



Governance and Priorities Committee Report For the Meeting of April 9, 2015

To: Governance and Priorities Committee **Date:** April 2, 2015
From: Katie Hamilton, Director of Citizen Engagement and Strategic Planning
Subject: Summary of Public Input on Draft Budget and Draft Strategic Plan

Executive Summary

Over the past year a new public engagement strategy was developed and implemented to increase public understanding and input on the financial planning and strategic planning processes. Part of a two-phase engagement program aimed at introducing participatory budgeting opportunities in 2016, the engagement program to date has focussed on improved financial information, increased notice of public participation opportunities, and new innovative tools for the public to engage in the decision-making process. Several new practices, tools and techniques were introduced this year including:

- Aligning the draft strategic plan and budget processes
- Inviting public input on the City's new strategic plan
- Introducing a comprehensive financial plan document outlining details about the organization and each business unit in the City of Victoria budget
- Creating short, educational videos to both launch engagement and explain the budget process, and to assist residents and businesses in understanding the City budget and how it impacts them
- Applying a focused and highly visual social media strategy
- Offering a "budget at a glance" package to provide a high-level overview of the draft budget and strategic plan, and "Understanding Your Municipal Budget" guide to assist in understanding the budget process
- Inviting input on how to allocate an estimated \$4.5 million in funding from new assessment revenue and 2014 surplus
- Responding to earlier public feedback, communicating holistic impacts to tax payers in terms of increases to taxes and utilities, providing 5 year forecasts
- Hosting Town Hall, as well as an e-Town Hall, to make engaging in the budget conversation easier and accessible to demographics we may not have heard from in the past
- Providing a Sign Language Interpreter for hard of hearing guests attending the Town Hall
- Utilizing a new online survey tool to improve the administrative compilation and reporting of the public input received

An online survey consisting of both a short and long version was launched on Friday, March 6 and March 29. 1,527 people participated in the survey.

In terms of survey respondents, 86% of respondents indicated they lived in Victoria. 19% were from Fairfield, 11% from Fernwood, and 10% from James Bay. 24% of respondents indicated they owned or operated a business in Victoria, which is a higher level of participation from business than the City typically experiences. 38% of respondents were under 40, 32% were between the ages of 40-59, and 24% of respondents to the survey were 60 or older.

An additional 152 letters/emails were received.

A Town Hall meeting was hosted on Monday, March 23 at City Hall. A record number of over 250 citizens attended in person. Overflow seating and live webcasting were offered in the City Hall foyer to accommodate those who could not sit in the Council Chambers.

For the first time, the City piloted an electronic component to the Town Hall, introducing a new "e-Town Hall" tool to the City's engagement program. This gained high community interest, allowing individuals to participate in the event remotely. Over 102 comments and questions were directed to Council or staff collectively through social media, web submission and phone with additional questions from those in attendance. Questions were interchanged between in-present attendees and those attending "virtually". Aside from the election, the Town Hall was the highest viewed meeting the City has webcast to date, receiving double the amount of online viewers of any other Council or Committee meeting held at city Hall.

In comparison to previous years, public involvement in the financial planning process significantly increased. Last year, a total of 15 people attended the budget information sessions held at City Hall, with 38 people watching the webcast remotely and 47 completing surveys.

The majority of survey respondents stated they agreed with the proposed tax increase and the majority (64%) of survey respondents were moderately (51%) to very satisfied (13%) with the programs and services they receive for their tax dollars.

When asked about the importance of the draft strategic objectives, the five objectives that ranked the highest were (in no order):

- Complete a multi-modal active transportation network
- Strive for excellence in planning and land-use
- Steward water systems and waste streams responsibly
- Enhance and steward public places, green spaces and food production
- Engage and empower the community

In regards to where to direct the estimated \$4.5 million of unallocated funding, the community identified the following objectives as to where they would like to see the funding directed (listed in order):

- 1) Complete a multi-modal active transportation network
- 2) Enhance and steward public places, green spaces and food production
- 3) Create prosperity through economic development
- 4) Strive for excellence in planning and land-use
- 5) Make Victoria more affordable

When asked within the capital budget whether investment should be higher, lower or "just right", the majority were "just right", with exception of active transportation. The majority of respondents felt that spending should be higher.

When asked specifically about the dental benefits for City Council, a slight majority (53%) were supportive of this occurring and 47% were not. Of those who answered yes, the majority felt it should be introduced in 2015, not 2019.

Hundreds of detailed comments related to all business units and the budget overall, are included which will also be considered to further inform projects and initiatives outlined within the financial plan and strategic plan over the coming months.

A detailed summary "*Your Priorities. Your Budget. Your City. Engagement Summary Report*" including and all verbatim input received are attached as appendices.

Recommendation

- 1.) Council accept this report for information.

Respectfully submitted



Katie Hamilton
Director of Citizen
Engagement and
Strategic Planning

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:
Date:



Apr. 2, 2015

List of Attachments:

Appendix A: *Engagement Summary Report*