

**To:** COUNCIL  
**Meeting Date:** 9/17/2024  
**Subject:** 2025 Budget Engagement Survey Results  
**Submitted By:** Sheryl Ayres, CPA, CGA, Chief Financial Officer  
**Prepared By:** Sheena Pawliwec, CPA, CGA, Director of Finance  
**Report No.:** 24-051-CRS  
**File No.:** C11  
**Wards Affected:** All Wards

### **RECOMMENDATION(S):**

THAT Report 24-051-CRS 2025 Budget Engagement Survey Results be received for information.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

#### **Purpose**

With the objective of engaging the public in the budget process, the 2025 budget engagement survey was launched in June. This report summarizes the feedback based on responses received.

#### **Key Findings**

- In total, the survey had 390 respondents; this compares to 402 responses to the 2024 budget survey.
- Survey participants were predominantly comprised of residents and/or business owners with approximately 52% indicating that they reside in a household that includes children under the age of 20, and 23% representing households that include adult(s) over the age of 65.
- 83% of respondents indicated that they have a somewhat or a good understanding of how tax dollars are used.
- Responses on value for tax dollars reflected 28% as excellent or good, 36% as fair or poor, and 28% as neutral.
- The top three service priorities by respondents are roads & winter maintenance, affordable housing, and recreation programming with the lowest three services being by-law & parking compliance, arts & culture, and libraries.

- The top three infrastructure priorities selected by respondents are linear assets, recreation facilities, and emergency services.
- 91% of respondents indicated that user fees should continue to be charged for certain service types, to varying degrees of cost recovery.
- A total of 38% indicated that the value for water and wastewater fees was good or excellent, 25% fair or poor, and 27% selected feeling neutral.
- The leading response by participants was to set an annual tax rate for 2025 to maintain current assets and service levels.
- Most participants representing 64% heard about the survey through City initiated email(s).

### **Financial Implications**

The information provided through the survey will be considered as staff and management continue to prepare the draft budget, not only for 2025 but also will be factored into the 2026, 2027 and 2028 budget forecasts.

### **STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT:**

Strategic Action

**Objective(s):** Not Applicable

**Strategic Action:** Not Applicable

**OR**

Core Service

**Program:** Finance

**Core Service:** Financial Planning

### **BACKGROUND:**

The 2025 budget plan includes a public engagement strategy with the objective of engaging residents early in the process so that feedback received can be considered and incorporated during budget development. Meaningful and effective public engagement improves the quality of decisions made, facilitates citizen understanding of issues and government processes, fosters respect for the views of others, and increases support, understanding and ownership of decisions made. This survey provides important insights regarding community objectives which help to inform budget priorities for the subsequent year.

The budget engagement survey was officially launched through engageCambridge on

June 10th and was open for public input until June 30th. It was advertised through the City's news release, electronic newsletter, social media accounts, digital media ads, and profiling on the City's website. The survey consisted of 12 questions relating to the topics of value for tax dollars and water/wastewater fees, service and infrastructure priorities, subsidization through user fees, tax rate increase preferences, and some demographic details.

In total, the survey had 390 respondents; this compares to 402 responses to the 2024 budget survey. It is important to note that the responses are not considered statistically valid due to the number of responses and the methods used to capture responses. The feedback received continues to provide important insights however and acts as a gauge into the community's priorities surrounding the City's 2025 budget.

### **ANALYSIS:**

A summary of the 2025 budget survey results is outlined below. This information is also provided via the engageCambridge report per Appendix A. Additional resident feedback correspondence received has been included in Appendix B as information. Please note that, where applicable, certain responses were redacted to ensure privacy of individuals and/or remove inappropriate content, consistent with the City's moderation guidelines which can be found at [www.engagewr.ca/moderation](http://www.engagewr.ca/moderation).

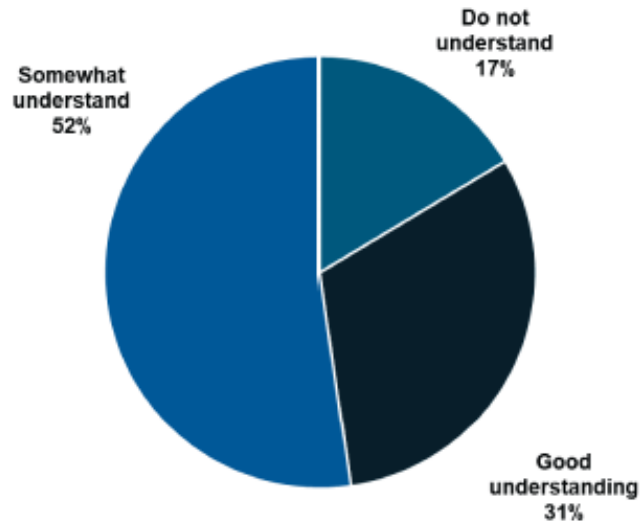
### **Demographics**

Survey participants were predominantly comprised of residents and/or business owners totaling over 98% of responses, with 62% representing long-term residents of the City greater than 10 years. A total of 52% of respondents indicated that they reside in a household that includes children under the age of 20 and 23% represented households that include adult(s) over the age of 65.

### **Knowledge and Value for Services**

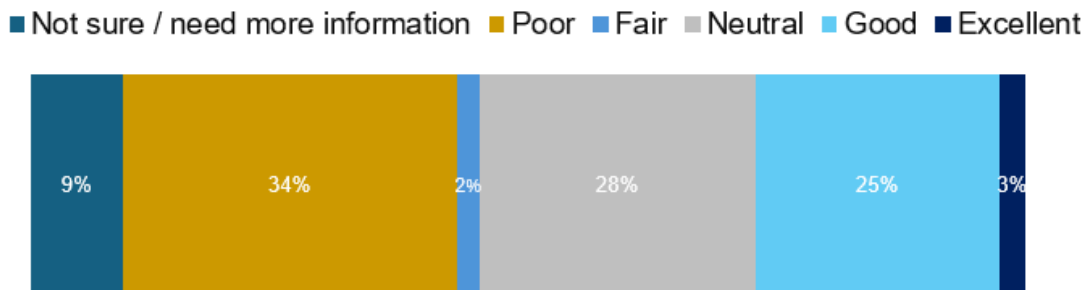
To provide excellent transparency and accountability to citizens and ratepayers in the City's budget, it is important that the information be understandable to the public. Information was provided regarding the structure of municipal governments and taxes levied on the tax bill, and participants were requested to rate their understanding of how tax dollars are used. Most participants at 83% indicated that they have a somewhat or a good understanding of how tax dollars are used within the City of Cambridge budget.

**Chart 1: Understanding of Tax Dollars**



Participants were additionally provided context on the cost of 2024 municipal taxes charged for each \$100,000 in property value assessment in providing over 140 City services (i.e. \$502 annual taxes for every \$100,000 in assessment). When asked to rate the value received for taxes levied, 28% responded excellent or good, 36% fair or poor, and 28% felt neutral.

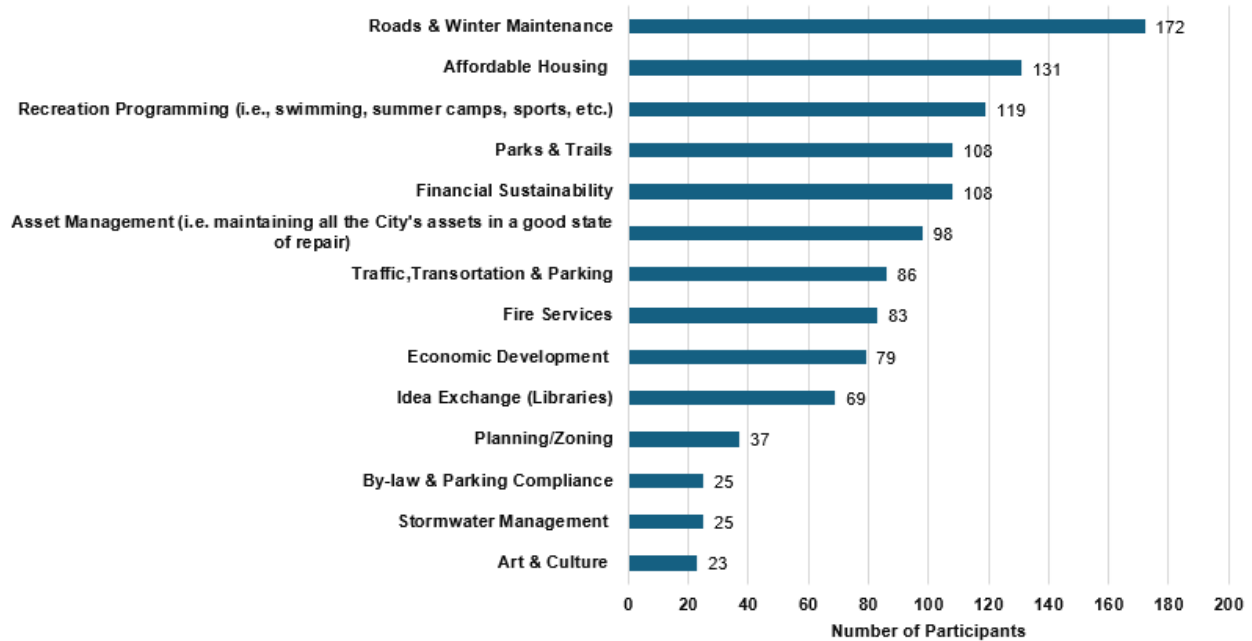
**Chart 2: Value for Tax Dollars**



### Service and Infrastructure Priorities

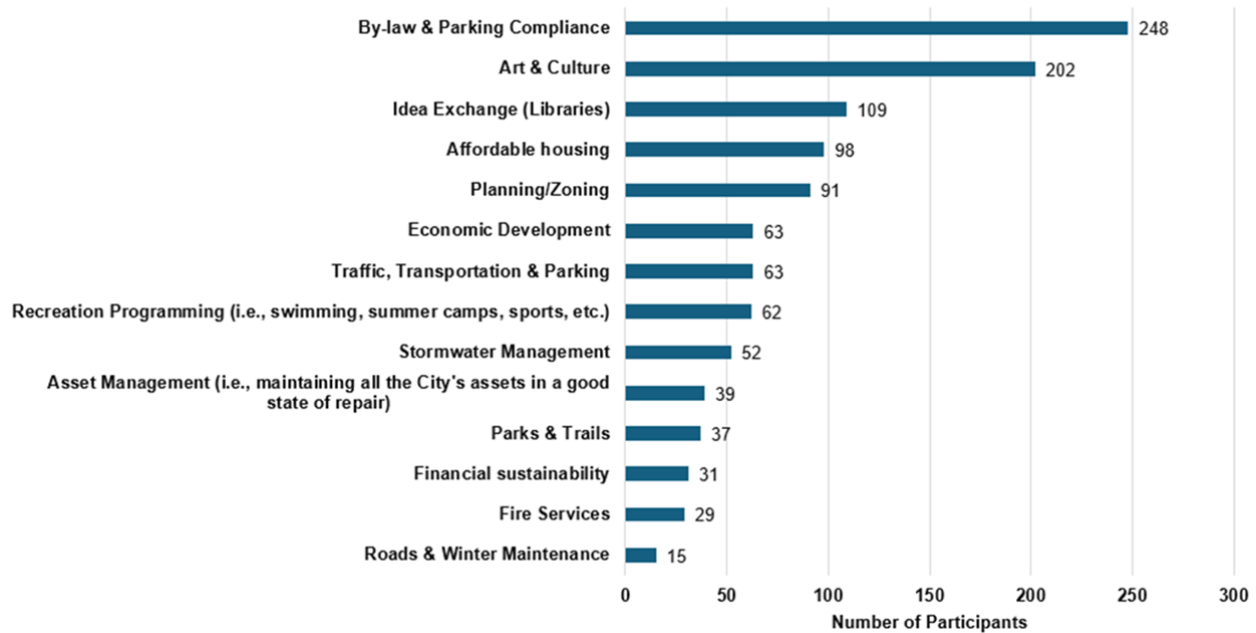
Participants were provided with 14 key strategic service options and were requested to select what they feel are the top 3 priorities. The results are Roads & Winter Maintenance, Affordable Housing, and Recreation Programming.

**Chart 3: Top Three Service Priorities**



Similarly, using the same 14 service options, respondents were requested to then select what they feel are the lowest 3 priorities. The results are By-law & parking compliance, arts & culture, and libraries (also known as idea exchange).

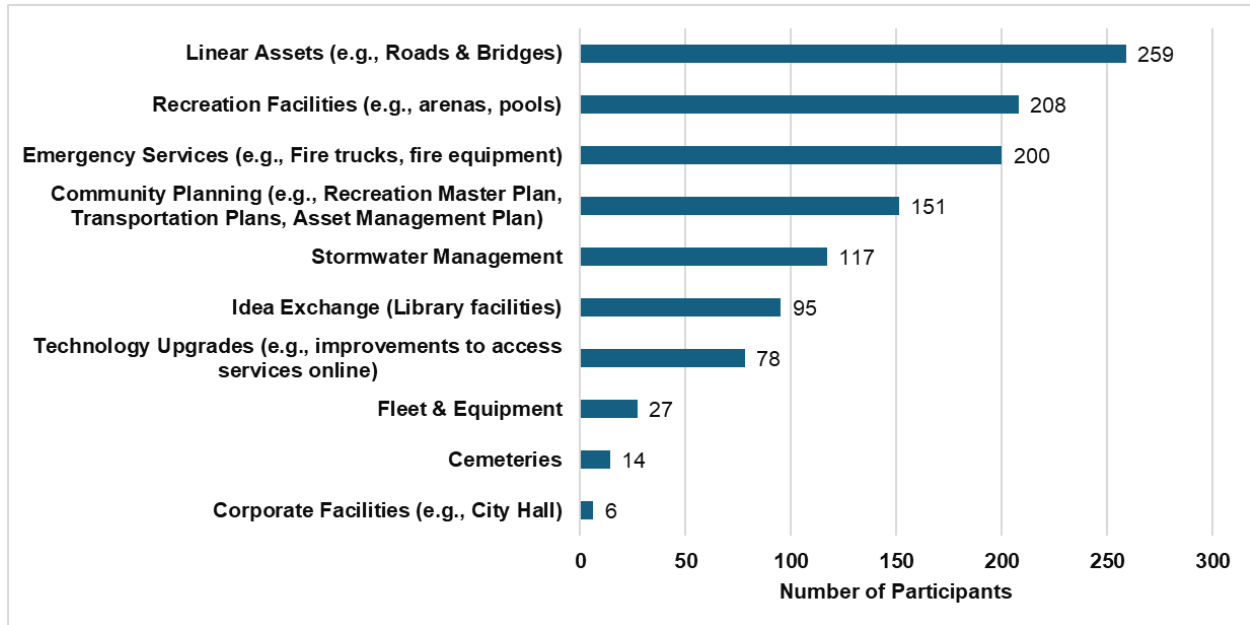
**Chart 4: Lowest Three Service Priorities**



Information was provided on the dedicated infrastructure levy as approved by Council with the 2024 Budget and respondents were requested to select their top three

infrastructure priorities from a selection of 10 options. The results are Linear Assets, Recreation Facilities, and Emergency Services.

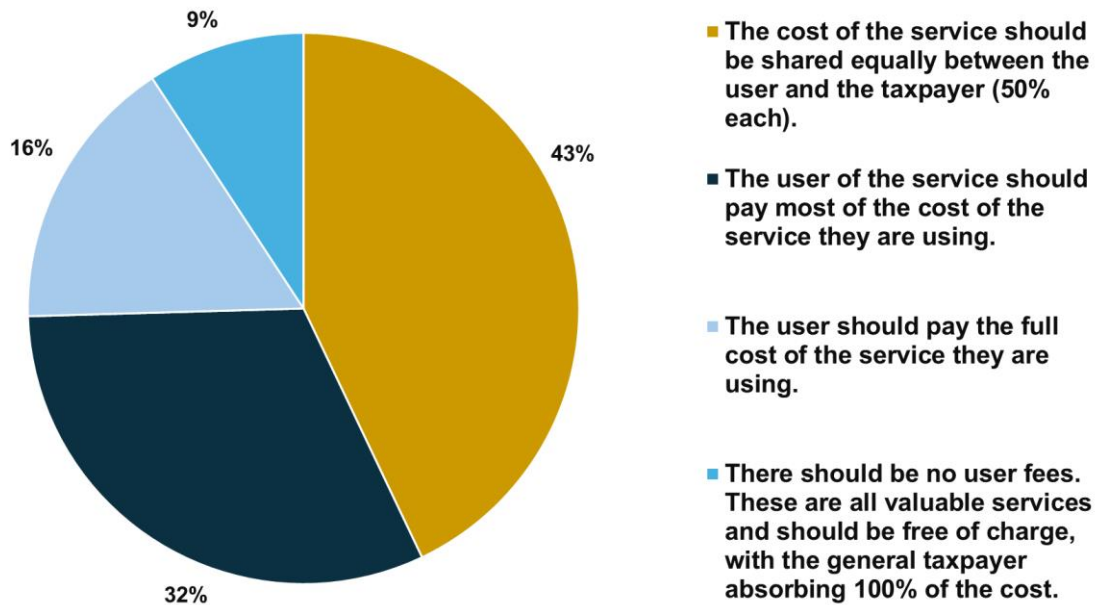
**Chart 5: Top Three Infrastructure Priorities**



### **User Fee Services Subsidization**

Participants were asked to select one of four options on how certain user fee applicable services should be funded. A response of 43% believe the cost of the service should be shared equally between the user and the taxpayer, while 32% believe the user of the service should pay most of the cost of the service they are using. A total of 16% selected that the user should pay the full cost of the service they are using, and 9% selected that there should be no user fees, with the general taxpayer absorbing 100% of the cost.

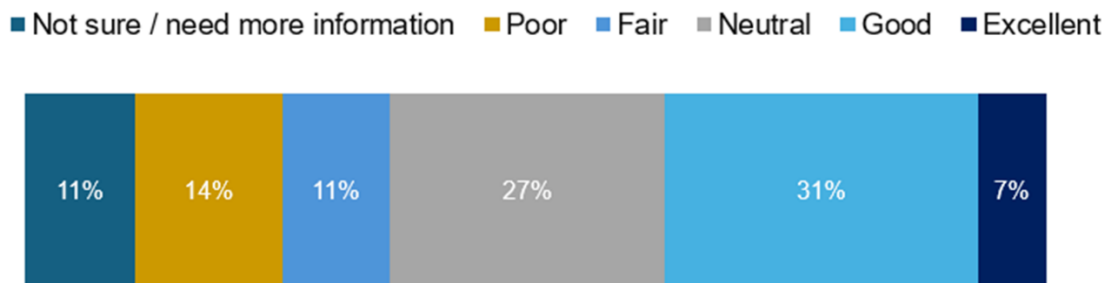
**Chart 6: User Fee Subsidization Preferences**



**Value for Water and Wastewater Services**

Information was provided on the average annual water and wastewater cost per household, and participants were asked to rate the overall quality of service received for these fees charged. A total of 38% indicated that value was good or excellent, 25% fair or poor, and 27% selected feeling neutral.

**Chart 7: Value for Water and Wastewater Services**




**Tax Rate Setting**

Information was provided on what “service levels” mean and this relationship to the tax levy. Participants were asked to rank three statements on how the City of Cambridge should set its annual tax rate for 2025. Evaluating the results using an average ranking methodology, the leading response is to set a tax rate increase to maintain current assets and service levels. This was followed with limiting an increase possibly leading

to service reductions, and lastly to set an increase to maintain and expand assets and services.

**Chart 8: Setting of the Annual Tax Rate**

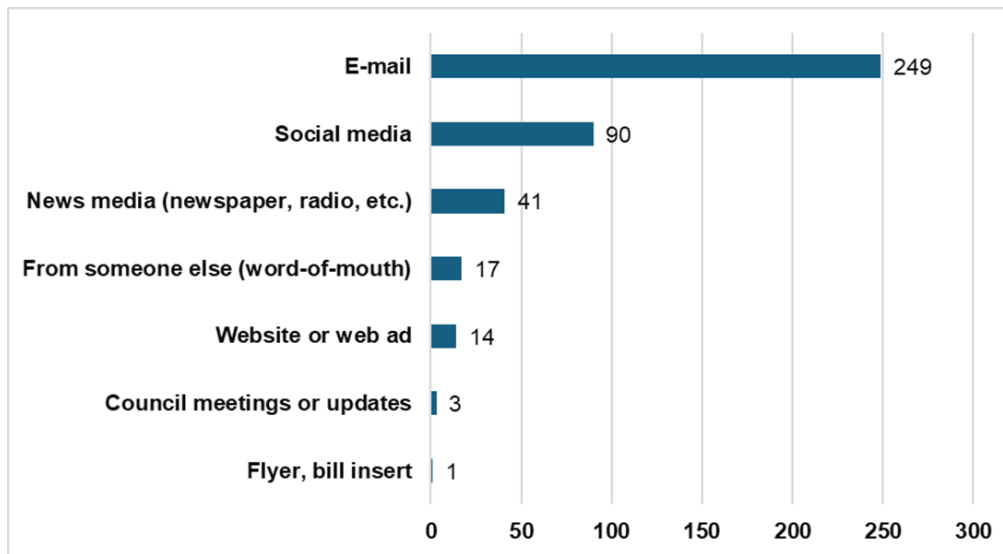
Options	Average Rank
Set a tax rate increase to maintain current City assets and services	1.86
Limit a tax rate increase, even if this means reducing service levels	1.94
Set a tax rate increase to maintain current City assets and services, AND also invest in new assets and expand services	2.2



**Budget Survey Communication**

From a communications perspective, most participants heard about the survey through email followed by social media and news media.

**Chart 9: Budget Survey Communications**



**EXISTING POLICY / BY-LAW(S):**

There is no existing policy/by-law.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

Through report 24-035-CRS 2025 Budget Timeline and Guidelines, Council directed staff to prepare the 2025 Operating Budget in alignment with the City’s Council-approved Strategic Plan and consistent with the tax levy increase forecast through the



approved 2024 Budget which includes an incremental 1% levy to the Infrastructure Renewal Fund (IRF) annually. Further direction was made to staff to present options to reduce the tax levy impact for the 2025 Budget as well as opportunities for additional investment.

During preparation of the budget, staff will consider current levels of service and make recommendations to the Budget and Audit Committee as required to ensure City services are being delivered most efficiently to meet the community's needs. Consistent with the prior year budget process, all impacts from capital projects, growth and new service level initiatives will be submitted as part of the 2025 budget for consideration by Council.

Advertising costs associated with the 2025 budget survey are within the approved 2024 Operating Budget.

**PUBLIC VALUE:**

The City's budget represents responsible financial planning, supporting the sustainable management of financial resources.

The public feedback collected from the 2025 budget survey provides meaningful insights on the community's priorities and will be used by staff and management in preparing the 2025 Draft Budget and Business Plan. Residents and stakeholders will also have an additional opportunity to have their voices heard on the Budget and Business Plan through the public delegations scheduled for December 5, 2024.

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE INPUT:**

Not Applicable.

**PUBLIC INPUT:**

The City's annual budget survey is an informative way for staff and Council to learn about the community's priorities for spending. Staff carefully consider the thoughts and opinions expressed and use them to inform budget preparation.

In June, staff conducted a budget engagement survey through engageCambridge with paper copies available upon request. The data collected through the survey provides meaningful insights on the key issues facing the community. Staff and management utilize this information in preparing the City's 2025 Draft Budget and Business Plan and three-year forecast.

The public is further able to provide input to the 2024 Draft Budget and Business Plan by registering to be a delegate at the Budget & Audit Committee meeting scheduled on December 5, 2024.

## **INTERNAL / EXTERNAL CONSULTATION:**

The 2025 budget survey was drafted in consultation with the Corporate Leadership Team.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The feedback received through the 2025 budget engagement survey indicated a desire to set a tax rate increase to maintain current City assets and services. The information provided through the survey will be considered as staff and management continue to prepare the draft budget, not only for 2025 but how it may shape future years' budgets and be factored into the 2026, 2027 and 2028 budget forecasts.

## **REPORT IMPACTS:**

Agreement: **No**

By-law: **No**

Budget Amendment: **No**

Policy: **No**

## **APPROVALS:**

**This report has gone through the appropriate workflow and has been reviewed and or approved by the following as required:**

**Director**

**Deputy City Manager**

**Chief Financial Officer**

**City Solicitor**

**City Manager**

## **ATTACHMENTS:**

1. 24-051-CRS Appendix A – Budget Engagement Survey Results
2. 24-051-CRS Appendix B – Additional Public Feedback