

**To: Warden and Members of County Council**

**From: Director of Corporate Services**

## 2024 Budget Engagement Survey

### RECOMMENDATION

---

1. That the 2024 Budget Public Survey Results be received for consideration during final budget deliberations.

### REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

---

- 2024 Budget online public survey results are in
  - over 500 comments and suggestions received through 1,009 responses to the online public survey
  - 68% responded that they receive fair or good value for their tax dollar
  - majority of respondents felt that each of the services should be at least maintained at the current service levels

### Implementation Points

The public engagement process is intended to inform County Council and staff as they plan the level of public services for consideration in the 2024 business plans and budget, ensuring strategies and programs align with community needs and expectations.

The budget survey also presents opportunity for the County and Area Municipalities<sup>1</sup> to work together. Many of our area municipalities collaborated on strategy and content development for the survey, and the joint outreach helps minimize “survey fatigue” for residents.

### Financial Impact

Although there is no direct financial impact presented in this report, survey results referenced in the report will be considered in determining the 2024 budget and tax levy.

---

<sup>1</sup> With exception of the Township of East Zorra-Tavistock and City of Woodstock for the 2024 Budget Survey

## Communications

Budget communications are undertaken in two phases: first, the survey phase, for which 2024 detailed survey results will be posted on the [Speak Up, Oxford! 2024 Budget page](#). Subsequently, the County will shift to a second phase this fall that informs residents of the 2024 Business Plan and Budget process and what is being proposed for next year.







Advertising for the 2024 Budget Survey was staggered over a three-month campaign period to reach as many residents as possible within a set budget. A range of tactics was also used to reflect different preferences residents and stakeholders have for receiving communication including traditional media; social media; print, digital, and radio advertising; and email communication. Approximately \$4,500 was spent for advertising across all forums and printing bill inserts that were included in municipal tax bills.

The 2024 Budget Survey had strong online engagement. A Google ad campaign (\$101) was viewed over 37,900 times by people living in Oxford County, driving 39 actual budget page engagements. Paid social media advertising had a total reach 9,187 people in Oxford with 311 direct engagements.

A key communication goal of the survey design is education. The budget survey format provides statistics, information and explanation about services, thereby helping to inform residents about municipal services and also “who does what.”

Each municipality has received a copy of survey results completed by its residents. A copy of this report will be shared with the area municipalities.

## Strategic Plan (2020-2022)

					
<b>WORKS WELL TOGETHER</b>	<b>WELL CONNECTED</b>	<b>SHAPES THE FUTURE</b>	<b>INFORMS &amp; ENGAGES</b>	<b>PERFORMS &amp; DELIVERS</b>	<b>POSITIVE IMPACT</b>
		3.iii.	4.i. 4.ii.		

## DISCUSSION

---

### Background

A collaborative area municipal online survey was launched June 14, 2023 through a *Speak Up, Oxford!* engagement campaign for the 2024 Business Plan and Budget process. The survey was designed to provide residents and business owners in the community an opportunity to express their opinion and participate in forming the County’s 2024 budget priorities.

The last collaborative area municipal online survey was conducted in 2021 to inform the 2022 Budget.

The survey content informed how property taxes are being spent on services in 2023 and asked respondents to indicate whether the same services should be enhanced, maintained or reduced in the upcoming year. Participating residents were asked to rate their overall perception of the value received for County tax dollars; identify three top priorities for County services in their community; provide any other budget related comments; and indicate how they would like to be involved in the budget process in the future.

The online survey received 1,009 responses with over 500 individual comments and suggestions (2022 budget survey responses – 596 responses with 900 individual comments).

## Comments

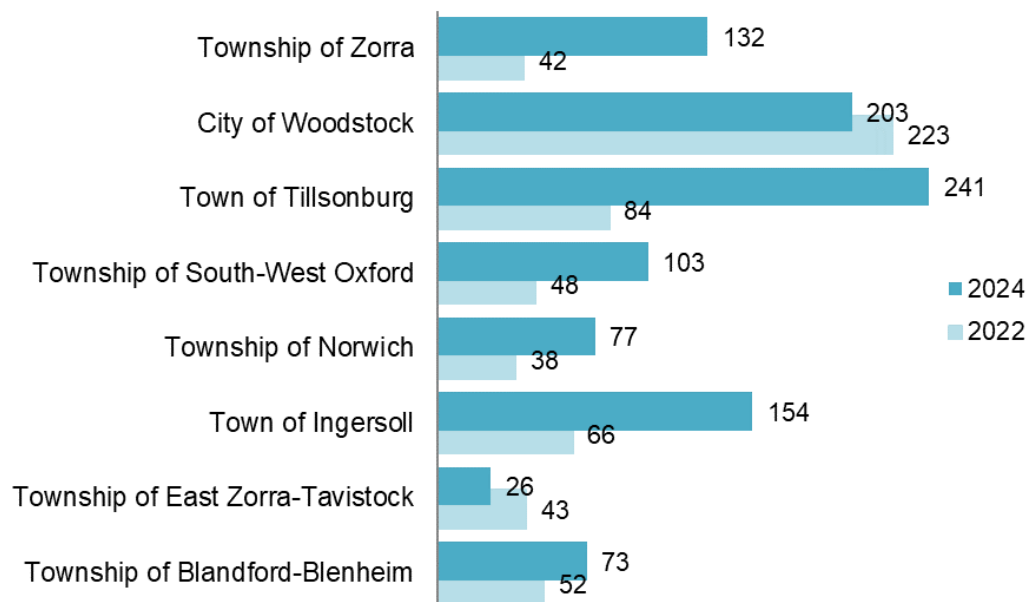
The information contained in this report provides Council with current public insight regarding County services and the 2024 budget. The information gathered through this survey will also help inform Council and staff in terms of how our community would like to be informed and engaged in future processes.

The detailed 2024 Public Consultation Information results are attached as Attachment 1 with the following sections providing a summary of responses.

## Communities Engaged

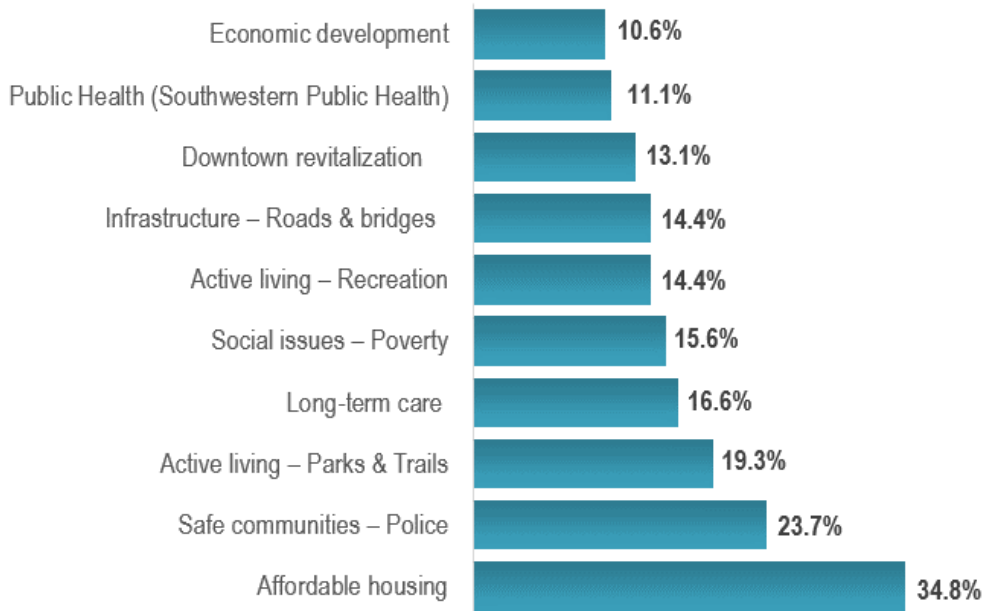
The online survey engaged 1,009 respondents, representing one of the strongest public survey/comment responses the County has received in recent years. The survey was promoted through the County website, social media, advertising, email, and by area municipalities and local media. The results are valuable in understanding the general perception of the community as well as obtaining qualitative feedback.

The following figure summarizes the number of responses received from each Area Municipality between the 2024 and 2022 Budget surveys:



### Community Priorities

When asked what the respondents thought were the top 3 priorities in their community, Affordable Housing was ranked highest. The most notable ones are identified below:



A full list of the priorities and responses are contained in Attachment 1.

### Service Levels

When asked if service levels should be enhanced, maintained or reduced, the majority of survey respondents indicated in every category that they would like service levels to be at least ***maintained***.

The more notable areas that were identified for service level ***enhancements*** are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 - Service Level Enhancements

Service	Description of Service	% in Favour of Enhancement
<b>Housing</b>	County housing includes affordable housing, market rent housing, supportive housing, rent-geared-to-income and emergency shelter.	36%
<b>Paramedic Services - Land ambulance</b>	Paramedic Services provides emergency care to stabilize a patient's condition, initiates rapid transport to hospitals (ambulance), and facilitates both emergency and non-emergency transfers between medical facilities.	28%

Service	Description of Service	% in Favour of Enhancement
<b>Woodingford Lodge</b>	Woodingford Lodge is an Oxford County-owned and operated, long-term care facility providing personal and health care services to residents. Woodingford Lodge provides a person-centred, resident-first model of care to 160 residents in Woodstock, 34 residents in Ingersoll and 34 residents in Tillsonburg.	36%

The primary areas that were identified for service level **reductions** are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 - Service Level Reductions

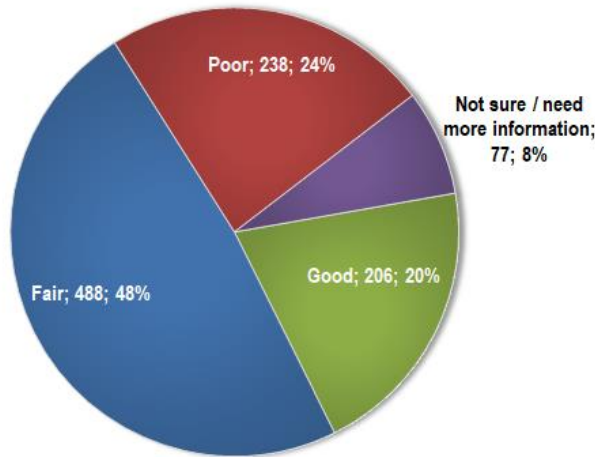
Service	Description of Service	% in Favour of Reductions
<b>Library</b>	Oxford County provides library services at 14 branch locations across the County, and offers electronic services and resources at <a href="http://www.ocl.net">www.ocl.net</a> .	25%
<b>Housing</b>	County housing includes affordable housing, market rent housing, supportive housing, rent-g geared-to-income and emergency shelter.	23%
<b>Child Care and EarlyON</b>	Child Care and EarlyON plans and manages quality child care through external partners and delivers free programs for parents and caregivers with children 0-6 years throughout the County. It also provides child care fee subsidy for qualifying families.	23%

### Comments Received

The budget survey provides a comment section for the service level question, as well as one final open ended comment question. The detailed comments provide added value to the service level rankings and are provided in Attachment 1 to this report.

### Tax Dollars

As illustrated in the following chart, 68% of respondents (2022 Budget Survey – 75%) feel they are receiving at least fair value for their tax dollars, while 24% (2022 Budget Survey – 18%) feel they receive poor value.

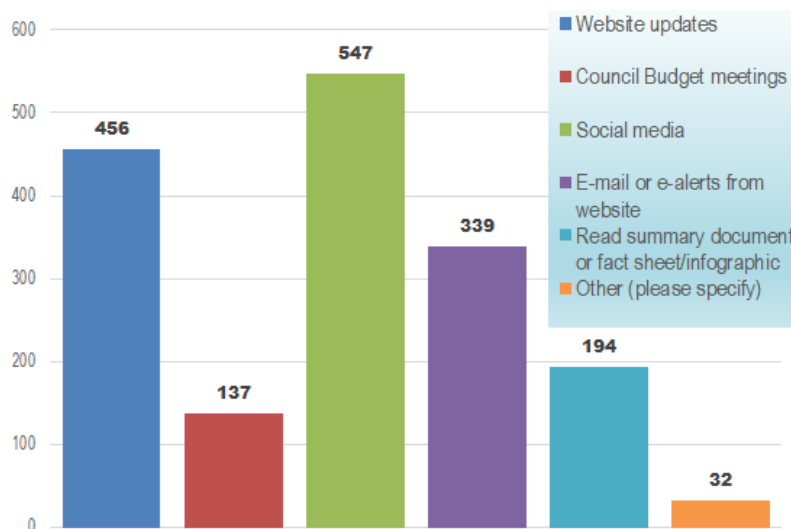


### 2024 Budget Engagement

To provide a direction for future budget engagements, the survey asked respondents how they would like to be informed about the County’s 2024 budget. Most respondents indicated that website updates and social media were their preferred method to receive information. Email communication and fact sheets were also popular responses.

The County does not use email to engage with the general public during the budget process, other than through eAlerts for those who have subscribed to website updates. Some “fact sheet” content is built into the survey design to inform residents about municipal services and programs during the survey period.

Responses to this question in the survey will be valuable in designing our public communications strategy during the 2024 budget process - for instance, by releasing stand-alone fact sheets or inviting residents to sign up for e-Alerts to receive updates throughout the process.



## Conclusions

The results of the online survey demonstrate that there is increasing public interest for participating in the budget process through a survey, suggesting that people want to share their feedback in ways that are convenient and immediate.

Obtaining public engagement and comments is important for setting the direction and priorities for municipal services. The information gathered through this survey will assist in informing Council and staff during 2024 Business Plan and Budget process.

## SIGNATURES

---

### Report Author:

“Original signed by”

---

Carolyn King, CPA, CA  
Manager of Finance

### Departmental Approval:

“Original signed by”

---

Lynn S. Buchner, CPA, CGA  
Director of Corporate Services

### Approved for submission:

“Original signed by”

---

Benjamin R. Addley  
Chief Administrative Officer

## ATTACHMENT

---

Attachment 1 – 2024 Budget Survey Responses