

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

2025 Budget Engagement Survey

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Director of Corporate Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the 2025 Budget Public Survey Results be received for consideration during final budget deliberations.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- 2025 Budget online public survey results are in
 - over 650 comments and suggestions received through 1,136 responses to the online public survey
 - 62% 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 2025 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 Municipalities¹ 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.

¹ With exception of the City of Woodstock for the 2025 Budget Survey

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 2025 budget and tax levy.

Communications

Annual budget communications begin with conducting a survey, informing Council of the results prior to posting on the [Speak Up, Oxford! 2025 Budget page](#) for the public. In the fall, residents will be informed of the 2025 Business Plan and Budget process and what is being proposed for next year.

Promoting the 2025 Budget Survey was carried out over a three-month campaign period to reach as many residents as possible. A range of tactics was also used to reflect different preferences residents and stakeholders have for receiving communication, including traditional print media, social media, digital, radio advertising, and email. Approximately \$5,300 was spent on advertising across all forums and printing bill inserts that were included in municipal tax bills.

The 2025 Budget Survey attracted strong online engagement. Google ad campaigns in July and August (\$210) had over 1.2 million impressions by people living or working in Oxford County, driving 338 actual budget page engagements. Paid social media advertising (\$140) had a total reach of 21,574 people in Oxford with 584 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 of the Area Municipalities has received a copy of survey results completed by their residents. A copy of this report will be shared with the Area Municipalities.

2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Oxford County Council approved the [2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) on September 13, 2023. The Plan outlines 39 goals across three strategic pillars that advance Council’s vision of “Working together for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future.” These pillars are: (1) *Promoting community vitality*, (2) *Enhancing environmental sustainability*, and (3) *Fostering progressive government*.

The recommendation in this report supports the following strategic goals.

Strategic Plan Pillars and Goals

PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3
		
Promoting community vitality	Enhancing environmental sustainability	Fostering progressive government
		Goal 3.2 – Collaborate with our partners and communities

See: [Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)

DISCUSSION

Background

A collaborative Area Municipal online survey was launched June 12, 2024 through a *Speak Up, Oxford!* engagement campaign for the 2025 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 2025 budget priorities.

The last collaborative Area Municipal online survey was conducted in 2023 to inform the 2024 Budget.

The survey content informs how property taxes are being spent on services in 2024 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 1,136 responses with over 650 individual comments and suggestions (2024 budget survey responses – 1,009 responses with over 500 individual comments).

Comments

The information contained in this report provides Council with current public insight regarding County services and the 2025 budget. The information gathered through this survey will also

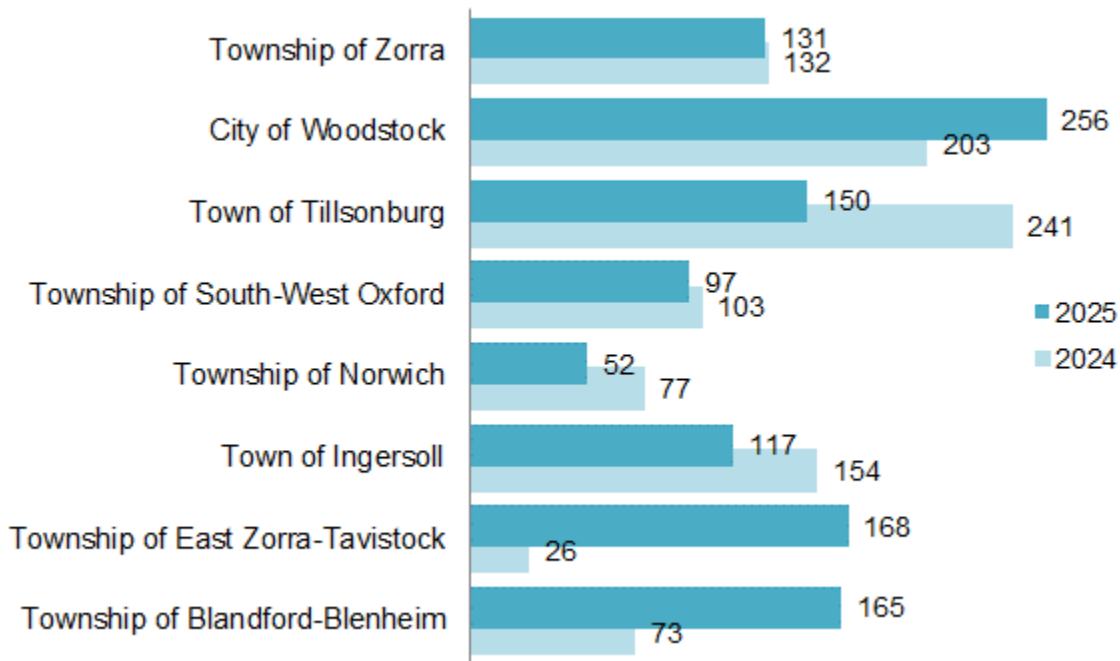
help inform Council and staff in terms of how our community would like to be informed and engaged in future processes.

The detailed 2025 Public Consultation Information results are attached as Attachment 1 with the following sections providing a summary of responses.

Communities Engaged

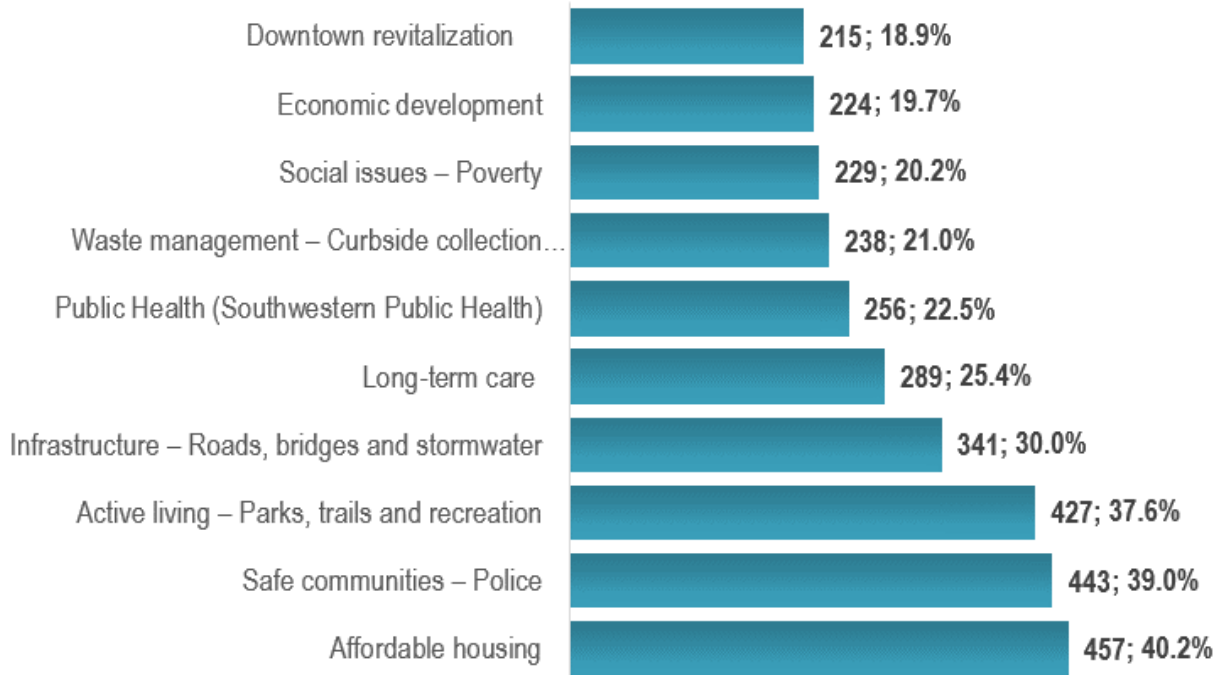
The online survey engaged 1,136 respondents, representing the strongest budget public survey/comment responses the County has received. The survey was promoted through the County website, social media, advertising, email, and by Area Municipalities and local media. The results are valuable in understanding 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 2025 and 2024 Budget surveys:



Community Priorities

When asked what the respondents thought were the top 5 priorities in their community, Affordable Housing was ranked highest. The most notable services areas mentioned 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
Housing	County housing includes affordable housing, market rent housing, supportive housing, rent-geared-to-income and emergency shelter.	26%
Child care and EarlyON	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.	25%

Service	Description of Service	% in Favour of Enhancement
Woodingford Lodge	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.	25%

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

Table 2 - Service Level Reductions

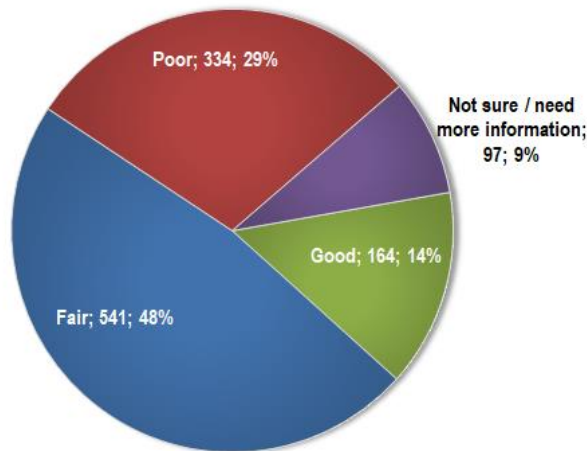
Service	Description of Service	% in Favour of Reductions
Library	Oxford County provides library services at 14 branch locations across the County and offers electronic services and resources at www.ocl.net .	34%
Housing	County housing includes affordable housing, market rent housing, supportive housing, rent-g geared-to-income and emergency shelter.	32%
Community Planning	Community Planning provides professional advice and services to Oxford County and all eight Area Municipalities on the use of land, including but not limited to, planning for growth (i.e. residential, commercial and industrial) and the protection of agriculture and the broader natural environment.	32%

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, 62% of respondents (2024 Budget Survey – 68%) feel they are receiving at least fair value for their tax dollars, while 29% (2024 Budget Survey – 24%) feel they receive poor value.

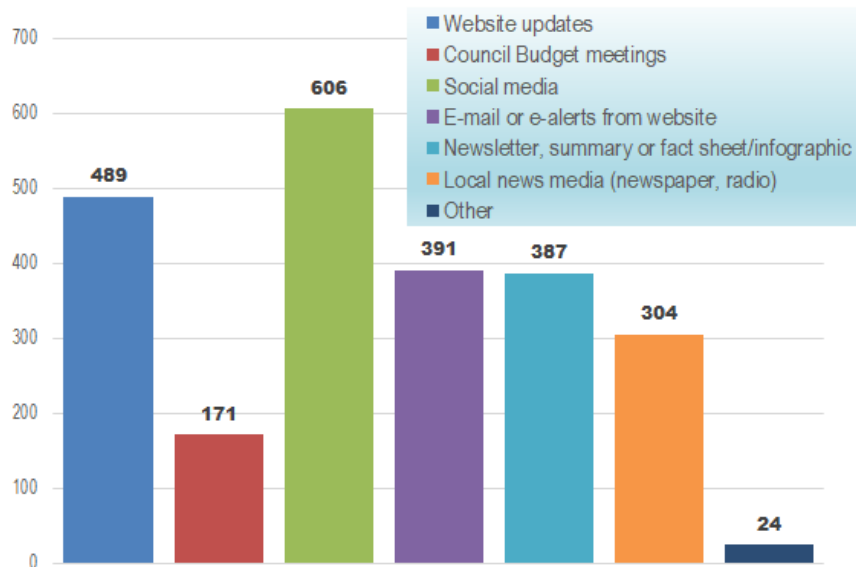


2025 Budget Engagement

To provide a direction for future budget engagements, the survey asked respondents how they would like to be informed about the County’s 2025 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 2025 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 2025 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 – 2025 Budget Survey Responses