 and Video Transcripts

ATTACHMENT B – Topic Analysis Table of Written Correspondence and Videos

ATTACHMENT C – Downtown Victoria Business Association's Budget Feedback Package