

# **Community Engagement Summary Report**

## **2022 Pre-Budget Consultations**

*July 21, 2021*

## Table of Contents

Summary of Engagement Activities .....	3
Emerging Themes .....	4
Survey Questions .....	5
Online Survey Respondent Demographics .....	6
Survey Results Question 1 .....	7
Survey Results Question 2 .....	7
Survey Results Question 3 .....	8
Survey Results Question 4 .....	9
Survey Results Question 5 .....	10

## Summary of Engagement Activities

The City of Thunder Bay connected with local residents from June 8 - 29, 2021, to gather input and comments on the 2022 City Budget. Engagement activities included a survey and virtual town hall.

### Survey

A total of 244 survey responses were received from residents.

The survey was made available to residents through a variety of channels to promote access and encourage feedback. The survey was available online at [www.thunderbay.ca/GetInvolved](http://www.thunderbay.ca/GetInvolved), as well as printed in the Source on June 10, 2021, and available as a downloadable document off the City website. Residents were invited to submit their hard copy surveys by mail to City Hall or through drop boxes at all branches of the Thunder Bay Public Library.

The survey questions covered the importance of programs and services to residents, how residents would prefer to cover increased costs due to COVID-19, if there were any programs or services that could be reduced or modified to assist with COVID-19 financial impacts, and overall any suggestions or comments for City Council to consider when deciding on the 2022 budget.

The Get Involved budget webpage was accessed 397 times during the engagement period. Of the 244 total survey responses, 201 surveys were completed online and 43 in hard copy.

### Virtual Budget Town Hall

A 2022 Pre-Budget Virtual Town Hall was held on June 22, 2021. Councillor Mark Bentz, Chair of Administrative Services, City Manager Norm Gale, and Linda Evans – General Manager Corporate Services & Long-Term Care & City Treasurer, along with representatives from City departments presented information about the upcoming budget and responded to citizen questions. A recording of the virtual town hall can be viewed at [www.thunderbay.ca/GetInvolved](http://www.thunderbay.ca/GetInvolved) on the 2022 Budget page.

The virtual town hall was aired live on Shaw TV Cable 10, Tbaytel TV Channel 110, and available online through the City of Thunder Bay website. Following the live event it was also posted as a recorded video on the Budget Get Involved webpage and on the City's youtube channel for viewing.

A listing of citizen questions received during the town hall was included in the *Community Engagement Detailed Verbatim Report* distributed separately to City Council.

## Emerging Themes

Of the 244 budget surveys received the following emerging themes were conveyed.

Roads, winter maintenance, emergency services, garbage and recycling, drinking water and stormwater management were among the top services ranked by citizens to be important among the list provided. Also of importance to residents, which were shared as write-in responses, were recreation including parks and trails; supporting vulnerable residents who may experience homelessness, poverty, mental health, or substance use; addressing climate change by focusing on environmental initiatives; and restoration and beautification of the city.

Services that appeared lower on the importance rating scale from the list provided included child care, transit, and libraries – of which a portion of respondents also indicated they did not use the services.

When asked preferred methods to cover increased costs due to the pandemic (of which four options were presented), the most popular choice was to draw from the reserve fund with approximately 62% support, followed by temporarily reducing/modifying services at 50%, and increasing user fees with 39% support. Lowest was the option to increase taxes at 10%.

Of those programs or services residents indicated they would be most comfortable with temporarily reducing or modifying to help cover COVID-19 costs, the strongest response was for the multi-use indoor turf facility. The other suggestions to reduce/modify included police services, libraries, golf courses, transit, recreation programs, City administration positions, by-law enforcement, the number of City Councillors, and fire services.

Overall a total of 151 comments were received in the open ended comments section. While there was a wide variety of topics covered, the emerging themes centred around focusing on essential 'needs' of residents such as infrastructure and core services versus investing in 'wants' such as new expensive developments and legacy projects – specifically not proceeding with the multi-use indoor turf facility. Residents also expressed they do not want to see taxes raised. They would like to see the City invest in what we currently have and support the core needs without increasing taxes. It was also expressed that they wish to cut back the number of City Councillors and reduce the levels of management and salaries in City administration. Supporting animal welfare through Animal Services was important as was investing in addressing climate change and furthering green initiatives. Support for social services continued to be expressed.

## Survey

A total of 244 surveys were received from citizens. The surveys came in through the online engagement page at [www.thunderbay.ca/GetInvolved](http://www.thunderbay.ca/GetInvolved) (201 surveys), and printed copies in the Source or available for download (43 surveys). The survey questions asked to residents were as follows:

### Survey Questions

1. How important are the following programs and services to you and those in your household? (*rating scale: not important, somewhat important, important, very important, not applicable/don't use*)

- a. Emergency Services (EMS, Fire and Police)
- b. Roads Maintenance & Construction
- c. Winter Maintenance (snow plowing, sanding/salting)
- d. Drinking Water
- e. Wastewater (sewer)
- f. Stormwater Management (ditches, storm sewers, low impact developments etc.)
- g. Transit
- h. Garbage and Recycling Collection
- i. Long Term Care & Senior Services (Pioneer Ridge, Jasper Place and Meals on Wheels)
- j. Parks (Parks, Conservatory, Splash pads, campgrounds, golf etc.)
- k. Recreation Programs & Facilities (aquatics, arenas & stadiums, older adult programs, community centres, events and programming etc.)
- l. Child Care
- m. Libraries
- n. Economic Development (attracting and retaining businesses)
- o. Communication & Engagement with Residents
- p. Animal Services
- q. By-law Enforcement

2. Are there any other areas not listed above that you would rate as important/very important?

3. The financial impact of COVID-19 on the 2021 budget was funded from the City's Stabilization Reserve fund. These impacts are expected to continue into 2022. What option(s) would you support to cover the increased costs and financial impacts of COVID-19 that exceed any COVID-19 related funding (i.e. Safe Restart Funding, COVID-19 Recovery Funding)?

Response Options:

- Temporarily reduce/modify some services in 2022
- Temporarily increase user fees in areas that have increased costs due to COVID-19
- Increase taxes in 2022
- Draw from a reserve fund that is set aside for emergencies and budget to replenish in future years

4. Are there any programs or services that you would be comfortable with temporarily reducing or modifying in order to help cover estimated COVID-19 financial impacts? If so, please list.

5. Do you have any additional suggestions for City Council to consider when deciding on the 2022 budget?

## Online Survey Respondent Demographics

The following demographics represent the online survey participants (201). Due to the nature of the hard copy surveys, demographics of these write-in respondents were not recorded.

### Age breakdown:

46% of online participants were over the age of 55, with 32% in the range of 35 – 54 years, and 22% under age 35.

Specific age range breakdown:

- Under 18: 1 (0.5%)
- 18 – 24: 9 (4.5%)
- 25 – 34: 34 (17%)
- 35 – 44: 36 (18%)
- 45 – 54: 28 (14%)
- 55 – 64: 49 (24.5%)
- 65+: 43 (21.5%)

### Postal Code breakdown:

Online survey participants represented 147 different postal code areas from across the city.

## Survey Results

The results of all surveys (both online and hard copy submissions) have been incorporated into the following results.

Note that while 244 total surveys were received, residents may have chosen to skip some questions resulting in the cumulative total number of responses on each individual question possibly less than the total. Skipped questions were extremely minimal in the numeric data and therefore have not impacted survey results and findings.

In this report, all foul language, targeted disparaging remarks, or identifying names have been removed from citizen comments – this has been minimal and has not impacted the nature of the results or intent of the responses.

## Question 1. How important are the following programs and services to you and those in your household?

Based on the responses the top ratings are as follows:

- Road Maintenance & Construction: 98.3%
- Winter Maintenance: 98%
- Emergency Services: 97.6%
- Garbage and Recycling Collection: 95.5%
- Drinking Water: 94.3%
- Stormwater Management: 93%
- Parks: 89.4%
- Wastewater: 89.2%
- Communication & Engagement with Residents: 88.9%
- Economic Development: 87.7%
- Animal Services: 81.5%
- Recreation Programs & Facilities: 80.6%
- Long-term Care & Senior Services\*: 80.2%
- By-law Enforcement: 77.3%
- Libraries\*: 72.1%
- Transit\*: 58.8%
- Child Care\*: 53.4%

*\*Denotation indicates where 10% or higher responded "Not Applicable / Do Not Use" for the item which may impact overall results as no rating was given because program/service was not used.*

A more detailed rating breakdown by each individual area has been provided to City Council in an accompanying *Community Engagement Detailed Verbatim Report*.

## Question 2. Are there any other areas not listed [in question 1] above that you would rate as important/very important?

### **Summary of comments:**

Question two received 99 comments. The following are the most frequently mentioned comments of those received. The number in brackets beside the topic indicates its overall frequency of mention. Only comments with three or more mentions have been included in this section. The listing of full verbatim comments have been distributed separately to City Council in an accompanying *Community Engagement Detailed Verbatim Report*.

**Top comments – additional areas of importance not listed in question 1:**

- Recreation / Parks / Trails (11)
- Homelessness / Housing / Poverty / Vulnerable Residents (9)
- Substance Use / Mental Health (8)
- Sustainability / Climate Change / Environmental Programs / Energy Conservation (7)
- City Beautification / Restoration (7)
- Road Work / Street Line Painting / Traffic Flow (6)
- Reduce City Administration (5)
- Anti-Racism (5)
- No Multi-use Indoor Turf Facility (4)
- Economic Development / Small Business Support (4)
- Animal Services / Wildlife (3)
- Hospital / Health (3)
- Waterfront Improvements / Enhancements (3)
- Safety (3)

Question 3. The financial impact of COVID-19 on the 2021 budget was funded from the City's Stabilization Reserve fund. These impacts are expected to continue into 2022. What option(s) would you support to cover the increased costs and financial impacts of COVID-19 that exceed any COVID-19 related funding (i.e. Safe Restart Funding, COVID-19 Recovery Funding)?

**Response Options:**

- Temporarily reduce/modify some services in 2022
- Temporarily increase user fees in areas that have increased costs due to COVID-19
- Increase taxes in 2022
- Draw from a reserve fund that is set aside for emergencies and budget to replenish in future years

**Responses:**

The most popular choice was drawing from the reserve fund with approximately 62% support, followed by temporarily reducing/modifying services with 50% support, and increasing user fees with 39% support. Lowest was the option to increase taxes at 10%.

## Question 4. Are there any programs or services that you would be comfortable with temporarily reducing or modifying in order to help cover estimated COVID-19 financial impacts? If so, please list.

Question four received 134 comments. The following are the most frequently mentioned comments of those received. The number in brackets beside the topic indicates its overall frequency of mention. Only comments with three or more mentions have been included in this section. The full verbatim comments have been distributed separately to City Council in an accompanying *Community Engagement Detailed Verbatim Report*.

### **Top comments – programs/service comfortable with temporarily reducing or modifying:**

- Multi-use Indoor Turf Facility (18)
- Police (14)
- Libraries (13)
- Golf Courses (11)
- Transit / Free Transit (11)
- Recreation Programs (10)
- Reduce City Staff (9)
- By-Law Enforcement (9)
- Reduce Number of Councillors (8)
- Fire (8)
- New Developments/Enhancements (6)
- Cut / Freeze City Wages (6)
- Parks (6)
- Committees (Sister Cities Committee) (5)
- Garbage & Recycling (5)
- Animal Service (5)
- Non-essential Services (5)
- Event Centre (4)
- Child Care (4)
- Council Salaries (4)
- Roundabout (4)
- Roads (4)
- Conservatory (3)
- Communications (3)
- Events / Concerts (3)
- Bike Trails / Lanes (3)
- Community Engagement (3)
- Recreation Facilities (3)
- Staff & Council Travel (3)
- Arenas (3)

## Question 5. Do you have any additional comments for City Council to consider when deciding on the 2021 budget?

Overall a total of 151 comments were received. While there was a wide variety of topics covered, the emerging themes centred around focusing on essential 'needs' of residents such as infrastructure and core services versus investing in 'wants' such as new expensive developments and legacy projects – specifically not proceeding with the indoor turf facility. They also do not want to see taxes raised, especially to support new capital projects. Citizens outlined they would like to see the City invest in what we currently have and support the core needs without increasing taxes. It was also expressed that they wish to cut back the number of City Councillors and reduce the levels of management and salaries in City administration. Supporting animal welfare through Animal Services was important as was investing in addressing climate change and furthering green initiatives. Support for social services continued to be expressed.

The following are the most frequently mentioned comments of those received. The number in brackets beside the topic indicates its overall frequency of mention. Only comments with three or more mentions have been included in this section. The full verbatim comments have been distributed separately to City Council in an accompanying *Community Engagement Detailed Verbatim Report*.

### Top comments:

- No indoor turf facility (23)
- Taxes are too high / Do not increase taxes (22)
- Essential services (needs vs wants) / No new expensive developments (16)
- Cut back number of City Councillors (15)
- Reduce management / Reduce staff (12)
- Fix roads (8)
- Support animal care & welfare / Animal services (accept cats again) (8)
- Invest in climate crisis / Green economy / Biodiversity / Natural solutions / Recycling (7)
- Council needs to listen to residents (7)
- Cut staff salaries (7)
- Long-term financial planning / Control costs / Transparent spending (6)
- Invest in social services / Defund police (6)
- Resolve lead in drinking water & fix leaky pipes (6)
- No roundabouts (6)
- No new police station (5)
- Invest in infrastructure (5)
- Offer and support low income activities and services (4)
- Consult residents on all large expenditures / plebiscite (3)
- Support trails / Improve bike lanes (3)
- Promote tourism (3)
- Don't hire consultants / Outside contractors (3)
- Invest in parks (more sitting areas) (3)