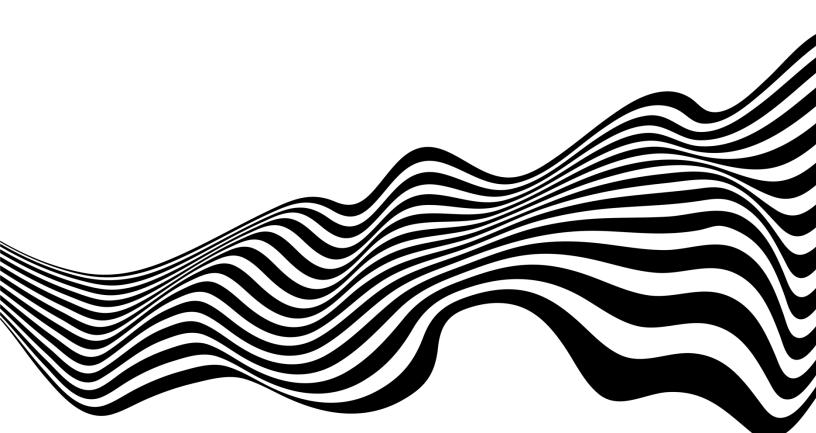


# Strathcona County 2025 Budget Survey Report

June 11, 2025

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# Executive Summary

This survey collected the perspectives of 739 people who were either a resident, business owner, owned a property, and/or worked in Strathcona County. Understanding and considering this representative sample is an important step when making budget decisions that may impact residents and others who pay County taxes or use County services.

A few main takeaways from the survey are worth highlighting:

- One-third (33%) of people surveyed indicated long-term fiscal sustainability and 24% indicated minimizing property taxes as two of the most important priorities to consider when informing and shaping future budgets and business plans.
- While there is certainly a desire for the County to be (or continue to be) fiscally responsible, respondents often don't want to see this come at the expense of services:
  - 31% would like the County to increase taxes and maintain services,
  - 26% of respondents would like the County to increase taxes and increase services,
  - 19% would like the County to maintain taxes and cut services; and
  - 14% would like the County to reduce taxes and cut services.
- There is relatively low awareness regarding how much the County transfers in taxes collected to the province to pay for education. Only 28% respondents provided a response somewhere between 20% to less than 40% (answer is 34%).
- Strathcona County continues to score excellent numbers for the value respondents believe they receive from County services for taxes paid. Close to sixty percent (58%) of survey takers indicated they receive good value and only 12% indicated they receive poor value.
- Respondents took a similar perspective to user fees as they did with their desired tax strategy for the County. Most respondents either wanted user fees to somewhat increase (39%) or keep user fees the same (42%).
- Different groups have different priorities when it comes to taxes and services.
   Throughout this report these differences are highlighted, but, in general, there were often strong differences observed between different ages and between urban and rural respondents.





# 1. Project Description

## 1.1 Background

Y Station collaborated with Strathcona County ("the County") to deploy their 2025 Budget Survey. The purpose of the survey was to understand the perspectives of residents, businesses, and property owners towards service levels and taxes to help inform the 2026-2029 budget. Questions included, but were not limited to, topics concerning their preferred tax strategy for the County, perceptions about the value received for taxes paid, and desired changes to spending for various services. Opinions regarding several County online services was also an area of inquiry.

## 1.2 Methodology

The survey content was designed and controlled by the County with some input provided by Y Station. The survey was programmed and hosted via Y Station. Y Station primarily administered the survey via random telephone calling. In some cases, respondents were sent an online link if they stated they preferred this option. To gain better representation amongst younger age groups, alternative methodologies, such as an online panel, were used. The County also collected surveys via their online public engagement platform (County Voice), where 856 responses were collected.

The survey was deployed from April 8<sup>th</sup> to May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025. A total of 739 surveys (n=739) were completed, and the results are detailed in this report. Where relevant comparisons to the online version of the survey are also discussed.

While this survey has been previously deployed twice, once in 2024 (n=532) and once in 2023 (n=575), the survey questions did undergo substantial changes and/or additions this year. Comparisons to the 2024 and 2023 data are made, where appropriate. The data was weighted to ensure better representation according to the 2024 Municipal Census data by age, gender, and region characteristics. The data in this report, unless otherwise indicated, illustrates the weighted percentages.

## 1.3 Subgroup Analysis

Differences between groups are compared throughout this report. Analysis provided checks for differences between the following groups:

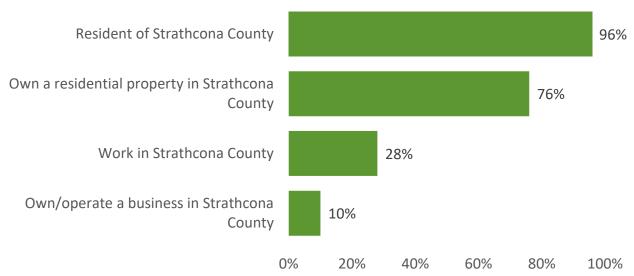
- Region (urban vs rural)
- Age (under 35 vs 35-54 vs 55+)
- Gender (male vs female)
- Accessed Family and Community Services (FCS) in the past year (yes vs no)
- Accessed Strathcona County Transit in the past year (yes vs no)

### 1.4 Sample Representation

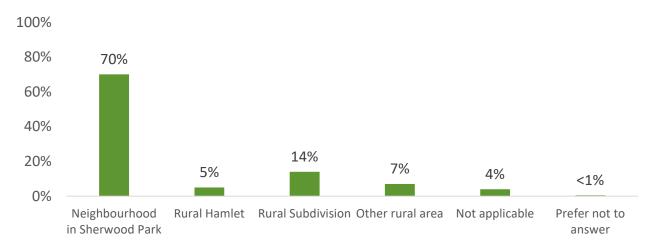




Almost all of the sample (96%) identified as a resident of Strathcona County, 76% owned a property in the County, 28% worked in the County, and 10% owned or operated a business in the County. Seventy percent (70%) of respondents live in a Sherwood Park neighbourhood, which aligns with 2024 municipal census data (73% of Sherwood Park residents live in an urban area). Four percent (4%) of respondents identified as non-residents and accordingly, these are individuals who either own a residential property, work, and/or operate a business in the County instead. Representation by age group and gender closely matches municipal census data.



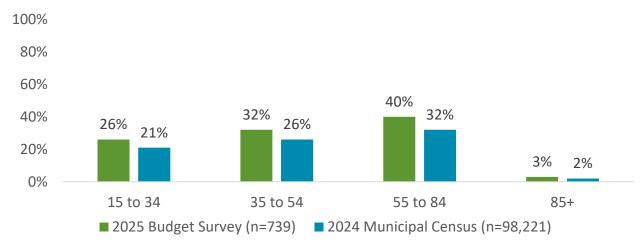
**Figure 1:** Do any of the following apply to you? Select all that apply (n=739).



**Figure 2:** Do you live in a...? (n=739).







**Figure 3:** Which category includes your age? Age group options are combined for this figure. Budget survey and municipal census data shown. Municipal census data does not add up to 100% due to age groups under 15 not being included in this figure.

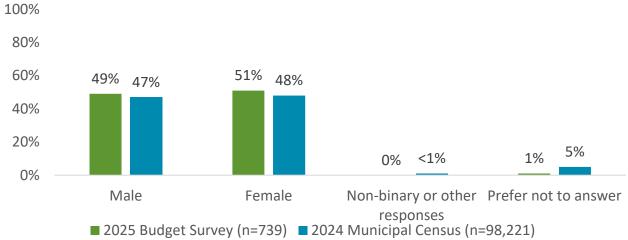


Figure 4: What is your gender? Budget survey and municipal census data shown.

For more details and a greater breakdown of the demographics of this sample please refer to the demographics section near the end of this report.

# 2. Findings

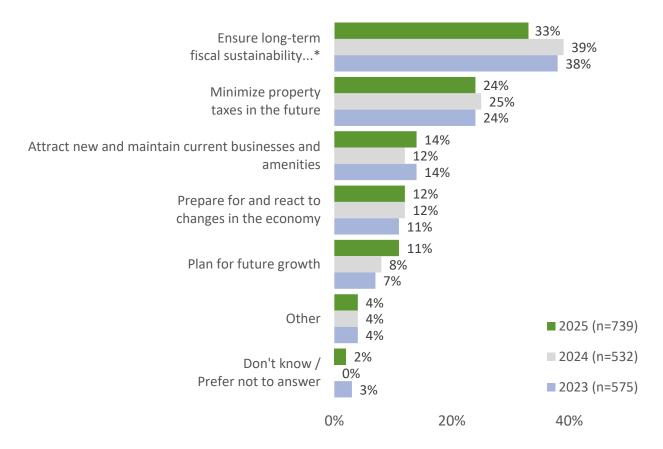
Results in this report may not always add up to 100% either due to rounding or multiple responses recorded. Similarly, data labels for values less than 4% for some figures are not shown, where indicated, for readability.





## 2.1 Budget Priorities, Preferences, and Awareness

Like in 2024 and 2023, ensuring long-term fiscal sustainability was the top topic that respondents would like to see influence budgets and business plans (33% in 2025, 39% in 2024 and 38% in 2023). Minimizing property taxes was the second most important priority (selected by 24% of respondents), which is consistent with previous years. When respondents were asked which tax strategy they preferred most selected a preference to increase taxes and maintain services (31%) followed by increase taxes and increase services (26%). Maintaining taxes and cutting services or reducing taxes and cutting services were tax strategy options selected less often.



**Figure 5:** As Strathcona County plans for the future, which of the following is **most important** to inform and shape 2026-2029 budgets and business plans? \*...meaning financial decisions today maintain a healthy financial position in the future. Single response.





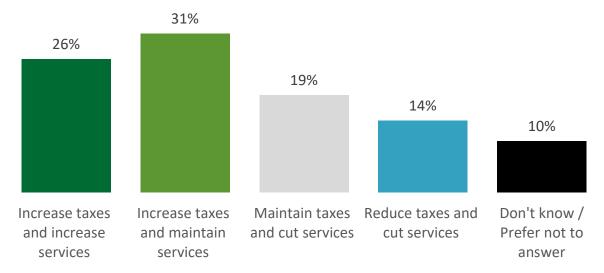


Figure 6: What is your preferred tax strategy for Strathcona County? (n=739). Single response.

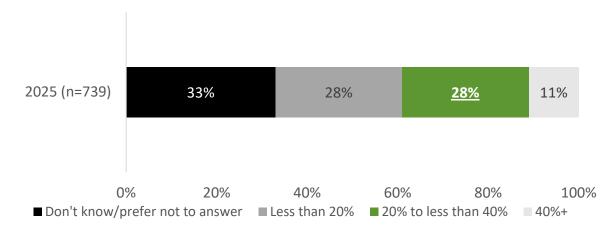
There were notable differences observed between groups and their preferred tax strategy for the County:

- Urban respondents were more likely than rural respondents to select 'increase taxes and increase services' (30% vs 16%).
- Rural respondents, while not the most frequently selected option, were more likely than urban respondents to select 'reduce taxes and cut services' (20% vs 11%).
- Younger respondents were more likely to prefer 'increase taxes and increase services' as a strategy compared to those who are over 55 years of age or older (40% under 35, 27% 35-54 vs 17% 55+)
- 'Increase taxes and maintain services' was the option most preferred by those who are 55+ (35%), especially compared to those who are under the age of 35 (22%).
- Those who have used FCS or County Transit in the past year are also much more likely to select 'increase taxes and increase services' as their preferred tax strategy option compared to those who did not use those services in the past year (40% vs 22% & 41% vs 21%, respectively).

There was a wide range of awareness regarding the percentage of taxes collected by the County that is transferred to the province to pay for education. There were a few extreme outliers who replied 0% and a few who indicated 100%. However, most of our responses indicated that the percentage lies somewhere less than 40%. Over a quarter of respondents (28%) provided an estimate somewhere between 20% to less than 40%, which is near the actual percentage of 34% collected by the County. One-third (33%) of respondents simply did not know and were not confident enough to hazard a guess. Those over the age of 55+ were often more likely to not provide a response for this question.



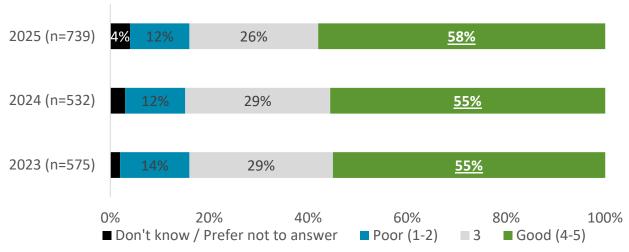




**Figure 7:** Did you know that Strathcona County is responsible for collecting education taxes? The County gathers these taxes and sends them to the province. To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of taxes collected by the County are transferred to the province to pay for education?

#### 2.2 Value for Taxes

The majority of respondents (58%) indicated the value they received from County services for their taxes was good or very good. Only 12% of respondents indicated the value they receive is poor or very poor. The County has consistently shown strong performance in this measure since 2023.



**Figure 8:** What value do you receive from County services for taxes paid? Please rate using a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means "very poor" and 5 means "very good". Data labels less than 4% not shown. Some caution should be used interpreting results to 2024 and 2023 as "for taxes paid" was added to the question this year and the previous scale used to be (1) poor to (5) excellent.





For the above figure, there were also notable differences observed between groups:

- Most notably, urban respondents are much more likely to indicate the value they receive from County services for taxes paid is 'good' compared to rural respondents (66% vs 40%). This isn't surprising as this was a trend also seen with the 2024 results.
  - o In contrast, rural respondents are more likely than urban respondents to indicate the value they receive is poor (27% vs 6%).
- 70% of respondents who are between the ages of 35-54 indicated they receive good value, which is much higher than those who are under 35 (52%) or 55+ (53%).

Respondents were also asked to explain or provide additional comments about the rating they provided. Please refer to the below tables (Tables 1-3) for a detailed breakdown of these contextual responses. Open responses provided by those who did not provide a value are not included in this report for brevity.

The top three criticisms of those who provided a poor value rating included lack of or poor ice and snow removal services (26%), lack of services for rural residents (21%), and taxes are too high (13%). In contrast, those who perceived good value for services mentioned the County is doing a great job in general (26%), the roads are in good condition (19%) and believe the snow removal services are good (15%).

**Table 1**: Please share any additional comments explaining your answer of (1-2) on the value of County services for taxes paid. Base: respondents that provided a 1-2 "poor" rating. Multiple responses recorded.

Additional comments – 1 to 2 (poor) value responses	Percentage of Respondents (n=88)
Lack of/poor ice and snow removal services (general)	26%
Lack of/minimal services provided for rural residents (general)	21%
Taxes are too high (general)	13%
Lack of/poor road maintenance or repairs/too many potholes	12%
Lack of water and sewer services	12%
Lack of/poor public transit services	5%
Lack of/poor recreational facilities and services	5%
Poor garbage/recycling collection services	4%
Lack of/poor internet and cellular/mobile network services	4%
Lack of/poor policing/police services	4%
Other responses (less than 4%)	26%
Don't know/not stated	10%





**Table 2**: Please share any additional comments explaining your answer of (3) on the value of County services for taxes paid. Base: respondents that provided a 3 rating. Multiple responses recorded.

Additional comments – 3 value responses	Percentage of Respondents (n=192)
Lack of/minimal services provided for rural residents (general)	8%
Taxes are too high (general)	7%
Lack of/poor road maintenance or repairs/too many potholes	7%
Satisfied with County services/are doing a great job	5%
Lack of/poor ice and snow removal services (general)	5%
Good snow removal services (general)	4%
Poor fiscal responsibility/not staying within budget/wasteful spending	4%
Other responses (less than 4%)	39%
Don't know/not stated	37%

**Table 3**: Please share any additional comments explaining your answer of (4-5) on the value of County services for taxes paid. Base: respondents that provided a 4-5 ("good") rating. Multiple responses recorded.

Additional comments – 4-5 value responses	Percentage of Respondents (n=430)
Satisfied with County services/are doing a great job (general)	26%
Good roads/road maintenance and repairs/roads are in good condition	19%
Good snow removal services (general)	15%
Good recreational services, programs and facilities	8%
Positive rating but concerns/room for improvement (various)	8%
Good park and green space maintenance/cleanliness	6%
Good garbage recycling collection services (general)	5%
Good public library services	4%
Other responses (less than 4%)	13%
Don't know/not stated	25%

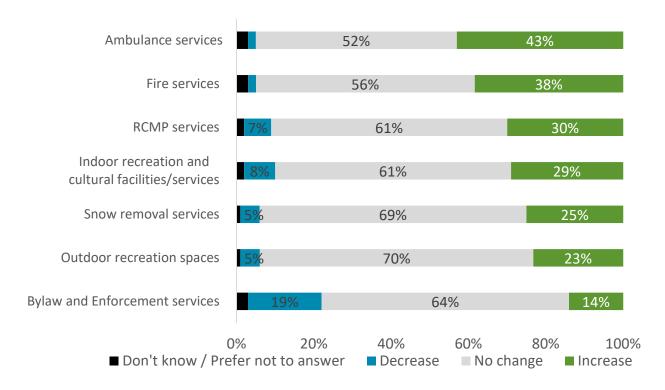
#### 2.3 Services

Between half and seventy percent (52% to 70%) of respondents indicated 'no change' to variable spending, depending on the service in question. In other words, across the seven services measured, respondents tend to express that they would prefer the County to keep variable spending the same. There are some notable outliers worth mentioning. For example, 43% and 38% of respondents would like the County to increase their variable spending for





ambulance and fire related services, respectively. Bylaw and Enforcement saw nearly one fifth (19%) of respondents indicate they would like spending to decrease for that service.



**Figure 9:** What is your desired change to variable spending for the following services (increase, no change, or decrease)? (n=739). A definition of variable spending was provided to respondents if requested. Data labels less than 4% not shown.

Differences between subgroups was not frequently seen across these seven services. When there were differences observed it was most often between age groups.

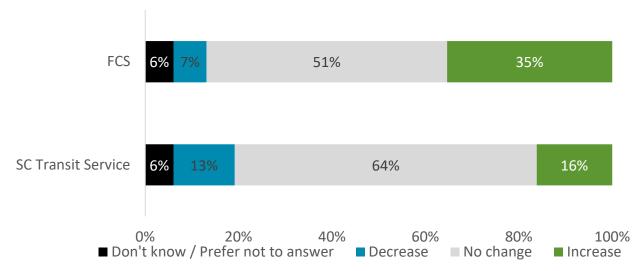
- **Ambulance services** 35–54-year-olds are more likely to select 'increase' compared to respondents who are 55+ (50% vs 38%).
- **RCMP services** respondents under the age of 35 are more likely to select 'decrease' (14%) compared to respondents who are 35-54 (4%) or 55+ (6%).
- **Bylaw and Enforcement services** respondents under the age of 35 are more likely to select 'decrease' (28%) compared to respondents who are 35-54 (17%) or 55+ (15%).
- Snow removal services respondents under the age of 35 are more likely to select 'increase' (34%) compared to respondents who are 55+ (18%).
- Indoor recreation and cultural facilities/services respondents under the age of 35 and 35-54 year old respondents are more likely to select 'increase' compared to respondents who are 55+ (39%, 36% vs 17%, respectively).
  - Urban respondents are also more likely than their rural counterparts to select 'increase' for this service (32% vs 20%).
- Outdoor recreation spaces respondents under the age of 35 are more likely to select 'increase' (39%) compared to respondents who are 35-54 (21%) or 55+ (16%).





This survey also contained questions relating to FCS and County Transit. **Just over twenty percent (21%) of respondents indicated they have used FCS and 24% of respondents indicated they have used County Transit in the past year**. Users of FCS and transit were more often younger respondents (e.g. those under the age of 55) and urban residents. There is also a fairly strong relationship between these two service areas. Half (50%) of respondents who use County Transit also indicated they use FCS and 57% of those who use FCS services indicated they also use County Transit.

FCS, in relation to all of the services tested, received fairly high support to increase variable spending with 35% of respondents indicating they would like to see spending increase. County Transit service, on the other hand, received less support with only 16% of respondents indicating they'd like to see an increase in spending for this area.

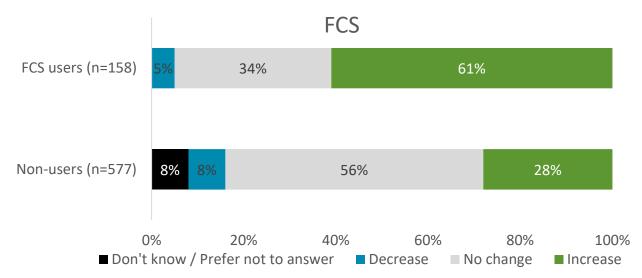


**Figure 10:** What is your desired change to variable spending for these services? (n=739). A definition of variable spending was provided to respondents if requested.

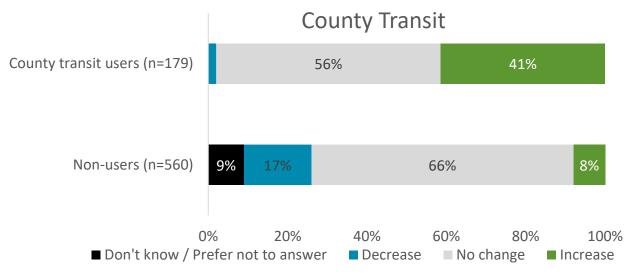
However, when controlling for those who have used these services in the past year there is a substantial difference in responses when comparing users and non-users (see figure 11 and 12 below). As there were differences observed between who is and is not a user of these services these same trends are apparent when assessing changes to variable spending. For instance, younger age groups (e.g. those under the age of 55) were more likely to be users of these two services and, accordingly, we also see this younger population more likely to desire an 'increase' in spending for these two services. A similar trend is seen with urban compared to rural respondents.







**Figure 11:** What is your desired change to variable spending for these services? FCS by those who have used FCS in the past year compared to those who have not. Respondents that did not provide a response to FCS usage are not shown.

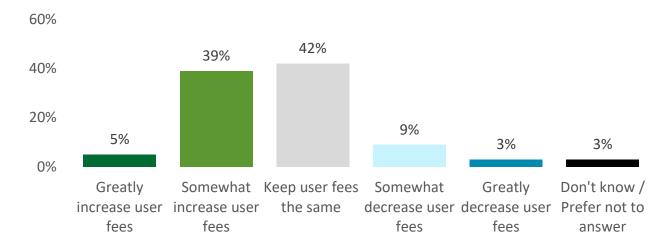


**Figure 12:** What is your desired change to variable spending for these services? County Transit service by those who have used County Transit in the past year compared to those who have not. Data labels less than 4% not shown.

Pertaining to user fees, top respondent preferences were to either somewhat increase fees or keep user fees the same (39% and 42%, respectively). Greatly increasing user fees or decreasing (either somewhat or greatly decrease) user fees were not preferred by the majority of the people surveyed. There were no notable differences between groups for this question.







**Figure 13:** Thinking generally about user fees for County services, how should the County adjust user fees in the future? A preamble about user fees was provided in advance of this question.<sup>1</sup> (n=739).

Online and technology related services was the last area of inquiry asked of individuals in this budget survey. Respondents were asked whether each of six online or technology related services does not meet, meets, or exceeds expectations. Encouragingly, only 20% or less of respondents, who have used or are aware of each measured service, indicated these services do not meet expectations. That being said, exceeding expectations across these areas was also hard to accomplish. 14% or less of respondents indicated the County has exceeded expectations for each of these areas. Most often, individuals who use or are aware of the services expressed the County is meeting expectations (72-82%).

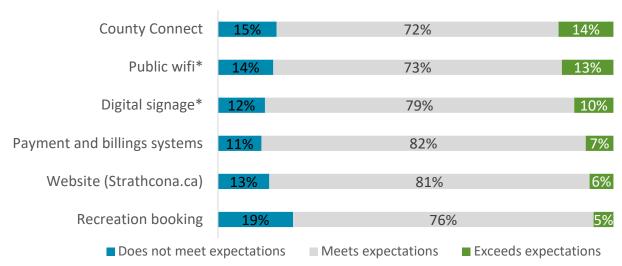
Half, or nearly half, of respondents indicated a "non-applicable or prefer not to answer" selection for recreation booking, digital signage at County facilities, public Wi-Fi at County facilities, and County Connect (not illustrated in the below figure). This could indicate challenges with awareness, accessibility or ease of use, or other issues that may be worth further exploring. Expectedly, large differences were observed when comparing different age groups across these online and technology related service areas. In general, individuals who are 55 or older were much more likely, for all six areas, to indicate a non-applicable response compared to younger age groups.

fees, which only partially cover the full cost of providing the service. Tax dollars typically cover the rest of the cost. Any reduction or increase to user fees will need to be met with an equal reduction or increase in taxes to cover the cost.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Some Strathcona County services (transit, recreation centers etc.) are funded partially through user fees, which only partially cover the full cost of providing the service. Tax dollars typically cover the res







**Figure 14:** To what extent do the following County online and technology services meet your expectations? n=318-589 as non-applicable/prefer not to answer responses are excluded.

# 3. Demographics

Cellphone or landline	Percentage of Respondents (n=739)
Cellphone	3%
Landline	61%
Not applicable/unconfirmed	36%

Do any of the following apply to you? Select all that apply.	Percentage of Respondents (n=739)
l am a resident of Strathcona County	96%
l own/operate a business in Strathcona County	10%
l own a residential property in Strathcona County	76%
l work in Strathcona County	28%





Do you live in a?	Percentage of Respondents (n=739)
Neighborhood in Sherwood Park	70%
Rural Hamlet in Strathcona County	5%
Rural Subdivision in Strathcona County	14%
Rural area in Strathcona County that is not within a subdivision	7%
Not applicable	4%
Prefer not to answer	<1%

Which of the following age groups include your age?	Percentage of Respondents (n=739)
Under 25	4%
25 to 34	22%
35 to 44	13%
45 to 54	19%
55 to 64	10%
65 to 74	16%
75 to 84	13%
85+	3%

What is your gender?	Percentage of Respondents (n=739)
Male	49%
Female	51%
Non-binary	0%
Prefer to self-identify	0%
Prefer not to answer	1%





What is your employment status?	Percentage of Respondents (n=739)
Work full-time	51%
Work part-time	8%
Full-time student	4%
Retired	32%
Other responses	4%
Prefer not to answer	2%

# 4. Appendix

## 4.1 Survey Tool

The survey tool used is attached below and reflects the telephone version of the survey. Some slight modifications were made for the online version, but no changes were made that would greatly impact comparability between versions. It should be noted that questions about strategic priorities are mentioned in the introduction as respondents were surveyed about this budget survey and a separate survey concurrently. Those separate survey questions are not detailed in this report nor are they detailed in the survey tool below.

Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ from Y Station. Y Station on behalf of Strathcona County is conducting a study to help shape the County's strategic priorities for 2027 – 2030. We are also looking for the views of residents, and business and property owners in setting property taxes in relation to service levels for the 2026-2029 budget.

The survey takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. Is now a good time?

[Interviewers to use if respondent has questions/concerns, ONLY IF NEEDED: refer to Cameron Dykstra, Public Engagement and Research Analyst, at <a href="mailto:cameron.dykstra@strathcona.ca">cameron.dykstra@strathcona.ca</a> or 780-464-8252. And ONLY IF NEEDED: direct them to <a href="https://countyvoice.strathcona.ca/">https://countyvoice.strathcona.ca/</a>]

QCell: [Telephone only] Before we begin, can I confirm if I'm calling you on your cellphone or landline?

- 1. Cellphone
- 2. Landline
- 3. Prefer not to answer

#### **Screeners**

1. Do any of the following apply to you?\*[MANDATORY] [Select all]





- 1. I am a resident of Strathcona County
- 2. I own/operate a business in Strathcona County
- 3. I own a residential property in Strathcona County
- 4. I work in Strathcona County
- 5. I do not live, own/operate a business, or own property in Strathcona County [Exclusive, terminate]
- 2. [if resident, Q1=1] Do you live in a: \*[MANDATORY]
  - 1. Neighbourhood in Sherwood Park
  - 2. Rural Hamlet in Strathcona County (Antler Lake, Ardrossan, Collingwood Cove, Half Moon Lake, Hastings Lake, Josephburg, North Cooking Lake, South Cooking Lake)
  - 3. Rural Subdivision in Strathcona County
  - 4. Rural area in Strathcona County that is not within a subdivision
  - 5. I do not live in Strathcona County [TERMINATE]
- 3. Which category below includes your age? \*[MANDATORY]
  - 1. Under 18 [TERMINATE]
  - 2. 18 to 24
  - 3. 25 to 34
  - 4. 35 to 44
  - 5. 45 to 54
  - 6. 55 to 64
  - 7. 65 to 74 8. 75 to 84
  - 9. 85+
- 4. What is your gender? \*[MANDATORY]
  - 1. Male
  - 2. Female
  - 3. Non-binary
  - 4. Prefer to self-identify (write-in) \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Budget Questions**

- 5. As Strathcona County plans for the future, which of the following is **most important** to inform and shape 2026-2029 budgets and business plans? [single response]
  - 1. Ensure long-term fiscal sustainability meaning financial decisions today maintain a healthy financial position in the future
  - 2. Attract new and maintain current businesses and amenities
  - 3. Minimize property taxes in the future





- 4. Prepare for and react to changes in the economy
- 5. Plan for future growth
- 6. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. Don't know/Prefer Not to Answer
- 6. What is your preferred tax strategy for Strathcona County? [single response]
  - 1. Increase taxes and increase services
  - 2. Increase taxes and maintain services
  - 3. Maintain taxes and cut services
  - 4. Reduce taxes and cut services
  - 5. Don't know/Prefer not to answer
- 7. Did you know that Strathcona County is responsible for collecting education taxes? The County gathers these taxes and sends them to the province. To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of taxes collected by the County are transferred to the province to pay for education?

Enter percentage value:

Don't know/Prefer not to answer

[info pop-up] In 2024, **34%** of Strathcona County taxes collected are for education on behalf of the province of Alberta.

#### Value for Taxes

- 8. What value do you receive from County services for taxes paid? Please rate using a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means "very poor" and 5 means "very good"
  - 1: Very poor
  - 2:
  - 3:
  - 4:
  - 5: Very good
  - [] Don't Know/Prefer not to answer
- 9. Please share any additional comments explaining your answer of X [insert response from previous Q] on the value of County services for taxes paid. [open-end]

**[IF Q8=Don't know/prefer not to answer]:** Please share any additional comments on this topic (value of County services for taxes paid).

#### **Services**

The next section addresses the level of different service areas. Please note that an increase to a service would result in an increase to taxes paid.





10. What is your desired change to **variable** spending for the following services (increase, no change, or decrease)? [scale, grid]

[INTERVIEWER TO READ IF NEEDED: \*Variable spending refers to budgeted items that can be adjusted (ex. Levels of service at facilities) as opposed to non-variable spending that cannot be adjusted (ex. Providing access to utilities).]

- 1.) Increase
- 2.) No change
- 3.) Decrease
- 4.) Don't know/Prefer not to answer
  - a) Fire services
  - b) Ambulance services
  - c) RCMP services
  - d) Bylaw and Enforcement services
  - e) Snow removal services
  - f) Indoor recreation and cultural facilities/services (rec centers, ice rinks, etc.)
  - g) Outdoor recreation spaces (parks, sports fields, etc.)
- 11. Have you used the following services in the past year?
  - 1.) Yes
  - 2.) No
  - 3.) Don't know/Prefer not to answer
    - a) Family and community support services
    - b) Strathcona County Transit service
- 12. What is your desired change to variable spending for these services?
  - 1.) Increase
  - 2.) No change
  - 3.) Decrease
  - 4.) Don't know/Prefer not to answer
    - a) Family and community support services
    - b) Strathcona County Transit service
- 13. Some Strathcona County services (transit, recreation centers etc.) are funded partially through user fees, which only partially cover the full cost of providing the service. Tax dollars typically cover the rest of the cost. Any reduction or increase to user fees will need to be met with an equal reduction or increase in taxes to cover the cost.

Thinking generally about user fees for County services, how should the County adjust user fees in the future?





- 1.) Greatly increase user fees
- 2.) Somewhat increase user fees
- 3.) Keep user fees the same
- 4.) Somewhat decrease user fees
- 5.) Greatly decrease user fees
- 6.) Don't know/Prefer not to answer
- 14. To what extent do the following County online and technology services meet your expectations?
  - 1.) Does not meet expectations
  - 2.) Meets expectations
  - 3.) Exceeds expectations
  - 4.) Non-applicable
  - 5.) Don't know/Prefer not to answer
    - a.) Website (Strathcona.ca)
    - b.) Recreation booking (swimming lesson registration, facilities bookings)
    - c.) Payment and billings systems (property tax billing, utility bills, etc.)
    - d.) County Connect
    - e.) Public Wi-Fi (at County facilities)
    - f.) Digital Signage (at County facilities)
- 15. What is your current employment status?
  - 1. Work full-time
  - 2. Work part-time
  - 3. Full-time student
  - 4. Retired
  - 5. Other (specify):
  - 6. Don't know/Prefer not to answer

On behalf of Strathcona County, thank you so much for completing the survey.