



## Special Committee of the Whole Meeting Report For the Meeting of November 27, 2023

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**To:** Special Committee of the Whole **Date:** November 15, 2023

**From:** Susanne Thompson, Chief Financial Officer/Deputy City Manager  
Sheldon Johnson, Director of Communications and Engagement

**Subject:** 2024 Draft Budget Public Engagement Summary Report

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### RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Receive this report for information, and
2. Direct staff to use a similar consultation approach for the 2025 and future financial planning processes to satisfy the consultation provision in section 166 of the Community Charter

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City's 2024 Budget engagement took a different approach from previous years', combining a scientifically valid, random Ipsos telephone interview survey with 700 City of Victoria residents and a series of focused, budget community conversations co-hosted with eight, equity-seeking organizations and close to 80 community members they serve.

The organizations were selected to provide diverse and varied perspectives from across the city and included Silver Threads Society, Victoria Native Friendship Centre, Inter-cultural Association of Greater Victoria, City of Victoria Youth Council, Action Committee of People with Disabilities, Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness, Peers Victoria Resources Society and Our Place Society.

Budget engagement took place from July 31 to September 27, 2023. Key findings from this two-prong approach were shared with City staff to help inform their draft department budgets that are presented to Council in the City's 2024 Draft Budget. Engagement results are also designed to help inform Council's budget discussions. Public input will also include an in-person Opportunity for Public Input on the draft financial plan, pursuant to section 166 of the Community Charter, to be scheduled at a later date.

Engaging with equity-seeking groups in-person supplemented the results of the Ipsos telephone survey and ensured that the approach aligned with the City's Engagement Framework. Marginalized individuals and those with English as a second language do not often participate in phone or online surveys. This engagement strategy was also a way to help build reciprocal relationships with the participating organizations and their community members moving forward. Each budget community conversation involved approximately 10 community participants and a representative(s) from the local co-hosting organization. The conversations consisted of two hands-on, interactive activities which asked participants

what they felt was important to them for Council to fund in the City's 2024 Budget and to rank Council's eight priorities for investment.

The small group, conversation format was designed to create a safe space in which to connect with people who we don't often hear from.

This focused engagement provided the unique opportunity for equity-seeking members of the community to be heard and to have their ideas and input noted. The eight-part series of conversations encompassed urban Indigenous peoples, youth, seniors, persons with disabilities, immigrants and vulnerable populations – those who are currently unhoused and living rough on the streets, sheltering in City parks and/or overnight shelters, residing in a range of supportive housing in the community or in their own independent housing.

In addition to the ranking of Council's eight priorities, the budget community conversations revealed a range of actions for Council to consider investing in, some of which may be funded in the 2024 Budget or planned and budgeted for by City staff in future years upon Council's direction.

Some suggested actions by equity-seeking groups fell outside the traditional responsibilities of local government. For these actions, Council may wish to consider their role as an advocate for change among agencies, institutions and other local and levels of government to help improve the lives of all Victoria residents.

Results from the Ipsos telephone survey and the input from the eight-part series of budget community conversations often aligned. Both forms of engagement identified housing, affordable housing and poverty/homelessness as being top of mind for *local social issues* in open-ended questions.

Community conversations also supported the Ipsos survey results, which ranked Housing as the number one priority for *investment*. Community Safety and Well-Being placed second.

While Transportation was noted as top of mind and in need of investment, Climate Action and Environmental Stewardship was ultimately ranked the third highest core service needing the most attention and investment next year.

While many felt all eight Council priorities were important, among most equity-seeking groups, the least important Council priority was Arts, Culture, Music, Sports and Entertainment for investment *next year*. These results also mirror the Ipsos survey (only 8% identified it as their first choice to fund, followed by 25% as their second choice to fund.)

Engagement with Indigenous peoples in the community conversations identified that while having Truth and Reconciliation as its own Council priority is a good thing, truth and reconciliation should be interwoven into all seven other Council priorities and all the work of the City.

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of Ipsos survey respondents are satisfied with the overall level and quality of services provided by the City with 16% saying “very satisfied” and 56% saying “somewhat satisfied”.

Overall perceptions of the current quality of life in Victoria are positive, with more than four-in-five (84%) residents considering this to be ‘very good’ (32%) or ‘good’ (52%). Less than one-in-five (15%) rate the quality of life poorly.

However, most (63%) residents believe that the quality of life in Victoria has ‘worsened’ over the past three years. One-quarter (25%) feel the quality of life has ‘stayed the same’ while 7% say ‘improved’. Those who have lived in Victoria for 20+ years are more likely to say the quality of life has worsened (71% versus 54% of those who have lived here for less than 20 years).

In the Ipsos Budget Survey, increasing property taxes is the least preferred option overall at 35% to balance the City’s budget. This is more than double than what is reported on any other financial tool. More than two-thirds (45%) of Victoria residents would prefer the City to use corporate sponsorships and naming rights for municipal programs and facilities to balance the budget.

The 2024 Draft Budget Public Engagement Summary is located in **Attachment A**. The full Ipsos 2024 Budget Survey Report is available in **Attachment B**. Detailed notes taken during budget community conversations with the eight, equity-seeking groups are located in **Attachment C**.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Through the City’s budget engagement, which included statistically valid polling by nationally recognized firm Ipsos and focused conversations with equity seeking groups, there is clear support for Council’s priorities in their Strategic Plan, with the top priority for nearly all groups being Housing, Community Well-Being and Safety, and Climate Action and Environmental Stewardship.

This approach provides valuable feedback for the City’s 2024 and future-year budget planning, in addition to meeting the statutory requirement for consultation.

Respectfully submitted,

Susanne Thompson  
Deputy City Manager/Chief Financial Officer

Sheldon Johnson  
Director of Communications & Engagement

**Report accepted and recommended by City Manager.**

## **List of Attachments:**

Attachment A: 2024 Draft Budget Public Engagement Summary

Attachment B: 2024 Ipsos Budget Survey Report for City of Victoria

Attachment C: 2024 Budget Community Conversation Series Notes