

Priorities Committee Meeting_Jul11_2023

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE AND UPDATE

2024 Budget Survey Results

Report Purpose

To provide Priorities Committee with the results of the 2024 Budget Survey for the upcoming budget cycle.

Our Strategic Goals

Governance Requirement

N/A

Report

In response to feedback from the 2023 Budget Survey Results, a more robust public engagement plan was developed. Strathcona County developed a survey which Advanis reviewed and provided feedback on. The survey was programmed and administered over the phone using computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI) with live interviewers. In addition to this, an open web survey was also conducted simultaneously through County Voice, Strathcona County's public engagement platform. The surveys were run from April 3 to May 7, 2023, to better understand the views of residents, business owners and property owners as it relates to their priorities, property taxes, service levels and infrastructure in the County. The survey results will be used by administration in development of the 2024-2027 budgets and will also inform Council of resident views and preferences. While the full report can be found in detail in Enclosure 1, some highlights are captured below.

Survey Questions

When asked to select from a list about what the 2024-2027 budget priority should be, the top five results were:

- Ensure long-term fiscal sustainability (38%)
- Minimize property taxes in the future (24%)
- Prepare for and react to changes in the economy (14%)
- Attract new and maintain current businesses and amenities (11%)
- Plan for future growth (7%)

It is interesting to note that the top two results to this question may create conflict from a decision-making perspective, as ensuring long-term fiscal sustainability may sometimes require a significant tax increase(s).

When asked about comfort and preference of tax rate changes as it correlates to service levels (increasing property taxes could maintain or improve services, while maintaining or decreasing property tax levels would likely decrease services levels), the results were:

- Increase property taxes – 52%
 - Of the respondents who selected this answer, 69% support a tax rate increase of 2.0% or more
- Maintain property taxes – 33%
- Decrease property taxes – 9%

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When asked to rate the value received from County services, the most provided response was good or excellent value (55%). Average value responses were next (29%) with poor value receiving the fewest responses (14%).

When asked about their personal financial situation, both in 2023 and anticipated in 2024, results were as follows:

2023

- 9% became better
- 44% stayed the same
- 42% became worse

2024

- 11% will become better
- 56% will stay the same
- 28% will get worse

Respondent profile

Respondents with phone numbers in the Strathcona County area were randomly selected and contacted by telephone and asked to voluntarily participate in the online survey. In total, 575 statistically valid surveys were collected which have a margin of error of $\pm 4.1\%$, 19 times out of 20. An open web survey was also conducted simultaneously through County Voice, Strathcona County's public engagement platform. This open web survey was communicated through County communications channels. In total, 945 surveys were collected through the open web survey. Across the two methods, we collected 1,520 surveys.

Summary

The survey results are part of the information used to help with development of the 2024-2027 budgets. Overall, most respondents support long-term fiscal sustainability and moderate tax rate increases, and resident value-satisfaction of County services is generally high. It is interesting to note that the results of the statistically valid phone survey are extremely similar to the non-statistically valid results from the public web link for 2023 and 2024.

Council and Committee History

July 12, 2022	The Priorities Committee was provided with an update on the budget survey results for the upcoming budget cycle.
March 8, 2022	The Priorities Committee received a report with an update on public engagement options for the upcoming budget cycle.
February 8, 2022	The Priorities Committee received a report seeking feedback on the 2022 Budget process.
December 7, 2021	Council requested that the Public Engagement Options for Budget report be brought back to Council in Quarter 1, 2022.
November 26, 2021	Strathcona County 2022 Budget – Non-Statutory Public Hearing. The Mayor convened the Public Hearing at 4:01 pm.
April 13, 2021	Council approved public engagement on the annual budget for 2022 include activities that do not require in person attendance: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Virtual meetings between Councillors and constituents;• A non-statutory public hearing to be advertised once the budget dates have been determined; and• Inclusion of budget related questions in a mixed-topic SCOOP survey prior to the budget process, including a question on the

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proposed 2022 tax rate.
Council directed that by the end of 2021, administration bring forward a plan to address public engagement on the proposed budget in future years.
November 26, 2019 Council directed administration to provide a report, by the start of the second quarter of 2020, outlining logistics, timing and cost of options for providing specific annual opportunity for residents to have input on upcoming yearly budgets, the report to address the following:

- Opportunities for resident input to be provided prior to the end of July each year to allow timely consideration of the input;
- Include recommendations on how the input is to be received, and
- Who would receive the input.

Other Impacts**Policy:** n/a**Financial/Budget:** No direct financial impact. Information gathered will inform the 2024 Budget deliberations and approval by Council.**Legislative/Legal:** n/a**Interdepartmental:** n/a**Master Plan/Framework:** n/a**Enclosures**

1	2024 Budget Survey Report
2	2024 Budget Survey Council Presentation