



Committee of the Whole Meeting Report For the Meeting of October 24, 2024

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** October 15, 2024

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

Subject: 2025 Draft Budget Public Engagement Summary Report

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive this report for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City's 2025 Budget engagement followed last year's approach, 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 86 community members they serve.

The organizations were selected to provide diverse and varied perspectives from across the city and included Silver Threads Service, Victoria Native Friendship Centre, City of Victoria Youth Council, Victoria Disability Resource Centre, Victoria Pride Society, Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness, Peers Victoria Resources Society and Our Place Society.

Budget engagement took place from June 3 to August 28, 2024. Engagement results are designed to help inform Council's budget discussions. Further public engagement will include an opportunity for public input through the City's online engagement platform, inviting feedback on the draft financial plan in writing or pre-recorded video from October 25 to November 17, 2024. These opportunities for public input meet section 166 of the Community Charter.

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 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.

Each budget community conversation involved approximately 8-12 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 2025 Budget and to identify their top three of Council's eight priorities for investment next year.

The small group conversation format was designed to create a safe space in which to connect with people the City doesn'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, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and vulnerable populations – those who are currently unhoused and living rough on the streets, sheltering in City parks and/or overnight shelters, and residing in a range of supportive housing in the community or in their own independent housing.

In addition to ranking the top three Council priorities for investment next year, the budget community conversations revealed a range of actions for Council to consider investing in, some of which may be funded in the 2025 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 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.

According to the Ipsos survey results, the top two priorities for *more investment* next year are '**making it easier to build all types of housing, across the city, for everyone**' (68%), followed by '**working with community partners and other levels of government to improve safety and well-being**' (58%), at par with 2023.

Community conversations supported the Ipsos survey results, ranking **housing** (50%) as the number one priority for investment, with **community safety and well-being** (28%) placing second.

The Ipsos survey results placed **transportation** (9%) in third place with **climate action** (6%) dropping to fourth place this year for needing the most attention and investment. While transportation was not ranked as one of the top three priorities in the community conversations, it was ranked as a priority and was also a topic of discussion among all eight groups.

Parks and recreation (4%) comes in fifth place, followed by **arts and culture** (3%).

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.

A majority (72%) of Ipsos survey respondents are satisfied with the overall level and quality of services

provided by the City, with 18% saying 'very satisfied' and 54% saying 'somewhat satisfied'.

Overall perceptions of the current quality of life in Victoria are positive (85%); residents consider it to be 'very good' (28%) or 'good' (57%), with 14% rating the quality of life 'very poor' (2%)/'poor' (12%).

Victoria's good quality of life is attributed to a variety of factors, with three most frequently mentioned open-ended responses being 'good weather/climate' (20%), 'nice place to live/enjoy living here' (15%) and 'beautiful city' (15%).

The high cost of living is the number one reason for rating Victoria's quality of life poorly (40%), followed by housing availability/affordability (21%), public safety/crime (17%) and poverty/homelessness (15%).

However, most (62%) residents believe that the quality of life in Victoria has 'worsened' over the past three years. Nearly three-in ten (28%) 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 (67% versus 55% of those who have lived here for less than 20 years).

To balance the City's Budget, 40% of residents are most likely to prefer that the City continue to offer the same services *but not to the same level*, for example reduced hours. Increasing property taxes is the least preferred option overall at 38% to balance the City's budget, up three percentage points from 2023. This is more than double than what is reported on any other financial tool.

The 2025 Draft Budget Public Engagement Summary is located in **Attachment A**. The full Ipsos 2025 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 two priorities for investment next year being Housing and Community Well-Being and Safety. This approach provides valuable feedback for the City's 2025 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: 2025 Draft Budget Public Engagement Summary
Attachment B: 2025 Ipsos Budget Survey Report for City of Victoria
Attachment C: 2025 Budget Community Conversation Series Notes