

## **2025 BUDGET ENGAGEMENT WHAT WE LEARNED REPORT**

### **Issue**

Results of the What We Learned Report are provided to inform Council to assist in future budget decisions.

### **Motion Proposed by Administration**

That the 2025 Budget Engagement What We Learned Report be received as presented.

### **Report, Analysis and Financial Implications**

The 2025 Budget Engagement was conducted by the Town's Community Engagement and Corporate Strategies teams and was open from May 23 to June 9, 2024. As part of the budget check-in process, this provided Okotoks residents and businesses with an opportunity to share feedback with Administration and Council that can inform the Town's priorities and approach to potential adjustments to the upcoming 2025 municipal budget (the final year of the Town's four-year budget). This engagement is one point of data collection that can guide decisions and priorities for the upcoming budget, but it is not the only source of input upon which these decisions are ultimately made.

Key takeaways from the survey include:

- The survey had 925 respondents – a 62% increase over the last budget survey done in 2022. This indicates a significant increase in residents' desire to weigh-in on budget and service priorities;
- 69% of participants said they receive "fair", "good", or "very good" value for their taxes. This is down 16% from 2022, when the same question was asked as part of the Citizen Satisfaction survey;
- 63% of survey participants indicated that on average services should remain the same across all evaluated services;
- When reviewing the survey results in more detail there were several services that stood out from others as follows:
  1. Roads and Sidewalks - Strong values in favour of increasing service, while also having strong values against decreasing service. The desire to increase services related to maintaining a higher standard of snow clearing and ice control;
  2. Economic Development - Strong values in favour of increasing service to support local businesses expand and grow (when compared to the overall average of increasing services);
  3. Environment - Statistically different from other services in terms of how many respondents favoured decreasing services;
  4. Arts, Culture, Programs, Library and Events - Strong values in favour of decreasing service; and
  5. Fire and Rescue Services - Statistically different from other services in terms of how many respondents selected to keep service levels the same.

## Strategic Plan Goals

|                                     |                            |                                     |                                       |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Responsibly Managed Growth | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Demonstrated Environmental Leadership |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Strong Local Economy       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Enhanced Culture & Community Health   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Organizational Excellence  |                                     |                                       |

### Equity/Diversity/Inclusivity Impacts and Strategy

As part of the Community Engagement Strategy, the Town uses four guiding principles which is followed each time the public is engaged. One of these principles is Equitable: Diverse opportunities are provided to our community so that perspectives and ideas from all interested parties are considered in the decision-making process.

To provide more equitable access to participate, information and print copy surveys were available at the Okotoks Municipal Centre, Recreation Centres, and Seniors Centre and invitations to participate were sent out to several different agencies and social service groups through the Town's Community & Social Development team. High school students were also invited to participate through an email to local high schools.

### Environmental Impacts

n/a

### Community Engagement Strategy

The community engagement initiative follows Council Community Engagement Policy GP-D-2.6 and aligns with the Town's Community Engagement Framework.

The objectives of this engagement were to increase understanding of the budget process to understand where the community wants to see changes with respect to specific service levels, and if necessary, to put forward specific service level change options for the 2025 budget.

The initial engagement was conducted at the IAP2 level of consult, with a large focus on education as example an online customizable taxpayer receipt and information on services and percentage breakdown of tax dollars in each service level was provided to residents. The budget engagement process includes a provision for a second phase of engagement in the fall if required.

A dedicated budget project page on the Town's online engagement platform (Shape Our Town Okotoks) was created, and there were two different opportunities for participants to provide feedback including a survey and an online idea board.

Over the course of the online engagement, the opportunity to participate was communicated across a wide variety of channels including Eagle 100.9 radio advertisements, electronic signage on roads and in Town facilities, and Western Wheel advertising. Various organic and paid advertisements were featured on Town social media channels. Direct email campaigns

also invited participation from the Town's Citizen Panel and Shape Our Town members interested in budget and taxes.

### **Alternatives for Consideration**

n/a

### **CAO Comments**

The majority of residents have indicated that service levels should remain the same with the exception of snow and ice control and economic development. Administration will be reviewing service levels and performance to determine if alternate service delivery options could improve results with no cost to the public. As the results do not request fundamental changes in service levels it is suggested that there is no requirement for a phase 2 public participation process to further inform the budget.

### **Attachment(s)**

1. Budget 2025 Survey What We Learned

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