



**City of Kingston
Report to Council
Report Number 24-029**

To: Mayor and Members of Council
From: Desirée Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer
Resource Staff: Lana Foulds, Director, Financial Services
Date of Meeting: January 15, 2024
Subject: 2024 Budget Engagement Results

Council Strategic Plan Alignment:

Theme: Financial measures/budget

Goal: See above

Executive Summary:

On July 11, 2023, Council received [Report Number 23-120](#), which outlined the plan for the 2024 budget engagement process, leveraging lessons learned from previous years and utilizing an open budget process that incorporates a continuum of engagement levels from informative outreach to consultative and collaborative engagement as well as a variety of engagement tools to engage citizens in the budget process.

The 2024 budget engagement process commenced on July 21, 2023 with the launch of the 2024 Budget Get Involved Kingston project page and the budget engagement survey. This report provides an overview of the engagement tools and activities that were utilized and summarizes the feedback received during the 2024 budget engagement process.

Recommendation:

This report is for information only.

January 15, 2024

Page 2 of 5

Authorizing Signatures:

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF

FINANCIAL OFFICER & CITY TREASURER

Desiree Kennedy, Chief
Financial Officer & City
Treasurer

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Lanie Hurdle, Chief
Administrative Officer

Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:

Paige Agnew, Commissioner, Growth & Development Services	Not required
Jennifer Campbell, Commissioner, Community Services	Not required
Neil Carbone, Commissioner, Corporate Services	
David Fell, President & CEO, Utilities Kingston	Not required
Peter Huigenbos, Commissioner, Major Projects & Strategic Initiatives	Not required
Brad Joyce, Commissioner, Infrastructure, Transportation & Emergency Services	Not required

January 15, 2024

Page 3 of 5

Options/Discussion:**Background**

Building on lessons learned from previous engagements and guidance from the City's Public Engagement Framework, the 2024 engagement plan was implemented throughout the summer/fall of 2023. The 2024 engagement process was a condensed version of prior year plans with a scope that supplemented the engagement previously done on the strategic priorities and a deferred timing that would align with the 2024 budget process.

An open budget process offers citizens the opportunity to influence the allocation of public resources; however, the benefits of budget engagement, the selection of engagement tools, and the public interest in participation, have to be evaluated against the investment of staff time to plan and implement engagement activities. Budget engagement participation has declined the last couple of years, and it has become more challenging to engage the community on budget-related issues. Therefore, a portion of the City's 2024 engagement process included a consultation on how to better engage citizens and increase participation in the open budget process more effectively.

Budget engagement survey

The budget engagement survey was launched July 21, 2023 on the Get Involved Kingston webpage. The community was provided opportunities to engage online, by phone or by email. The survey closed on September 8, 2023, with 151 surveys completed (down from 450 in 2022).

The survey included both open-ended and closed-ended questions covering a variety of topics – understanding of the city's budget, value received for tax dollars, level of investment in services and programs, and fee structures for various services and programs. The survey also included questions to solicit feedback on what tools and approaches would be more likely to appeal to residents in encouraging increased participation in the budget engagement process (i.e., in-person activities, virtual sessions, interactive tools, information resources). The final section of the survey captured demographic information concerning survey participation, consistent with prior years. As in previous years, the survey included some repeat questions to allow the city to continue to track trends and consistencies in resident responses.

In-person pop-up events

Two in-person pop-up events were held – one on August 31st at Springer Market Square and one on September 6th at the INVISTA Centre. At both sessions, Finance staff were in attendance to talk with residents and answer questions on the City's budget and budget process. In addition to completing the survey, residents could also participate in interactive activities by placing a sticker on a white board indicating how they would rate the value received for their tax dollars and by adding their input to the idea board in response to the question "How could the city better use your tax dollars?"

January 15, 2024

Page 4 of 5

Ideas tool

In response to the declining participation noted over the last couple of years, staff utilized the “Ideas tool” feature on the Get Involved Kingston Budget page to solicit suggestions on how to increase participation in the budget engagement process - what tools and activities will generate the most interest and how can staff encourage participation from an expanded and more diverse cross section of residents. Others could see ideas once posted and show their support by “liking” their favourite ones.

All budget engagement activities were promoted through the Get Involved Kingston budget engagement page, social media, news release, and the Get Involved Kingston email newsletter.

Who we heard from

Based on the Get Involved Kingston engagement statistics, 151 participants completed surveys or submitted future engagement ideas and 693 participants visited the project page. The in-person pop-up events had 26 people participate in the interactive activities.

What we heard

Exhibit A to this report summarizes the 2024 budget engagement results.

Of particular note from the survey, just over a third of respondents felt they were getting good or excellent value for their tax dollars. Similar results from the in-person engagements showed that the majority of participants felt that the overall value received from tax dollars ranged from fair to good.

Survey respondents were asked for their feedback on current programs and services that Council could consider for potential reduction or elimination. Seventy-four responses of wide variety were received and summarized by theme on Exhibit A.

Survey respondents were also polled on whether they would support an increase of user fees for specific services if this meant a reduction in the level of support from property taxes. The majority of respondents would not support an increase for recreational fees or transit fares; however, 50% of respondents would support an increase to garbage bag tags.

Survey respondents were asked to provide a project or idea that would positively impact their community or neighbourhood. Ninety-two responses were received and summarized on Exhibit A.

Survey responses and the Get Involved Kingston Ideas tool provided useful input and creative suggestions to encourage increased participation in the budget engagement process in the future. Staff will review and incorporate this feedback in developing the 2025 budget engagement plan and will continue to review other practices and techniques that will increase the level of public engagement on budget related topics.

January 15, 2024

Page 5 of 5

Feedback

It is important to ensure that participants feel that their feedback is valued and has influenced the subject matter at hand. Survey results and other engagement feedback were collated and forwarded to the respective departments/agencies for consideration during the 2024 budget development process and will provide input into future budget processes.

Existing Policy/By-Law

[Municipal Act, 2001](#), s. 290(1) as it pertains to the annual budgeting process.

[City of Kingston Public Notice Policy](#)

[City of Kingston's Accessibility Standard's Policy](#)

Notice Provisions

There is no legislated notice provision related to the budget engagement process.

Financial Considerations

None

Contacts:

Lana Foulds, Director, Financial Services & Deputy Treasurer, 613-546-4291 extension 2209

Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted:

Kelsey Pye, Communications Officer, Communications and Customer Experience

Exhibits Attached:

Exhibit A – 2024 Budget engagement results

2024 Budget Engagement Results

Budget engagement survey

The budget engagement survey was launched July 21, 2023 on the Get Involved Kingston webpage. The community was provided opportunities to engage online, by phone or by email. The survey closed on September 8, 2023, with 151 surveys completed (down from 450 in 2022).

The following provides a summary of the survey response highlights. Responses were shortened for brevity and clarity. Feedback that did not follow the City of Kingston's Guidelines for Participation was omitted.

1. How well do you feel you understand the City's budget and how tax dollars are spent?

Response	Number of Respondents	Response percentage
I am very familiar with how the municipality's budget is spent.	25	16.6%
I have some understanding of how the municipality's budget is spent	98	64.9%
I am not familiar with how the municipality's budget is spent.	28	18.5%
Total	151	100.0%

2. In 2023, the average residential property valued at \$328,100 paid \$3,809 in property taxes for all municipal services, including roads, sidewalks, pathways and trails, winter control, fire, police, recreation, parks, transit, garbage, and recycling. How would you rate the overall value received for your tax dollars?

Response	Number of Respondents	Response percentage
Excellent	10	6.8%
Good	49	33.1%
Fair	62	41.9%
Poor	27	18.2%
Total	148	100.0%

3. Are there any current programs or services that you think Council should consider reducing or eliminating? If so, please list.

There were 74 responses to this question. Responses were summarized into the following themes:

- Infrastructure and transportation
 - Kingston should move away from car-centric infrastructure and planning
 - Review bike lanes for usage
 - Reduce roads and parking development so funding can be allocated to active transportation
 - Bicycle initiatives
- Economic programs and services
 - Universities should pay costs associated with large gatherings/parties
 - Reduce tax breaks (if any) for larger companies and corporations, or on incentives for businesses to relocate to Kingston
 - Drop reduced taxes for empty storefronts
 - Eliminate funding to KEDCO and Tourism Kingston

- Environmental programs and services
 - Stop subsidizing high-pollution industries like aviation and cruising
 - Reduce garbage and green bin collection to every other week in winter
 - Reduce climate change spending
- Other services and reductions
 - Police budget
 - Non-core infrastructure spending like arts and flag raising sets
 - Reduce social service expense to invest in infrastructure or recreation
 - Reduce administrative staff
 - Fire services budget
 - No budget cuts should be on programs and services for residents
 - The Integrated Care Hub
 - Some recreation/festivals – they could go to the private or volunteer sector
 - Reduction of the urban growth boundary to intensify growth over time and reduce costs to deliver municipal services
 - Art/interactive displays downtown

4. Please identify whether you would support an increase in user fees for these services if this meant a reduction in the level of support from property taxes.

Programs or Services	Support an increase	Do not support an increase	Undecided
Recreation (sports fields and park fees)	51	83	12
Arenas (ice rental fees)	75	63	12
Recreational programming (e.g., fitness / aquatics)	50	83	15
Transit fares	34	113	1
Cultural programming fees (e.g., Grand Theatre, museums)	68	71	10
Garbage bag tags	74	63	11

5. Do you have a project or idea that could positively impact your neighbourhood or community?

There were 92 responses to this question. Responses were summarized into the following themes:

- Urban Mobility and Infrastructure
 - o Expansion of bicycle infrastructure and protected bike lanes
 - o Foot patrols and enforcement in the downtown area
 - o Traffic calming measures, such as planters and bollards
 - o More bus/public transportation services to rural areas
- Environmental Conservation and Awareness
 - o Invasive species eradication and native plant promotion
 - o Nature talks and park/garden development
 - o Green initiatives like e-waste collection and solar panel installations
 - o Community-led climate education and campaigns

- Community Development and Services
 - o Utilization of public spaces for more activities and facilities
 - o Affordable housing initiatives and neighborhood watch programs
 - o Support for local events and festivals, such as mini-festivals and music events
 - o Initiatives for community gardening and composting
 - Infrastructure and Civic Services
 - o Improvement of city roads and pavements
 - o Increased presence of garbage and recycling bins
 - o Enhanced staffing and services in libraries
 - o Property maintenance initiatives and neighborhood beautification
 - Sustainable Development and Environmental Research
 - o Land acquisition for environmental research and community projects
 - o Frequency of transit services and initiatives for environmental sustainability
6. Have you previously participated in any of the City's budget engagement activities (survey, virtual sessions, in-person pop-ups, ideas tool)?

Response	Number of Respondents	Response percentage
Yes	51	33.8%
No	74	49.0%
Unsure	21	13.9%
Prefer not to say	5	3.3%
Total	151	100.0%

7. What budget engagement tools and/or activities do you think are most effective for engaging the community in the municipal budget process?

Note: Respondents could select more than one tool.

Response	Number of Respondents
Get Involved Kingston project webpage	104
Budget open house	62
Virtual presentations	59
In-person pop-up events	52
Interactive activities	53
Surveys	110
Special speaking/information sessions	43
Other tools or events (please specify)	21
Total	148

Those who selected “Other tools or events” specified the following:

- Promotional emails
- Offline promotion/engagement for those who do not have access to the Internet
- Social media (free or sponsored advertisements)
- Online education courses to help the public understand the basics of municipal budgeting
- YouTube videos
- Events that allow for families with children to participate
- Better advertising of events
- Sharing information/speaking with community groups
- Promoting specific information of departmental budgets, and how residents’ actions can impact

- Promoting how to engage with local Councillors to discuss the budget and budget process
 - Incentives to participate, such as giveaways
 - Hard copy participation – flyer mail and community board notices
 - Relationship building
8. Is there any additional information we could provide that would be useful in understanding the City's operating and capital budgets? Note: Respondents could select more than one tool.

Response	Number of Respondents
The budget development process and how decisions are made	82
The different sources of revenue for the City	98
Details of specific services and service levels available	89
The costs of services and programs	122
The difference between the operating and capital budgets	79
How the budget impacts my property tax bill	53
How capital projects are prioritized and funded	61
How tax dollars are allocated to various services and program	107
Other (please specify)	15
Total	147

Those who selected “Other” specified the following:

- Who works on which projects
- Pecuniary interests
- How a 0% tax increase would affect services
- Visual statistical charts accompanied by brief explanations of why you want to go in the direction that you do

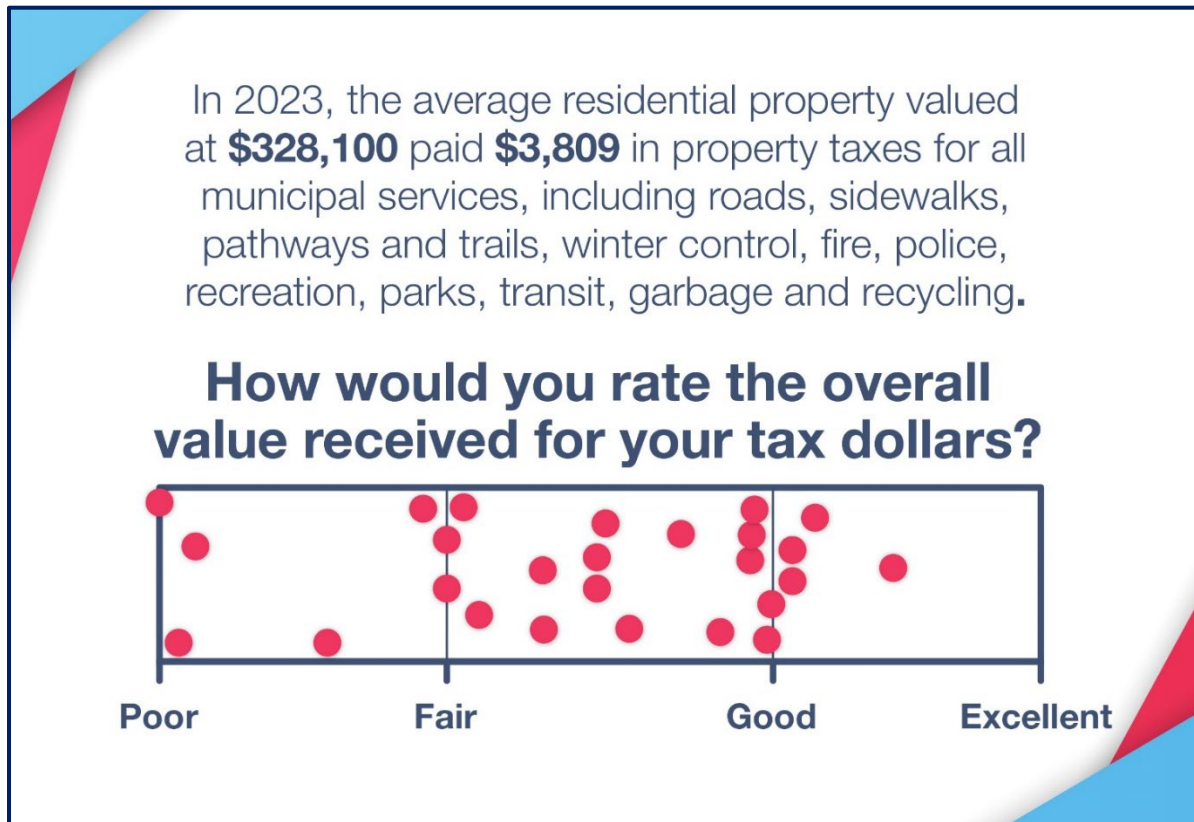
- For each service delivered by the City, how much goes into actually improving the target of the expenditure versus how much is spent on financing the bureaucrats and bureaucracy responsible for making the improvements
- More detailed financial and budget information easily available online to the public
- A breakdown of department salaries as a whole over five years
- Explain how resident actions can affect budgets. For example, by-law enforcement services. Let residences and businesses know that any time their actions require investigation and/or enforcement of by-laws, that this is adversely impacting their property tax bill
- Information about the cost of delivering municipal services per capita to different land uses and densities (urban, suburban, rural) to encourage the right development in the right areas. For example, the tiny homes project for veterans at King St/Portsmouth Ave project is a missed opportunity to provide a much higher residential density inside the urban boundary to avoid having to expand development in other areas
- Information about how all taxes are collected and spent
- How the police budget is developed, funded, monitored, and controlled
- How the City is staffed and how to increase staff and services
- Explanations of why residents may be taxed for services they do not use
- The climate implications of budget decisions
- Information about housing services/budgets

In-person pop-up events

Two in-person pop-up engagements were held – one at Springer Market Square and one at the INVISTA Centre. At both sessions, residents could provide input by placing a sticker on the white board indicating how they would rate the value received for their tax dollars and add an entry to the idea board by responding to the question “Based on where you added your sticker, how could the city better use your tax dollars?”

The following summarizes the results of these interactive activities. The picture below shows the results of the white board activity and the additional responses received.

Responses were shortened for brevity and clarity. Feedback that did not follow the City of Kingston's Guidelines for Participation was omitted.



Additional comments received:

- North of Highway 401 loses out on many services
- The Property Standards department should receive more money to address the condition of houses, specifically in the University District
- More bicycle infrastructure, park amenities for older children, keeping tree canopies in urban neighborhoods and public waterfront amenities
- Nothing – taxpayers get good value
- Program traffic lights as a system to increase efficiency
- Price of FitPass is too expensive
- Some neighbourhood streets/cul-de-sacs are not plowed fast enough
- Doctor shortage

- Bus routes, bicycle infrastructure, youth shelters, fix roads
- Tree trimming and maintenance needs to be more proactive
- Advanced road closure signage
- Waterfront improvement
- Better wayfinding for washrooms
- Green boxes for condominiums
- Righthand lane going north and south on Montreal/John Counter Boulevard
- Secure an airline provider
- Geese taking over some parks, making them undesirable
- Pedestrianize streets around City Hall in the summer
- Repair streets and potholes properly, following the right procedure
- Use Waaban Crossing for transit routes
- North of Highway 401 receives no road maintenance including grass and ditch cutting; roads also not maintained to support highway closures
- Better park amenities in Briceland Park
- There is quick service for parks and tree removal and excellent garbage removal in Kingston

Ideas Tool

The 2024 budget engagement utilized the “ideas tool” feature on the Get Involved Kingston Budget page. This tool provides the opportunity for the community to engage with each other by submitting creative ideas in response to a variety of questions. Others can see ideas once posted and show their support by “liking” their favourite ones.

The ideas tool was used solicit suggestions for increasing participation in the budget engagement process - what tools and activities will generate the most interest and how do staff encourage participation from an expanded and more diverse cross section of residents.

The following are the responses submitted by participants on the Get Involved Kingston project page and at in-person events to the question: “What other ways can the city engage residents on the budget? Are there opportunities for us to bring more people into the conversation?”

There were seven responses to the question. Responses were shortened for brevity and clarity. Feedback that did not follow the City of Kingston’s Guidelines for Participation was omitted.

- Run bus ads with prompts (e.g., “You asked, we listened. Last year, the City invested xx on yy topic. Have your say at...”)
- Further outreach including pop-up events, social media events and paid advertising
- Use social media to promote the budget more
- Visit high schools or youth organizations to educate on how the budget works and how to get involved
- More diverse and targeted engagement strategies that use different tactics to reach various groups
- Incentives to complete surveys
- Hire post-secondary students who can support increased engagement activities