



Special Committee of the Whole Meeting Report For the Meeting of January 18, 2021

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** January 15, 2021

From: Susanne Thompson, Deputy City Manager
Bill Eisenhauer, Head of Engagement

Subject: Draft 2021 Financial Plan – Public Input Summary

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive this report for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City began public consultation on the 2021 Draft Financial Plan on December 7, 2020. Citizens were invited to provide input on the proposed budget through a variety of means, including an online survey and written submissions (email) by January 10, 2021, and/or through participation in the Virtual Budget Town Hall held on January 13, 2021.

For the second consecutive year, the City collaborated with the City of Victoria Youth Council to host a free event titled, Youth Speak: Budget 2021 in conjunction with the Town Hall.

Targeted engagement was directed to reach under-represented groups, with a particular focus on youth, renters, diverse community groups and newcomers.

A total of 709 individuals participated in the City’s online budget survey, which asked people to share their priorities for investment in 2021. The survey attracted diverse participation that more closely reflects the make-up of the community than in previous budget engagement surveys. An additional 185 people provided written feedback on the draft budget.

Affordable Housing was ranked as the top Council Strategic Objective by survey participants, and it was also a key theme in written submissions. Housing and homelessness; Health, well-being and social issues; and Climate action and sustainability were rated as the most important priorities facing our city right now. Overall, most survey respondents were satisfied with the repair and maintenance of the City of Victoria’s transportation infrastructure/amenities and with parks and public spaces infrastructure/amenities, with a few notable exceptions including parking and park washrooms.

When assessing essential priorities for Council, survey respondents said they want a city that supports vulnerable populations (58%), is a leader in climate action and sustainability (44%), is

equitable and inclusive (41%), where residents and visitors feel safe (41%) and local businesses are supported in economic recovery (39%), among other actions.

The topic of Police funding was often cited in comments from survey respondents and in written budget input, however people expressed divergent views with some seeking an increase to VicPD's budget while many others calling on Council to defund, or at least freeze, the police budget for 2021 and redirect funding to other City priorities, particularly affordable housing and community services.

Overall, 61% of survey respondents said they receive very good or fairly good value for their tax dollars. This is up from 45% last year and 49% in 2019.

PURPOSE

This report provides Council with public feedback and correspondence received during the consultation period for the 2021 Draft Financial Plan.

BACKGROUND

On November 5, 2020, the 2021 Draft Financial Plan was provided to Council. The Financial Plan includes summary descriptions of programs and services, deliverables as well as the proposed operating and capital budget (revenue and expenditures) for the upcoming year.

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 2021 Draft Financial Plan.

The City's online engagement platform at engage.victoria.ca provided a one-stop hub for budget information and engagement opportunities.

A budget summary document 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. An accessible version was also available.

Those who wanted to dive more deeply could review the full draft Financial Plan. Details on the Virtual Budget Town Hall and the online survey were also hosted here.

Budget consultation, which opened on December 7, 2020 and closed on January 13, 2021, was actively promoted through social media, print and online advertising, the City's Connect community e-newsletter, stakeholder and neighbourhood outreach, and in media interviews.

Targeted engagement efforts were directed to reach under-represented groups to actively work to provide information and opportunities to participate in the Budget 2020 conversation - with a particular focus on youth, renters, diverse community groups and newcomers.

For the second consecutive year, the City collaborated with the City of Victoria Youth Council to host a free event titled, *Youth Speak: Budget 2021*. Due to COVID-19, the event was virtual and ran in parallel with the Virtual Budget Town Hall to foster civic financial literacy and gather feedback from youth, on youth priorities for City Council. Participants tweeted their questions live during the Virtual Budget Town Hall.

2021 Virtual Budget Town Hall

For the seventh consecutive year, the City hosted a Budget Town Hall. Due to COVID-19, the interactive event was held virtually. Instead of gathering in person in Council Chambers, citizens were invited to submit questions and feedback in a variety of ways:

- Submitting a question or comment in the online form at engage.victoria.ca
- Tweeting using the hashtag **#victownhall**
- Submitting a video up to three minutes in length in advance of the event
- Pre-registering to call in during the event to speak up to three minutes
- Calling in during the live event to speak up to three minutes

During the live event, 317 people tuned into the webcast, 10 people phoned in to comment or ask a question, one video presentation was shared, and there were 58 online submissions. Comments and questions covered a wide variety of topics. A list of the online submissions is included in Attachment A. The live webcast was archived and is available for viewing online.

2021 Draft Budget Survey

A total of 709 individuals participated in the City's online budget survey, which asked people to share their priorities for investment in 2021. The Budget 2021 Survey Report, including comments provided by survey respondents to open-ended questions, is included as Attachment B.

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 are the views of the respondent and have not been edited; however, some information has been redacted to remove personal information, hate speech, or potential libel comments.

Written Budget Feedback

Formal correspondence was welcomed as part of the budget feedback process, with 185 emails received, which are included in Attachment C.

Youth Speak: Budget 2021

This virtual event was a collaboration between the City of Victoria and the City of Victoria Youth Council to connect local youth with the City and give young people the opportunity to ask questions directly to Council via Twitter about the 2021 Draft Budget during the Budget Town Hall event. Eight youth participated in the event, which included facilitated group discussions to learn more about the City's budgeting process and how Council makes decisions about the key priority areas in which to invest the City's 2021 budget. Areas of interest included the police budget, affordable housing and support for local business. Although the event was intended to run from 6 p.m. - 7:30 p.m., participants were so engaged that the event extended until 9 p.m.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

The City's online engagement platform provides enhanced data on how people interact with an engagement project online. Over the five-week budget engagement period (December 7, 2020 to January 13, 2021), the City's budget consultation resulted in:

- 2,633 people **aware** of the draft budget (visited at least one page of the Budget project)
- 1,261 people **informed** of the draft budget (downloaded a document, visited multiple project pages)
- 709 completed the budget survey

What We Heard – Online Survey

Who We Heard From

- 88% of respondents said they live in the City of Victoria, with the highest neighbourhood representation from Fairfield at 16%
- 57% indicated they rent in Victoria, while 41% indicated they own property in Victoria
- 16% of respondents indicated they own or operate a business in in Victoria
- 23% indicated they are newcomers (i.e. have lived in Victoria less than five years)
- 16% of respondents were youth, between the ages of 12-24

More renters participated in the online survey than in previous years, with 377 out of 663 (57%) of respondents stating they rent in Victoria. With renters making up 61% of Victoria's population (*Statistics Canada 2016 Census*), the budget survey reached a high percentage of these citizens. In last year's budget survey, 35% of respondents were Victoria renters.

This year, a higher number of youth participated in the online survey at 16%, compared to 3% last year. There was also a marked increase in survey respondents aged 25 to 39, at 50% compared to 28% last year, indicating that the City may be reaching more young families with its engagement activities.

Highlights of 2021 Draft Budget Survey Results

Participants were asked **to rank Council's eight Strategic Objectives from highest to lowest importance**, with 1 being the highest priority and 8 being the lowest:

OPTIONS	AVG. RANK
Affordable Housing	3.04
Climate Leadership and Environmental Stewardship	4.07
Reconciliation and Indigenous Relations	4.24
Strong, Liveable Neighbourhoods	4.56
Health, Well-Being and a Welcoming City	4.82
Good Governance and Civic Engagement	4.89
Sustainable Transportation	4.91
Prosperity and Economic Inclusion	5.35

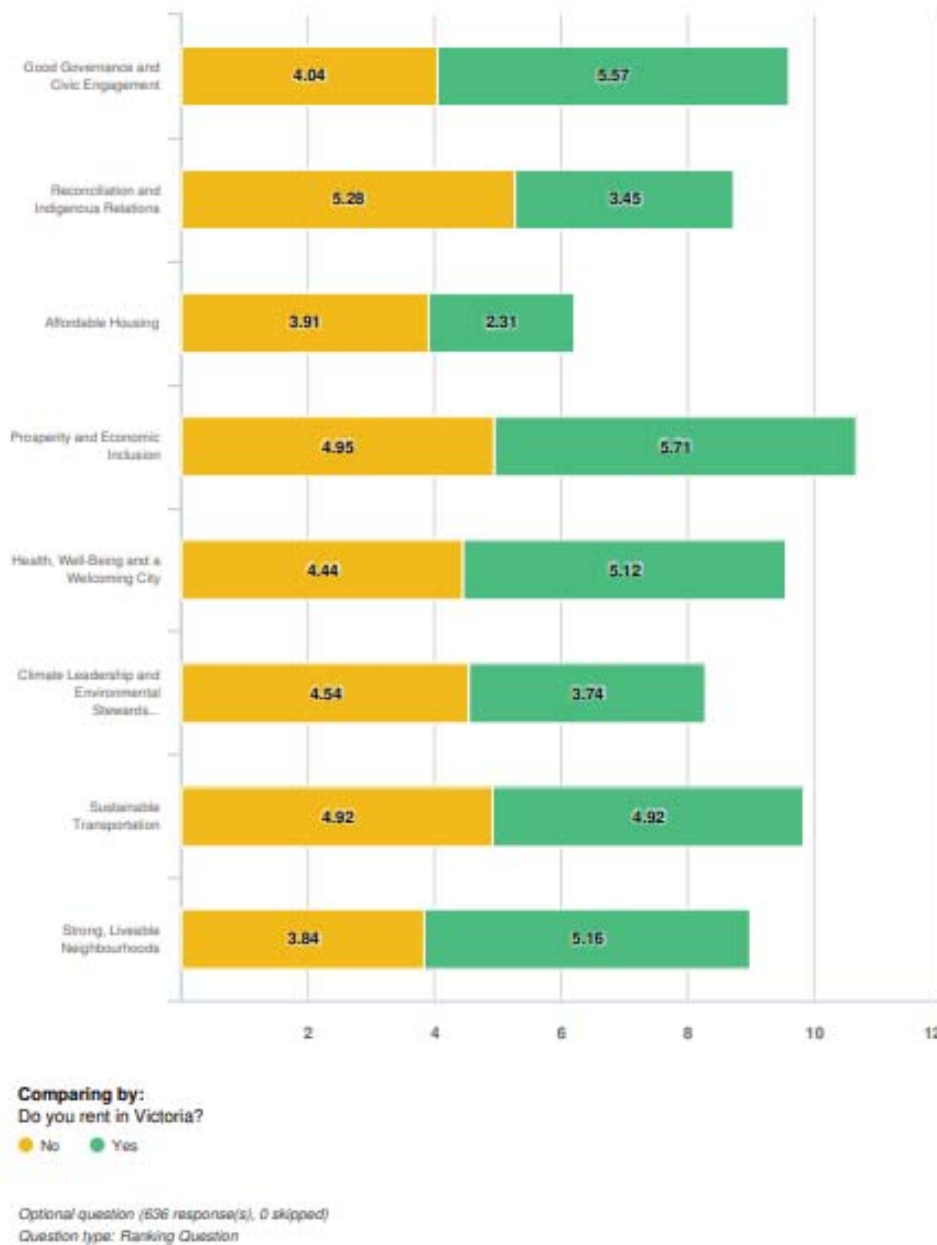
Optional question (674 response(s), 35 skipped)

Question type: Ranking Question

NOTE: Items with the lowest ranking number indicate the highest priority.

This ranking of Council Strategic Objectives has shifted slightly in survey responses over the past three years. Affordable Housing continues to be the top (2021, 2019) or second highest ranked (2020) Objective, however Climate Leadership and Environmental Stewardship has climbed into second spot, from sixth in 2019 and seventh in 2020. Reconciliation and Indigenous Relations has also had a higher priority placed on it in 2021 compared to the past two budget surveys, ranked third this year, up from the least important Strategic Objective in both the 2020 and 2019 surveys.

Digging deeper into the 2021 survey results, comparing the responses of renters to those who do not rent, also shows differing priority rankings. Both renters and non-renters place a high priority on Affordable Housing, with renters placing a higher priority on Reconciliation and Indigenous Relations and Climate Leadership and Environmental Sustainability.



NOTE: Items with the lowest ranking number indicate the highest priority.

Ranking of Strategic Plan Objectives (Highest to Lowest Priority)	
Renters	Non-Renters
1. Affordable Housing	1. Strong, Liveable Neighbourhoods
2. Reconciliation and Indigenous Relations	2. Affordable Housing
3. Climate Leadership and Environmental Sustainability	3. Good Governance and Civic Engagement
4. Sustainable Transportation	4. Health, Well-Being and a Welcoming City
5. Health, Well-Being and a Welcoming City	5. Climate Leadership and Environmental Sustainability
6. Strong, Liveable Neighbourhoods	6. Sustainable Transportation
7. Good Governance and Civic Engagement	7. Prosperity and Economic Inclusion
8. Prosperity and Economic Inclusion	8. Reconciliation and Indigenous Relations

When asked to **rank a list of the most important priorities facing our city right now**, survey respondents said their top five priorities were:

- | | |
|--|------|
| 1. Housing (affordable, rental, missing middle) and homelessness | 2.75 |
| 2. Health, well-being and social issues | 3.74 |
| 3. Climate action and sustainability | 4.41 |
| 4. Economic recovery and jobs | 4.65 |
| 5. Equity and Inclusion | 4.88 |

Followed by:

- | | |
|--|------|
| • Governance and fiscal responsibility | 5.74 |
| • Public Safety | 5.98 |
| • Belonging and engagement | 6.12 |
| • Arts and culture events and venues | 6.35 |

NOTE: Items with the lowest ranking number indicate the highest priority.

People were asked to provide any additional priorities they had that were not listed in the previous question. Key priority themes that emerged from comments included:

- Accessibility and equity for disabled people
- Council to focus on municipal responsibilities
- Financial restraint during pandemic
- Indigenous reconciliation and equity / land return
- Infrastructure maintenance – focus on roads, sidewalks, garbage
- Overdose crisis / need drug addiction support and recovery response teams
- Police defunding
- Police funding freeze
- Police additional funding
- Systemic racism – address it

When asked ***How satisfied are you with the availability, repair and maintenance of the City of Victoria's transportation infrastructure/amenities?***, the majority of respondents indicated that they were very satisfied, satisfied, or neutral.

How satisfied are you with the availability, repair or maintenance of the City of Victoria's transportation infrastructure/amenities?



Optional question (680 response(s), 29 skipped)

Survey participants provided additional comments and suggestions for transportation infrastructure. Key themes included:

- Free bus fares for everyone, especially seniors
- Pedestrian accessibility focus: widen and fix crumbling sidewalks / road calming – make sidewalks higher priority than bike lanes
- Make crosswalks more visible (repaint them) / install lights to those without / create more crosswalks
- More EV stations / for electric wheelchairs too
- Synchronize traffic lights on north-south arteries
- Focus on road maintenance and repair / potholes
- Lack of adherence in 30 km zones
- More native plantings in boulevards

When asked **How satisfied are you with the availability, repair and maintenance of Victoria's parks and public spaces infrastructure/amenities?**, most respondents indicated that they were very satisfied, satisfied or neutral, with the notable exception of park washrooms in which most people were unsatisfied.

How satisfied are you with the availability, repair or maintenance of Victoria's parks and public spaces infrastructure/amenities?



Optional question (686 response(s), 23 skipped)

Question type: Likert Question

Survey participants provided additional comments or suggestions for the City's parks and public spaces infrastructure/amenities. Key themes included:

- Need family-focused / more green spaces downtown
- More cleaning of park washrooms / more public washrooms in parks / extended hours
- Install lighting at Vic West Skate Park / Galloping Goose Trail / key places downtown
- Delay Mile Zero expansion for now
- Increase number of sheltered picnic areas
- Make parks safer
- Restore and remediate Beacon Hill Park
- More seating outdoors downtown
- Include food production spaces in parks / focus on food security
- More accessible playgrounds for all ages
- Introduce playgrounds for seniors in parks
- More basketball courts in parks
- Improve drainage in parks
- More dogs-off leash areas and proper fencing to protect dogs and pedestrians

On the question, ***For 2021, what level of priority do you place on the following for our city?***, survey respondents ranked these items as **essential priorities**:

1. Our city supports vulnerable population – 58%
2. Our community is a leader in climate action and sustainability - 44%
3. Our community is equitable and inclusive - 41%
4. Our community is safe - 41%
5. Our city supports local businesses and economic recovery - 39%
6. Our community is healthy - 38%
7. Our city has the infrastructure it needs for the future - 31%
8. Our city supports multi-modal transportation - 31%
9. Our city embraces arts and culture- 21%
10. Our community is welcoming - 13%
11. Our city is innovative - 11%

For 2021, what level of priority do you place on the following for our city?

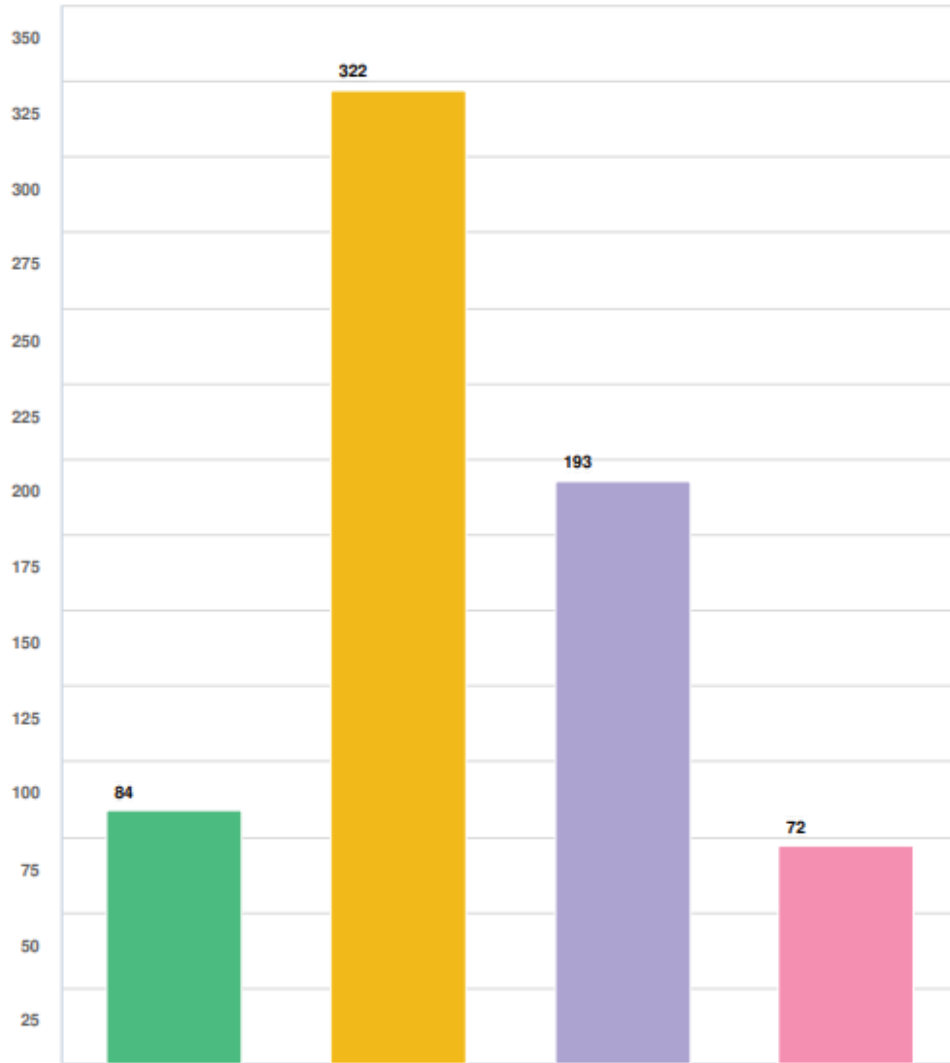


Optional question (686 response(s), 23 skipped)

Question type: Likert Question

When asked to assess the **Value you get for your tax dollars for all the programs, services and capital projects you receive from the City of Victoria**, 61% of survey respondents said they receive fairly good to very good value for their tax dollars.

Thinking about all the programs, services and capital projects you receive from the City of Victoria, would you say that overall you get:

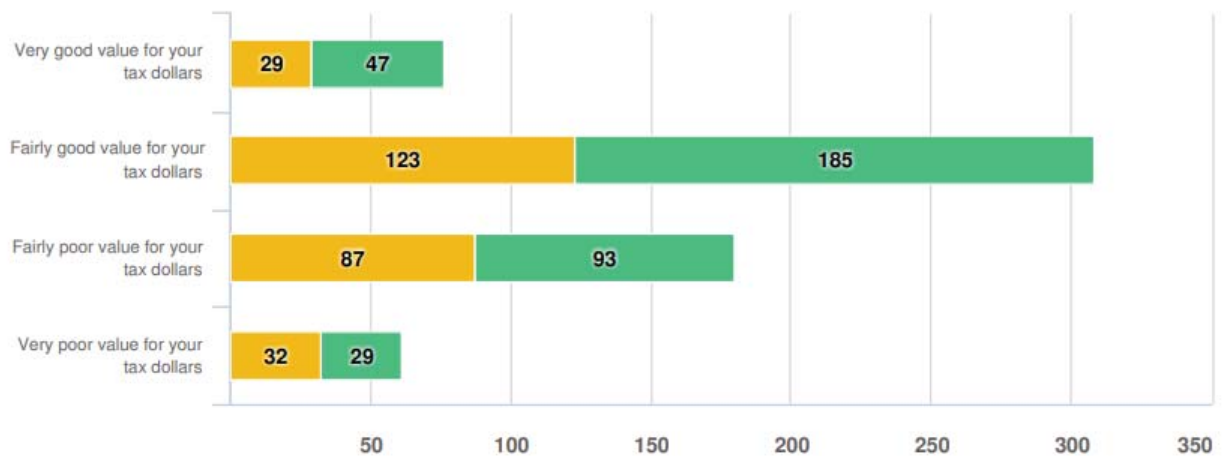


Question options

- Very poor value for your tax dollars
- Fairly poor value for your tax dollars
- Fairly good value for your tax dollars
- Very good value for your tax dollars

Optional question (671 response(s), 38 skipped)

Renters placed more value on the programs and services they get from the City for their tax dollars, with two-thirds of renters saying they receive Very Good or Fairly Good value compared to just over half of non-renters.



Comparing by:
Do you rent in Victoria?
● No ● Yes

Optional question (625 response(s), 11 skipped)

Of the total survey respondents, 10% provided additional **comments and suggestions** for Council to consider as part of the 2021 Draft Financial Plan. Key themes included:

- Keep focused on municipal priorities
- Make climate action a priority
- Affordable housing for all / support rental housing and affordable housing
- Defund the Police / Don't increase Police Budget by 1.5% / Freeze funding for 2021 / Fund social workers and mental health/addiction support / housing
- Increase policing
- Need multi-level government action on homelessness and root issues
- Where is the money to support reconciliation and Indigenous relations?
- Invest in infrastructure
- Delay projects to avoid raising taxes / do not raise taxes / reduce taxes
- Replenish reserve funds
- Lower taxes for businesses / cap on rents / focus on protecting local economy
- More substantial grant amounts for community-led projects without requiring matching funds
- Make recycling easier for people in condos
- Get the Crystal Pool project back on track
- Vic West Skate Park needs lighting
- More secure bike lock-up areas downtown

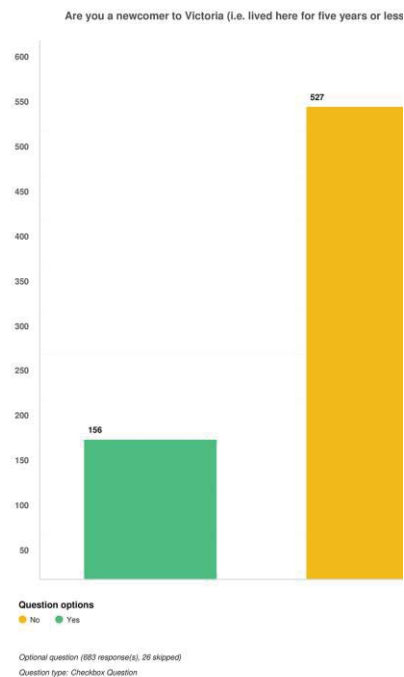
More Information on Who Participated in the Budget Survey

Newcomers

Survey respondents were asked if they are a newcomer to Victoria (i.e. lived here for five years or less). Out of the 683 people who responded to this question, 156 (23%) said they were newcomers.

People who stated they were newcomers said they moved her from:

- Outside of Canada – 8%
- Within B.C. – 42%
- Within Canada – 42%
- Within Capital Region – 7%

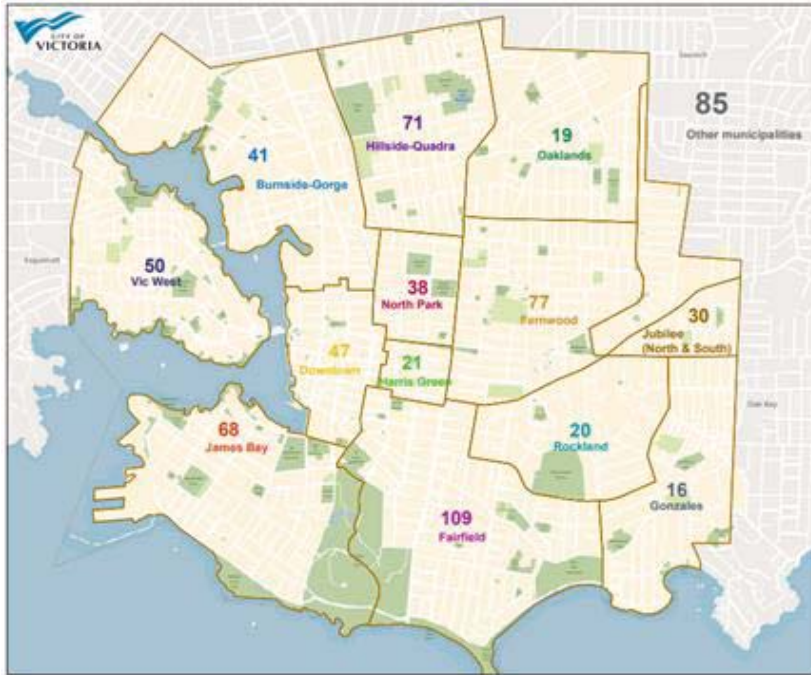


Age

689 participants responded to the question “Please indicate your age group,” as follows:

Age Range	Percentage of Respondents	Percentage of City Population (Census 2016)
12 – 24	15.8%	13%
25 – 39	47.6%	26.6%
40 - 59	22.4%	25.1%
60-79	13.8%	28.2%
80+	0.4%	6.4%

Neighbourhood Distribution



This map identifies how many people participated in the budget survey from each Victoria neighbourhood.

Victoria Neighbourhoods	Percentage of Survey Respondents	Percentage of City Population (Census 2016)
Fairfield (109)	16%	14%
Fernwood (77)	11%	11%
Hillside-Quadra (71)	10%	9%
James Bay (68)	10%	14%
Vic West (50)	7%	9%
Downtown (47)	7%	4%
Burnside-Gorge (41)	6%	8%
North Park (38)	5%	4%
Jubilee (30)	4%	6%
Harris Green (21)	3%	3%
Rockland (20)	3%	4%
Oaklands (19)	3%	8%
Gonzales (16)	2%	5%
Other Municipalities (85)	12%	N/A

Note: Percentages will not add to 100 due to rounding

What We Heard – Written Budget Input

Of the 185 emails received, 139 (75%) were in the form of a letter asking Council to freeze VicPD’s funding for 2021 and redirect funds to affordable housing and mental health and addiction outreach.

- Other key themes included:
 - Fund affordable housing, incentivize non-market housing, acquire properties for non-market housing and community gardens
 - Increase VicPD funding to deal with crime downtown
 - Need to address Indigenous sovereignty
 - Leave Mile Zero is as for budgetary and historical reasons
 - Need more street lighting
 - Remediate Beacon Hill Park
 - Don’t increase taxes; Reduce transfers to reserves

CONCLUSIONS

The budget engagement process continues to evolve and improve each year. Feedback from residents on the 2021 Financial Plan and community priorities helps to inform Council decisions on investments in the City’s programs, services and capital projects.

Respectfully submitted,

Susanne Thompson
Deputy City Manager/Chief Financial Officer

Bill Eisenhauer
Head of Engagement

Report accepted and recommended by City Manager: _____

Date: _____

Attachments:

- Attachment A: 2021 Virtual Budget Town Hall Online Submissions
- Attachment B: 2021 Draft Budget Survey Report
- Attachment C: Written Budget Feedback