



## Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of December 5, 2019

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**To:** Committee of the Whole **Date:** November 28, 2019

**From:** Susanne Thompson, Deputy City Manager/Chief Financial Officer  
Bill Eisenhauer, Head of Engagement

**Subject:** Draft 2020 Financial Plan - Public Input Summary

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### RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive this report for information.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City began public consultation on the draft 2020 Financial Plan on November 6, 2019. Citizens were invited to provide input on the proposed budget through a variety of means, including an online survey, written submissions (email), and/or through participation in the Budget Town Hall held on November 21. The budget consultation period closed November 24, 2019.

### PURPOSE

This report provides Council with public feedback and correspondence received during the consultation period for the 2020 Financial Plan.

### BACKGROUND

On October 17, 2019, the Draft 2020 Financial Plan was provided to Council. The Financial Plan includes a summary of key performance measures, descriptions of programs and services, as well as the proposed operating and capital budget (revenue and expenditures) for the upcoming year. The budget also includes projected budget impacts from utility increases, municipal property tax increases and five-year forecasts for both residential and business properties.

As part of the City's budget outreach and engagement, staff used a number of different tools and tactics to engage and inform the public about the draft 2020 Financial Plan. A special section of the City's website – [Victoria.ca/budget](http://Victoria.ca/budget) – provided a one-stop hub for budget information and engagement opportunities. A budget summary brochure was prepared to give people a plain-language overview of the operational and capital budgets, as well as highlights of the City's programs and services planned for the coming year. Those who wanted to dive more deeply could review the full Financial Plan. Details on the Budget Town Hall and the online budget survey were also hosted here.

Budget consultation was actively promoted through social media, print advertising, digital display boards at City Hall, the City's Connect community e-newsletter, posters and handbills, direct stakeholder and neighborhood outreach, and media advisories.

Targeted engagement efforts were directed to groups not traditionally heard to ensure their voices are part of the conversation about Budget 2020 – with a particular focus on youth and renters. Again this year, the City collaborated with the City of Victoria Youth Council to host a Budget Town Hall Youth Night to foster civic financial literacy and gather feedback for City Council on the budget priorities of youth.

#### Online Survey

A total of 5,110 citizens responded to the online budget survey, a significant increase from previous years. 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, and a potential change to Council remuneration. The survey also gave people the option to dive deeper into specific areas related to the operating budget and capital budget categories.

It should be noted that the online budget survey is not a random, representative survey of Victoria residents, but rather represents the views of those who became aware of the survey and decided to complete it. Comments provided by survey respondents to open-ended questions are contained in Attachment A. Comments are the views of the respondent and have not been edited; however, some comments have been redacted to remove personal information, hate speech, or potential libel (i.e. comments are those of the respondent who wrote them, their reproduction does not indicate any endorsement by the City; nor do they reflect the views of the City, its elected officials or employees.)

#### Budget Town Hall

For the sixth consecutive year, the City hosted a Budget Town Hall. The meeting included an interactive e-Town Hall component and was webcast live. Participants were able to attend and provide feedback in person at City Hall or remotely. Citizens were invited to submit questions and feedback in a variety of ways:

- In person
- Twitter, using the hashtag #victownhall
- An online web form
- Via phone during the Town Hall

The Town Hall was well attended in person and had 53 online submissions. Comments and questions covered a wide variety of topics. Comments and questions are also included in Attachment A.

#### Correspondence

Formal correspondence was welcomed as part of the budget feedback process. More than 200 letters and emails were received from groups and individuals. This is a marked increase from previous years.

#### Budget Town Hall Youth Night

The *Budget Town Hall Youth Night* was a collaborative event between the City of Victoria and City of Victoria Youth Council that connected youth with the City, giving young people the opportunity to ask questions directly to City Council about the Draft 2020 Budget. The event was hosted at the Quadra Village Community Centre's community room timed with the City's interactive and webcast Budget Town Hall/E-Town Hall.

A total of 20 youth participated in the event, which included group activities to explore the City's budgeting process and make decisions about the key priority areas in which to invest the City's 2020 budget. Youth placed "Environment" as the highest budget priority, allocating one-third of

their City budget to programs and services that support parks, growing and maintaining the urban forest, storm water management, and the City's Climate Leadership Plan. Coming in a close second was actions to support "Community Well-being". They split the remaining third of their budget between programs and services in the categories of "A Safe and Livable City" and "Sustainable Transportation."

## **ISSUES & ANALYSIS**

### What We Heard

Of the more than 5100 people that participated in the online survey:

- 87% of respondents said they live in the City of Victoria, with the highest neighbourhood representation from Fairfield Gonzales
- 60% indicated they own property in Victoria, while 35% responded they rent in Victoria
- 17% of total respondents indicated they owned or operated a business in Victoria

Overall, survey respondents noted that spending in operating categories was "just right", with the exception of VicPD, where the majority of respondents (67%) noted that spending was "too low." Another exception was responses regarding the operating budget for Sustainable Planning and Community Development were fairly evenly split between "just right" and "too high."

With regard to capital budget expenditures, survey respondents noted that spending in capital categories was "just right", with the exception of Active Transportation, where respondents felt spending was "too high."

When asked how respondents would like the City to address the rising cost of maintaining services and infrastructure, 32% answered "cut service levels to maintain current tax levels; 27% responded "increase taxes to maintain services at current levels"; 21% said "increase taxes to enhance or expand services"; and 20% said "cut services to reduce taxes".

A total of 41% of respondents said they received fairly good value for tax dollars; 37% said fairly poor value; 18% answered very poor value; and 4% said they received very good value.

When asked how the City should allocate the 2019 surplus, the majority of respondents (58%) answered "save for future infrastructure investment," while 37% answered "combination of invest in new initiatives and save for future infrastructure investment" and 4% responded "invest in new initiatives."

When asked how the City should allocate new property tax revenue generated from new development in the City, the highest choice and more than half (55%) of all respondents said "reduce the tax increase". Half (50%) of respondents said "save for future infrastructure investment" and 16% responded "invest in new initiatives." (Note that responses to this question will add up to more than 100% as respondents were given the opportunity to select all that applied).

When asked if they agreed with adjusting the annual salary and benefits for members of Council to the median income of a City employee (\$70,100 in 2019, excluding Fire and Police), 86% of respondents said they strongly disagreed.

When asked to rank Council's eight Strategic Objectives from highest to lowest importance, the top three objectives were:

- Good Governance
- Affordable Housing

- Strong, Livable Neighbourhoods

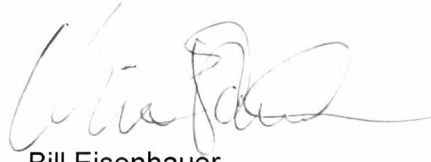
**CONCLUSIONS**

The budgeting process continues to evolve and improve each year. Feedback from the 2020 financial planning process will inform future budget process.

Respectfully submitted,



Susanne Thompson  
Deputy City Manager/Chief Financial Officer



Bill Eisenhauer  
Head of Engagement

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:



Date:

NOV 29, 2019

**Attachment**

A. 2020 Financial Plan Engagement Summary