

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Director of Corporate Services

2022 Budget Public Consultation Update

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the 2022 Budget Public Survey Results be received for consideration in final budget deliberations.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- 2022 Budget online public survey results are in
 - over 900 comments and suggestions received through 596 responses to the online public survey
 - 74.7% 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 consultation process is intended to inform County Council and staff as they plan the level of public services for consideration in the 2022 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 to work together. All nine 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 2022 budget and tax levy.

Communications

Budget communications are undertaken in two phases: first, the survey phase, for which 2022 detailed survey results will be posted on the [Speak Up, Oxford! 2022 Budget page](#) and then promoted through the County's social media. Subsequently, the County will shift to a second phase this fall that informs residents of the 2022 Business Plan and Budget process and what is being proposed for next year.

Advertising for the 2022 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 to stakeholders such as Chambers of Commerce and economic development partners. Approximately \$4,900 was spent for advertising across all forums and printing bill inserts that were included in municipal tax bills.

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)

					
WORKS WELL TOGETHER	WELL CONNECTED	SHAPES THE FUTURE	INFORMS & ENGAGES	PERFORMS & DELIVERS	POSITIVE IMPACT
		3.iii.	4.i. 4.ii.		

DISCUSSION

Background

A collaborative area municipal online survey was launched June 9, 2021 through a *Speak Up, Oxford!* engagement campaign for the 2022 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 2022 budget priorities.

This is the first collaborative area municipal online survey since 2018 (2019 Budget). The survey was deferred in recent years due to the pandemic's unanticipated imposition to the economy and impact on County and Area Municipalities' service levels.

The survey illustrated how property taxes were spent in 2021, 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 and how they would like to be involved in the budget process in the future.

Residents were also asked to identify their top four priorities in their community. Each question allowed for comments and there was a final question for additional open-ended comments regarding the budget.

The online survey received 596 responses with over 900 individual comments and suggestions.

Comments

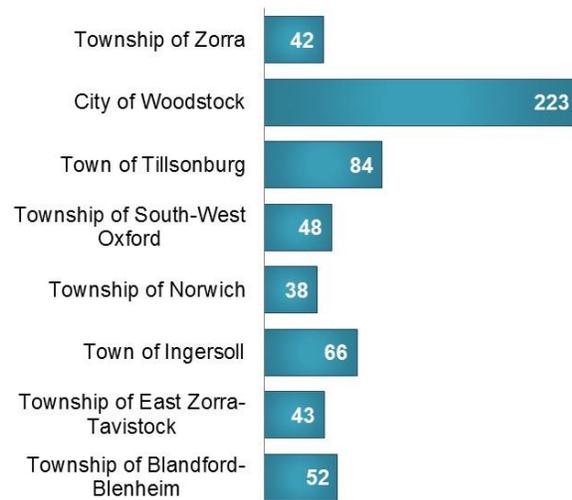
The information contained in this report provides Council with current public insight regarding County operations and the 2022 budget. The information gathered through this survey will also help inform Council and staff in terms of how our community would like to be informed and engaged in future processes.

The detailed 2022 Public Consultation Information results are attached as Attachment 1 with the following sections providing a summary of responses.

Communities Engaged

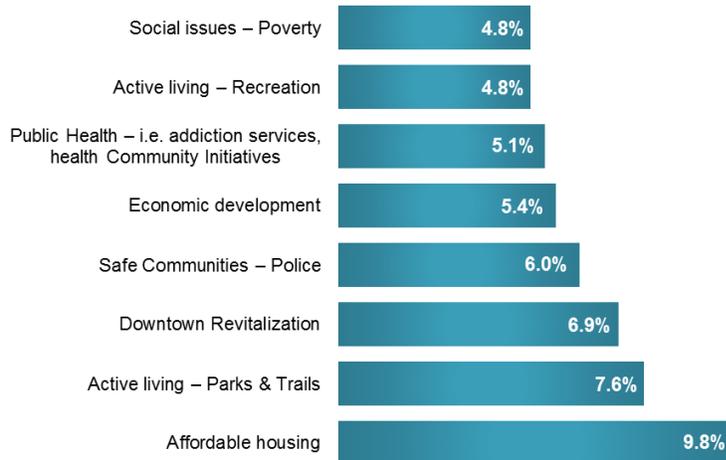
The online survey engaged 596 respondents, representing one of the strongest public survey/comment responses the County has received in recent years. The survey was promoted through the County website, social media, advertising, email to business and economic partners, and by area municipalities and local media. The results are valuable in understanding the general pulse of the community as well as obtaining qualitative feedback.

The following figure summarizes the responses received from each Area Municipality:



Community Priorities

When asked what the respondents thought were the top 4 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	
		2022 Survey	2019 Survey
Housing	County housing includes affordable housing, market rent housing, supportive housing, rent-geared-to-income and emergency shelter.	42%	21%
Waste Management	Waste management services include curbside collection for garbage and recycling, depots and special events, large article pick-up, and services at the Oxford County Waste Management Facility (OCWMF) in Salford.	38%	26%
Woodingford Lodge	Woodingford Lodge is an Oxford County-owned and operated, long-term care facility providing personal and	36%	31%

Service	Description of Service	% in Favour of Enhancement	
		2022 Survey	2019 Survey
	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.		

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

Table 2 - Service Level Reductions

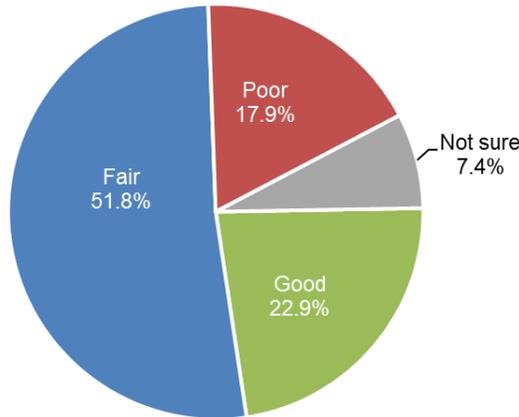
Service	Description of Service	% in Favour of Reductions	
		2022 Survey	2019 Survey
Library	Oxford County provides library services at 14 branch locations across the County, and offers electronic services and resources at www.ocl.net.	20%	30%
Housing	County housing includes affordable housing, market rent housing, supportive housing, rent-geared-to-income and emergency shelter.	14%	30%
Planning	Community Planning provides recommendations and advice to Local and County Councils regarding how land is used in the County, including planning for residential development, commercial and industrial growth, agriculture and enhancing the natural environment.	14%	19%

Comments Received

The budget survey provides a comment section for each 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, 74.7% of respondents (2019 Budget Survey – 81.4%) feel they are receiving at least fair value for their tax dollars, while 17.9% (2019 Budget Survey – 15.0%) feel they receive poor value.

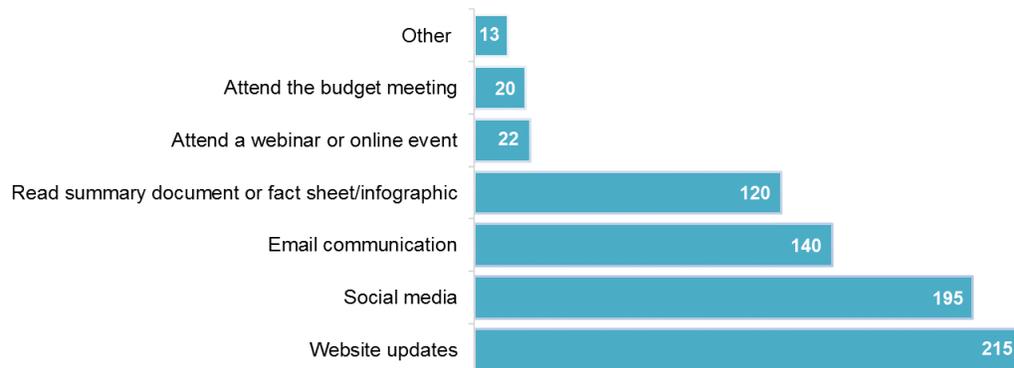


2022 Budget Engagement

To provide a direction for future budget engagements, the survey asked respondents how they would like to be informed about the County’s 2022 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 2022 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 2022 Business Plan and Budget process.

SIGNATURES

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ATTACHMENT

Attachment 1 – 2022 Budget Survey Responses