



Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of February 4, 2019

To: Committee of the Whole

Date: January 24, 2019

From: Bill Eisenhauer

Subject: Summary of Public Input on Draft 2019 Financial Plan

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive the report for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2014, a new public engagement strategy has been developed and implemented to increase public understanding and input on the financial planning and strategic planning processes. Efforts have focused on improving the presentation of financial information, increasing notice of public participation opportunities, an improved online survey, and new tools for the public to engage in the decision-making process.

The City began public consultation on the draft 2018 Financial Plan on December 17, 2018. Citizens were invited to provide input on the proposed budget through a variety of ways: including by completing an online survey, submitting correspondence, and through the Town Hall held on January 16.

The budgeting process continues to evolve and improve each year. Feedback on budget materials and the budget survey will inform next year's process.

PURPOSE

To provide Council with feedback and correspondence received during the 2019 Financial Plan public consultation period.

BACKGROUND

Projected budget impacts were communicated holistically, including impacts from utility increases in addition to municipal property tax increases and five-year forecasts for both residential and business properties. Information items developed for the public were provided online at www.victoria.ca/budget, including a video to explain the nature and purpose of a City budget, the full Draft Financial Plan, the "Budget Summary" piece, a four page "Budget at a Glance", Town Hall details, and the online survey.

Consultation was promoted widely through social media, home-page placement on the City's website, print advertising, digital display boards at City Hall and the Save-on-Foods Memorial Centre, e-newsletter, stakeholder emails, posters and handbills. A focus on increasing youth and renter feedback continued, including working once again with the City of Victoria Youth Council, and creating renter-specific messaging to encourage participation.

Online Survey

A total of 1,483 citizens responded to the online budget survey. The survey asked questions regarding priorities for strategic objectives, overall value for tax dollars, spending priorities for new revenue and prior year's surplus funds. It allowed participants the option to dive deeper into specific areas related to the operating budget, capital budget categories and supplementary budget requests for the City and VicPD.

It should be noted that the online budget survey is not a random, representative survey of Victoria residents, but rather only represents the views of those who became aware of the survey and decided to opt in.

Comments provided in the survey are enclosed as provided and their reproduction does not indicate any endorsement of them; they do not reflect the views of the City, its elected officials or employees. Some comments have been redacted to remove personal information, hate speech, or potential libel.

Budget Town Hall

For the fifth consecutive year, the City hosted a budget Town Hall with an e-Town Hall component. The meeting was interactive and webcast live. Participants were able to attend and provide feedback in person at City Hall, or from the comfort of their own homes. Citizens were invited to submit questions and feedback in a variety of ways:

- in person
- through Twitter using the hashtag #victownhall
- using the website form
- by phone during the meeting

The meeting was well attended in person and had 56 online submissions. Comments and questions covered a wide variety of topics.

Correspondence

Formal correspondence was welcomed as part of the budget feedback process. Several pieces of correspondence were received from groups and individuals.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

What We Heard

1,483 people participated in the online survey over four weeks. Of those:

- 82.5% of respondents said they live in the City of Victoria, with the highest neighbourhood representation from Fairfield Gonzales and James Bay
- 52% indicated they own property in Victoria while 38% responded they rent in Victoria
- 21% of total respondents indicated they owned or operated a business in Victoria

In general, survey respondents noted that spending in operating categories was “just right”, with the exception of VicPD, where more respondents noted that spending was “too low” with many comments noting the desire to see school liaison officers reinstated.

Regarding capital budget categories, survey respondents noted that spending in capital categories was “just right”, with the exception of Active Transportation, where respondents felt spending was “too high.”

The majority of survey respondents (51.2%) stated they agreed with the proposed tax increase for City operations, with 33.7% saying they feel the increase should be reduced.

49.6% of respondents noted that they were moderately or very satisfied with programs and services received from the City for tax dollars.

When asked how Council should fund the Employer Health Tax, 62.6% responded with “use new tax revenue from new developments.”

When asked how the City should allocate 2018 surplus, the majority of respondents (50.3%) answered “combination of invest in new initiatives and save for future infrastructure investment” and 40.8% answered “save for future infrastructure investment.”

When asked how the City should allocate new assessed revenue the majority (52.4%) responded with “save for future infrastructure investment.”

Strategic Objectives

Survey respondents were asked how they would distribute \$100 among the proposed strategic objectives. The top three objectives where respondents noted they would allocate funds were:

- Affordable Housing
- Strong, Livable Neighbourhoods
- Good Governance

When asked to rank the strategic objectives from most to least important, the top three objectives were:

- Affordable Housing
- Good Governance
- Sustainable Transportation

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

Impacts to Financial Plan

The public input should inform the 2019 financial plan.

CONCLUSIONS

The budgeting process continues to evolve and improve each year. Feedback from this year will inform next year’s budget process.

Respectfully submitted,



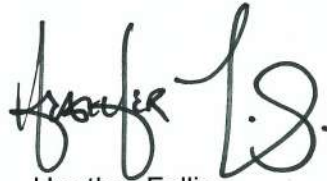
Bill Eisenhauer
Head of Engagement



Susanne Thompson
Deputy City Manager



Jo-Ann O'Connor
Deputy Director of Finance



Heather Follis
Customer Service Advisor

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:


Date: Feb 6, 2019

List of Attachments

- 2019 Financial Plan Engagement Summary