



SUBJECT: Preliminary Budget Engagement Results

TO: Community and Corporate Services Committee - Budget

FROM: Finance Department

Report Number: F-43-16

Wards Affected: All

File Numbers: 435-03

Date to Committee: December 8, 2016

Date to Council: December 19, 2016

Recommendation:

Receive and file finance department report F-43-16 providing preliminary budget engagement results.

Purpose:

- An Engaging City
 - Good Governance
-

Background and Discussion:

Open and transparent government remains a priority for the city. To continue to build on the momentum created by the public's involvement in the strategic plan, staff has enhanced the public engagement process during the development of the 2017 Proposed Budget. The following report outlines the efforts and results of the budget engagement process used this year, as well as provide an outline of the feedback received from the public to date.

Traditional Budget Engagement Process

The traditional approach to budget public engagement in Burlington was to host an annual Public Open House session shortly after the proposed budget documents were provided to members of Council. The intent of the meeting was to engage and inform residents on the proposed budget. The general format of the meeting included an overview presentation from Finance staff followed by the public completing an

interactive workbook in small groups led by facilitators. In addition, Finance staff have also presented budget information to the Chamber of Commerce and at some ward meetings. Online surveys which cover similar information to that in the interactive workbooks have also been available for residents who were unable to attend the session in person.

These public meetings have experienced very low attendance in recent years (less than 10 participants for each meeting). The meetings were traditionally held after the proposed budget has already undergone extensive internal review at both the staff and senior executive level and presented to Committee for review. Residents have stated that the timing was late for them to have meaningful input into the process.

Enhanced Budget Engagement Process

Staff continue to look for continuous improvements and forums to engage the public in the budget process. During the 2015 and 2016 budget, the City presented the budget on the website in an intuitive and illustrative way, through 'Burlington Open Budget'. Over these budgets cycles, there have been over 7,000 page views (hits), with an average time viewing the program of 3 minutes. Utilizing the website and online mechanisms appear to be a good communication medium to inform the public and staff will continue to use this platform for 2017 and future budgets.

During the development of the 2017 budget, the public engagement process was further enhanced with the use of 2 online surveys conducted concurrently with staff's development of the proposed operating and capital budgets. Both surveys were advertised through social media, including Facebook and Twitter, and media releases were published.

2017 Budget Engagement Survey #1

Survey #1 Objective:

This survey (Appendix A) consisted of five questions and asked residents when and how they would like to be involved with the City's budget. It was hosted on MindMixer and Insight Burlington between July 25th and August 14th and had a total of 428 participants (23 and 405 respectively).

Survey #1 Results:

A summary of the survey results are as follows:

Question 1 – How much involvement do you want to have with the budget?

- Would like to have input to the budget - 55%
- Want to be kept informed of the budget - 42%
- Do not want to be involved - 2%

Question 2 – How do you want to be informed on the budget process (approval dates, options for input, timelines, completion)?

- Newspaper – 27%
- Social Media – 22%
- Budget Website – 19%
- Mayor – 12%
- Council – 15%
- I am not interested in the budget – 0%
- Other, please specify – 6%

The majority of comments submitted under “Other” stated that respondents also preferred email (78%). Please refer to Appendix B for more information.

Question 3- Which, if any, of the following ways are you interested in learning about the budget?

- Online posting on budget website – 27%
- Burlington Post – 20%
- Public information nights – 17%
- Social Media – 14%
- Workshops – 11%
- Socrata budget tool on budget website – 7%
- Other, please specify – 4%

The majority of comments submitted under “Other” stated that respondents also preferred email (52%). Please refer to Appendix B for more information.

Question 4 - Please rank the following ways you prefer to provide feedback about the budget?

- Ranking:
1. Email and Online surveys and discussion
 2. Public Information session
 3. Through Mayor / Councilor
 4. Mail
 5. Workshop
 6. Social Media

Question 5 - In your opinion, how can we get more people involved with the budget? There was a wide range of suggestions submitted. Please refer to Appendix B for participants’ verbatim responses.

Survey #1 Insights:

In general, participants want to be informed and consulted on the City budget. The preferences on how they would like to be engaged are as follows:

- For budget status' and dates – newspaper and social media
- For information about the budget – online posting on Burlington website and through Burlington Post
- To provide input on budget matters – email and online surveys and discussion

A distinct shift towards online mediums to keep residents' informed and allow them to provide feedback is apparent.

2017 Budget Engagement Survey #2

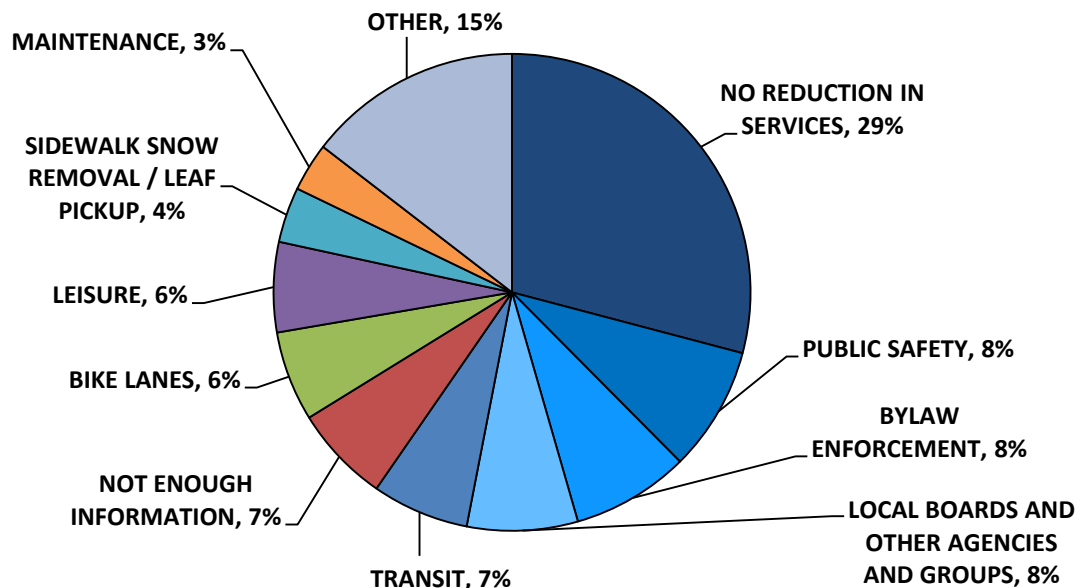
Survey #2 Objective:

This survey (Appendix C) consisted of five questions focused on budget issues and service level satisfaction. It was hosted on Insight Burlington from September 9th -26th. There were 316 participants.

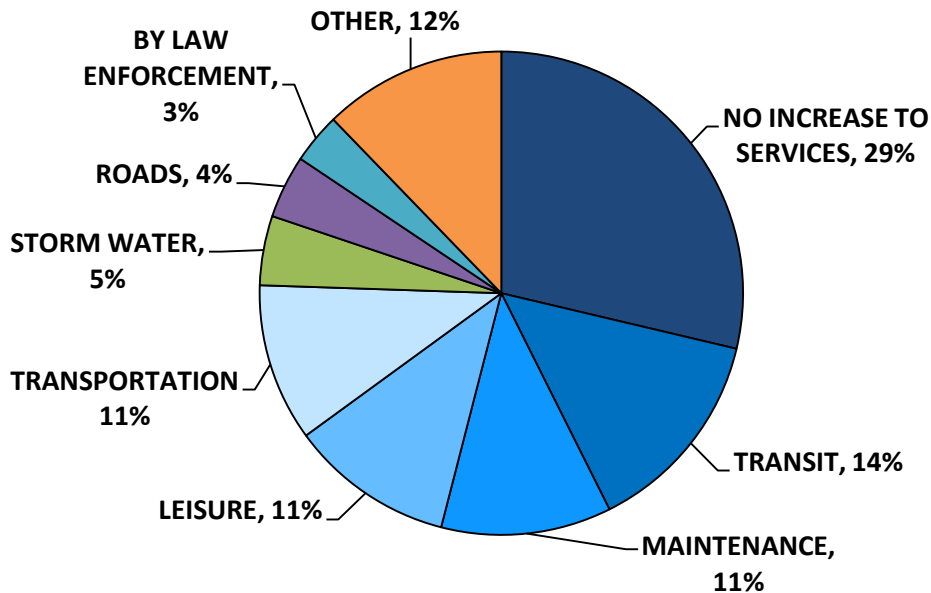
Survey #2 Results:

This survey contained primarily open-ended questions where participants were able to answer in their own words. Staff has attempted to categorize the responses into general themes for the charts below. Refer to Appendix D for the verbatim responses as submitted by participants for each question.

Question 1 – Is there a city service you feel that service levels should be reduced and funding should be redirected to other strategic priorities?



Question 2 – Is there a city service you feel should be increased (spend more money) to improve service?



Question 3 – Please tell us when you would be most likely to attend public information nights and workshops

A total of 56% of respondents indicated that they do not want to physically attend a consulting session held by the city.

- I would prefer online information and engagement – 47%
- I am not interested in attending a session – 9%

Of the remaining 44% of respondents that would like to physically attend a consulting session, their most convenient days were:

- Weekdays – 33%
- Weekends – 11%

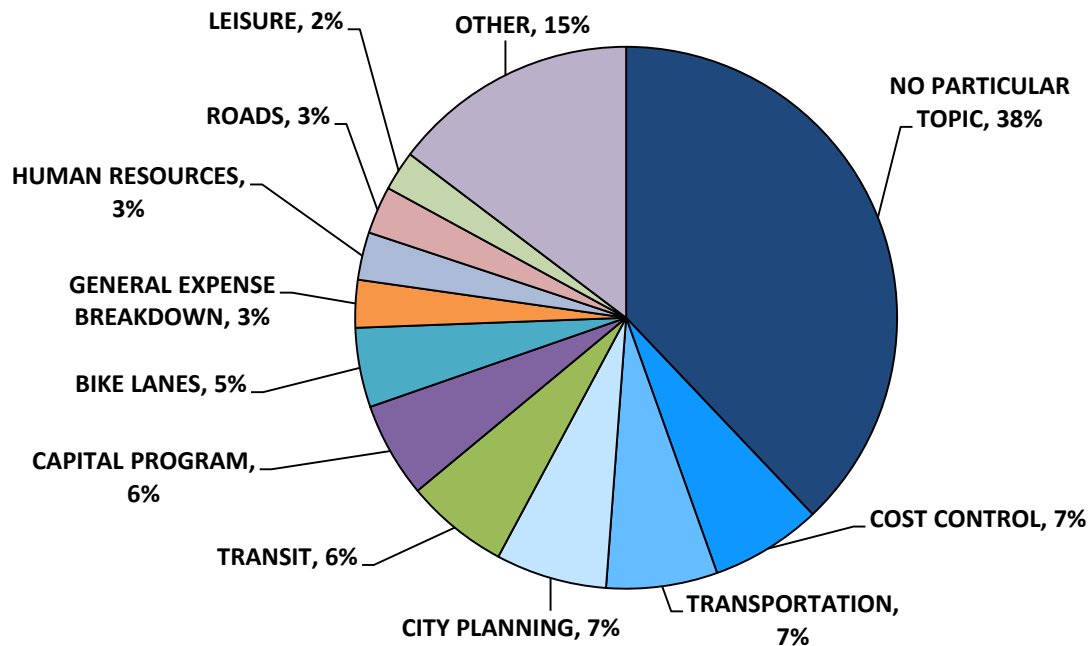
Question 4 – Please tell us the time that is most convenient for you to attend a budget workshop or information session.

- Late evening (7PM) – 40%
- I am not interested in attending a session – 28%
- Afternoon – 16%
- Morning – 14%
- Early evening (5PM) – 12%
- Other, please specify – 5%

For the 5% “Other” responses, 80% of respondents stated that online engagement is preferred. Please refer to Appendix D for more information.

Please note that all respondents were required to answer this question, even though they may have indicated that they did not wish to attend a physical consulting session in Question 3.

Question 5 – Is there a particular budget topic you would like to discuss at a workshop or public information session?



Survey #2 Insights:

When asked which city service should be decreased and increased, the largest responses (almost 30% of participants for both question 1 and 2) indicated that they did not want to see any service level changes. One can make the conclusion that these respondents are content with current service levels. However, there was a wider range of services that respondents felt could be decreased, while only a few services stood out when asked if service levels should be increased.

Furthermore, 29% of participants do not have any specific budget topics they want to discuss for the 2017 budget and they would prefer a general overview at budget engagement sessions.

Similarly to survey 1, respondents continue to emphasize that they would prefer online engagement as a mechanism to learn and provide feedback on the budget.

Public Open House

A budget public consultation session is planned for December 7th 2016 at the Haber Recreation Centre from 7:00 – 9:00pm, and will consider suggestions made by respondents regarding potential budget topics to discuss.

Next Steps

Staff will continue to use social media to keep residents informed and will look to increase utilization of online engagement tools, such as Insight Burlington, Mindmixer, the City website and emails for future budget cycles.

Financial Matters:

The surveys were hosted through the Mindmixer and Insight Burlington application. The City has licenses for these programs and was able to host these surveys at no additional cost other than staff time.

The Public Open House will have a nominal budget impact. Advertising cost is expected to be comparable to the previous year (approximately \$400 for an ad in the Burlington Post). However, the City will increase promotion efforts on social media for this Open House. The event will be held at a city facility (Haber Recreation Centre) and there will be a minimal expense for light refreshments.

Public Engagement Matters:

The City of Burlington will continue to utilize different forms of social media to inform the public on the upcoming public consultation meeting on December 7th. These methods will include emailed invitations to residents who identified themselves as being interested in being contacted by the City for consultations.

Conclusion:

Staff continue to encourage public participation in the budget process using various communication approaches. Responses from the recent online budget engagement surveys are consolidated and attached in the appendices of this report.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Chen

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Appendices:

- A. Budget Engagement Survey #1
- B. Budget Engagement Survey #1 – Verbatim
- C. Budget Engagement Survey #2
- D. Budget Engagement Survey #2 - Verbatim

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, Director of Finance and Director of Legal. Final approval is by the City Manager.