

STAFF REPORT TO FINANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

1100 Patricia Blvd. | Prince George, BC, Canada V2L 3V9 | www.princegeorge.ca

DATE: November 28, 2022

TO: STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND AUDIT

NAME AND TITLE: Walter Babicz, City Manager

SUBJECT: Budget 2023 Community Engagement

ATTACHMENT(S): None

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Standing committee on Finance and Audit RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION the report dated November 28, 2022 from the City Manager, titled “Budget 2023 Community Engagement.”

PURPOSE:

This report is provided for information in relation to the 2023 municipal budget.

BACKGROUND:

Budgets are one of the most difficult topics to engage the community on. While people often have opinions on how much their property taxes are, they sometimes find it to be much more complicated to provide thoughtful feedback on each of the service areas. The sheer size and complexity of a municipal budget can be intimidating.

When we ask citizens their opinions on service areas we also have to consider the context. If we ask the average citizen how important corporate services is to them, they may not hold it in high esteem, but they may also not understand what it is. Things like compliance with legislation, risk, and procurement are very important to the operation of a municipality but won't rank as high as roads or parks in the everyday life of a citizen.

Bylaw services is also a difficult area to properly assess. A recent parking ticket may make a respondent value bylaw services much lower than someone who had a car towed that was prohibiting snow clearing on their street.

The annual citizen engagement around the municipal budget is a crucial part of governance but we must also strive to achieve a culture of informing and listening to our community throughout the year. And we must continue to strive to keep them informed of the service that are provided to them.

The City of Prince George has provided excellent opportunities for feedback over the years in spite of the challenges created by the pandemic.

Consultation this year was done through digital channels:

- Five satisfaction surveys
- The annual citizen budget survey
- Gathering comments received on social media

Budget engagement for 2023 did not include an in-person event with Council due to the timing of the local government election.

For the first time, additional broader citizen satisfaction surveys were used to gather input from the public. These shorter topic-specific surveys attracted those who rent and/or do not want to complete a longer survey that includes topics they don't have strong opinions on.

Citizen Satisfaction Surveys

Five satisfaction surveys focused on important City services. The goal was to understand how residents think the City is doing at providing the following services and receive their suggestions on improvements:

- Roads and sidewalks
- Parks and trails
- Events and recreation
- Snow and ice control
- Protective services

Total responses from all surveys: 1,878.

Highest performing survey: Snow management 474 responses.

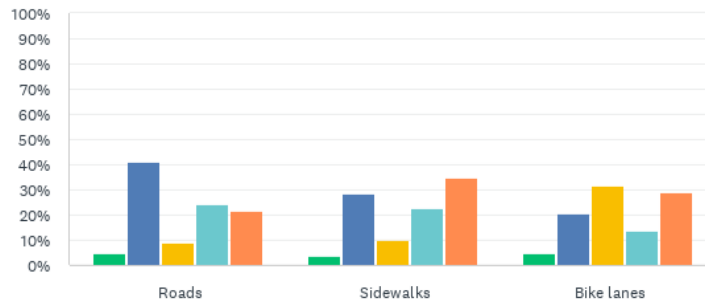
One question on each survey asked respondents to indicate which garbage zone they live in to determine if we were reaching all neighbourhoods. There was equal representation across all zones in all surveys.

Roads and sidewalks satisfaction survey

Total responses: 429.

Each of the questions in this survey allowed respondents to expand on their response in a comment. There were 663 comments indicating a very high level of interest and thought on this topic.

Q2 How satisfied are you with the quality of roads, sidewalks, and bike lanes in Prince George?



Answer options:

- Green – they're great
- Dark blue – they're good enough
- Yellow – I'm indifferent
- Light blue – they're not good
- Orange – they need work

Roads: 46% of respondents thought they were great or good enough while 45% thought they are not good enough or need work.

Sidewalks: 35% of respondents thought they were great or good enough while 58% thought they are not good enough or need work.

Bike Lanes: 26% of respondents thought they were great or good enough while 42% thought they are not good enough or need work. 32% were indifferent.

Citizens were also asked to explain their answers above. The majority of respondents expressed a need to improve/build sidewalks to make them more accessible for folks in wheelchairs, scooters, and those pushing strollers. Several responses also expressed a need for improved bike lanes. This also applies to question six where respondents were asked for additional feedback about roads and sidewalks.

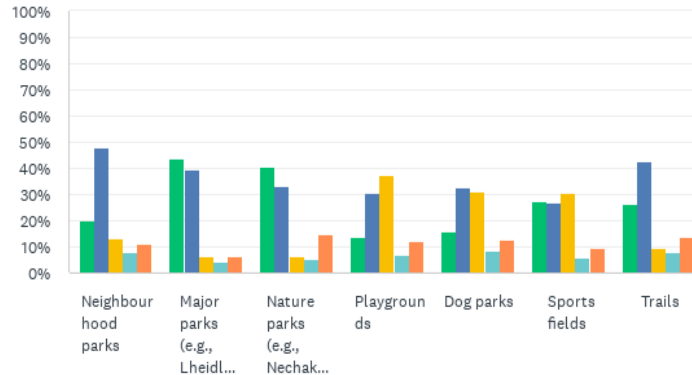
Citizens were also asked from a list of priorities where the City should be focusing its efforts with respect to roads. The majority of respondents (65%) said repaving damaged roads. 55% said filling potholes faster. In the comments people again expressed a need for sidewalks. Popular responses also included better visibility for bike lanes (signage, line painting) and more frequent line painting.

Finally, citizens were also asked from a list of priorities where the City should be focusing its efforts with respect to sidewalks. Adding sidewalks in areas that don't have them received the highest number of responses (63%) while replacing cracked and damaged sidewalks came in second (56%). Most comments expressed a need to make sidewalks more accessible (adding more curb ramps) and a need for sidewalks in the Hart area.

Parks and trails satisfaction survey

Total responses: 373.

Q2 Prince George has 106 kilometres of trails and 103 parks within city limits. How satisfied are you with the quality of parks and trails in Prince George?

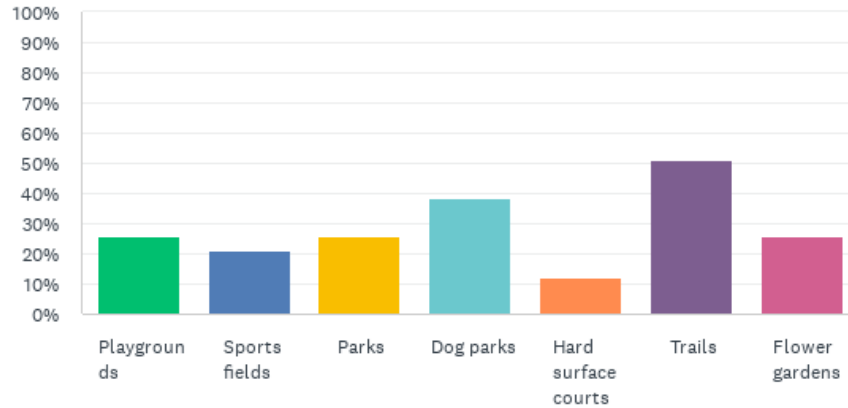


Answer options:

- Green – they're great
- Dark blue – they're good enough
- Yellow – I'm indifferent
- Light blue – they're not good
- Orange – they need work

Through comments, most respondents expressed a need for improved trail systems, bike trails, and trail maintenance (fixing rooted trails/bridges at Cottonwood was a popular response), however the sentiment was mostly positive. Several responses mentioned improving playgrounds in neighbourhood parks. Adding/improving dog parks (in College Heights specifically) and ball fields (North Nechako) were also mentioned.

Q4 What does Prince George need more of?

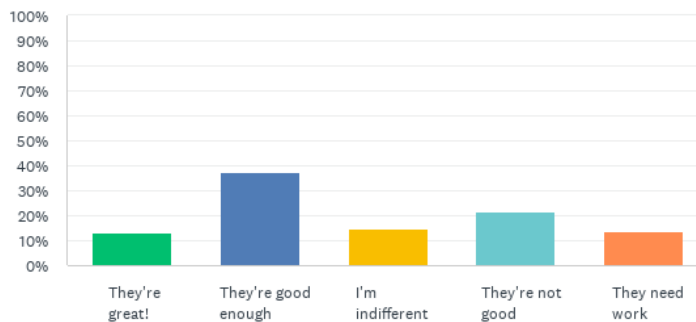


- Playgrounds 26%
- Sports fields 21%
- Parks 26%
- Dog parks 38%
- Hard surface courts 12%
- Trails 51%
- Flower gardens 26%

Events and recreation satisfaction survey

Total responses: 388.

Q2 How satisfied are you with the quality of recreation opportunities in Prince George?



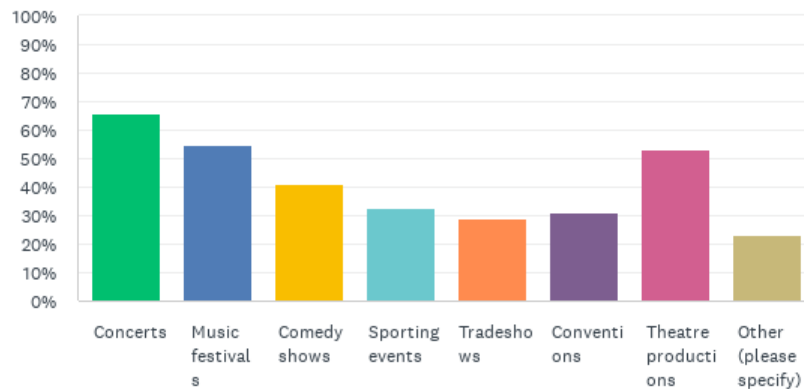
Respondents were asked to choose which area Prince George needs more of: aquatic activities, skating/ice time, sports/fitness activities, arts and culture or other. The majority of respondents said arts and cultural activities with sports/fitness and aquatic activities in a close second. 36% of respondents chose the 'other' option. This word cloud summarizes the most popular words used:

swimming trampolines park Outdoor friendly activities time younger parks one events
 Free people Kids indoor play children something
 Concerts pools activities Programs kids small
 need classes Indoor None family performing arts music Family friendly NEW
 indoor play areas Swimming lessons Festivals

In a question about user fees at pools and arenas, 46% said the cost is just right whereas 38% of people said they are indifferent to user fees. 15% thought the costs are too high.

On how satisfied respondents are with events at civic facilities 51% said they're good enough or great while 31% said they are not good enough.

Q6 What does Prince George need more of? Check as many as you like.



- Concerts 66%
- Music festivals 55%
- Theatre productions 53%

In the 'other' section, many respondents specified they'd like to see free, family friendly events and events geared towards children as well as indoor play spaces.

When asked about the possibility of building another theatre to replace the Playhouse. 68% of respondents said yes. And in the follow-up question about location there is a tie between downtown and anywhere outside of downtown (32%).

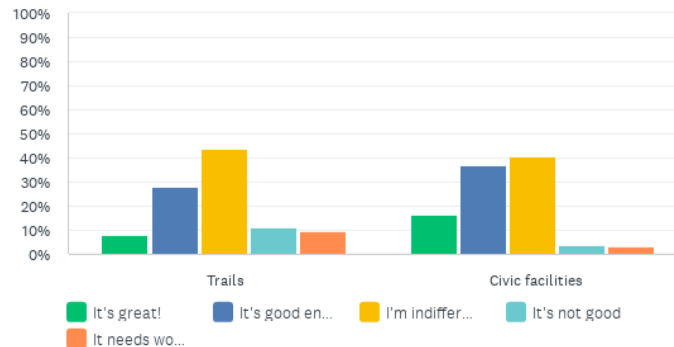
Snow and ice control satisfaction survey

Total responses: 474.

Q2 The City aims to clear main roads and sidewalks (priority one and two routes) within two days of a snow or ice event (i.e., if at least 7.5 cm of snow falls within 24 hours). The City aims to clear residential roads and sidewalks (priority three routes) within three days after all main roads are cleared. How satisfied are you with the quality of snow and ice management on our main routes, residential roads, and sidewalks?



Q3 The parks division is responsible for snow and ice management on city trails and at civic facilities. How satisfied are you with snow and ice management in these areas?



Answer options:

- Green – they're great
- Dark blue – they're good enough
- Yellow – I'm indifferent
- Light blue – they're not good
- Orange – they need work

Respondents were asked if residents should be responsible for shoveling the sidewalks in front of their property. The responses were split with 48% in favour and 52% not in favour of shoveling sidewalks in front of their property.

In the open questions asking for additional feedback on snow removal several respondents expressed the need to plow more sidewalks, more frequently. Some respondents expressed the need to ticket and tow people who park on the street during restricted hours. Overall, the feedback ranged from complaints about priority route schedules, to driveway clearing, to snow drifts, and the size of snow piles left behind. The comments were ranked that about 15% of responses were positive, 38% neutral, and 48% negative. There are more personal anecdotes in this section than in any other survey.

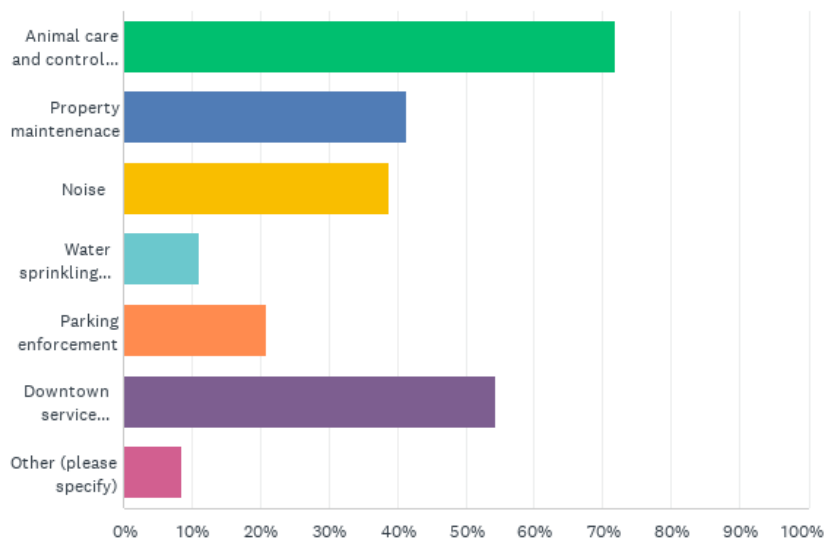
Protective services satisfaction survey

Total responses: 245.

In this survey respondents were asked if they have ever needed protective services.

- 26% of respondents said they have needed the fire department. They rated their service 4.4 out of 5. The majority of comments were positive, praising quick response times and helpful staff.
- 62% of respondents said they have needed the RCMP. They rated their service 3.8 out of 5. The majority of comments spoke about response times (some saying it's too slow, some saying it's great).
- 36% of respondents said they have needed bylaw. They rated their service 2.8 out of 5. The majority of comments spoke about response times (some saying it's too slow, some saying it's great).

Q8 Which bylaw services are most important to you?



In the open question asking for additional feedback about protective services the majority of respondents expressed a need to improve safety downtown and reduce property crime. Respondents also expressed their desire to see more fines issued for unleashed dogs and dog waste in City parks and trails, vehicles parked in the street during the winter, and bear attractants.

Satisfaction survey promotion

The City published 10 organic posts (two for each survey) on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The highest-performing platform was Facebook:

- Average post reach: 4,365
- Average post engagements: 463

In addition, a boosted (paid promotion) post on Facebook to promote all surveys for one week was used:

- Total post reach: 9,286
- Total post engagements: 1,227
- Total cost of boost: \$50

Vista Radio advertising statistics:

- MyPGNow.ca banner ad ran from mid-September to October 1
- Total impressions: 16,764
- Total clicks: 17
- A radio spot on both Vista stations ran tee times per day through the duration of the banner ad.
- Total cost of radio and banner ad: \$510

Citizen budget survey

The survey questions this year were the same as previous years to allow for year-to-year comparisons. The survey ran from October 4th to November 1st and was promoted through advertising and social media.

Participants were asked to increase, decrease, or maintain their property tax funding for different budget categories within a balanced budget or by increasing taxes. They were also asked to indicate on a sliding scale how important or unimportant different city services are for them.

The survey platform had 1,619 views with 652 participants, and 626 comments. In 2021 the survey had 1,710 views and 552 participants.

The following summarizes the feedback received for each service area:

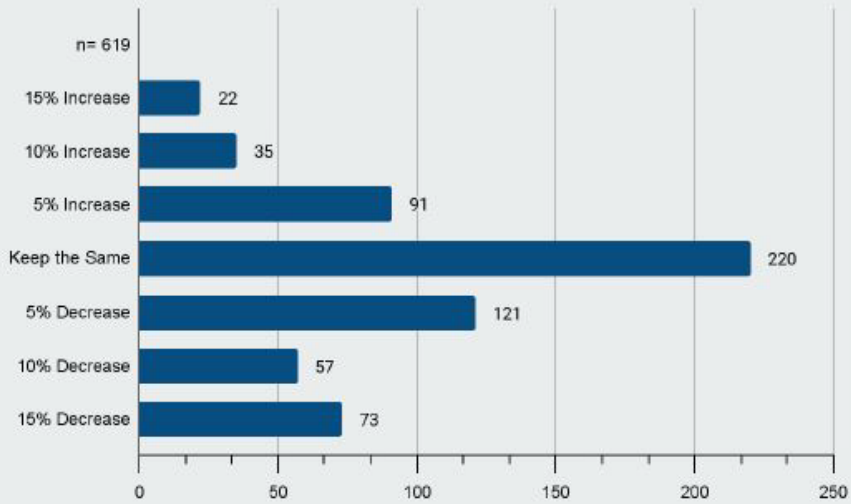
SERVICE AREA	SENTIMENT	APPROVAL	WEIGHT
Bylaw Enforcement Services	Keep the same	70%	6.8%
Community Planning and Infrastructure	5% Increase	74%	8.4%
Community Support services	Keep the same	61%	7.8%
Corporate Services	5% Decrease	73%	4.1%
Fire Protection Services	Keep the same	81%	10.7%
Parks, Trails, and Beautification	Keep the same	74%	9.1%
Police Services	5% Increase	61%	10.5%
Public Transit Services	Keep the same	67%	5.6%
Recreation and Community Services	Keep the same	73%	8.6%
Roads and Sidewalks	5% Increase	80%	10.4%
Services that attract and retain business and facilitate development	Keep the same	71%	7.0%
Snow and Ice Control	5% Increase	81%	11.0%

In 2021 respondents preferred a 5% decrease in corporate services and a 5% increase in police services and roads and sidewalks. All other service areas the majority preferred to leave the budget the same.

The following are the responses in each service area for budget priorities and satisfaction (1=poor, 5= neutral, and 10= excellent):

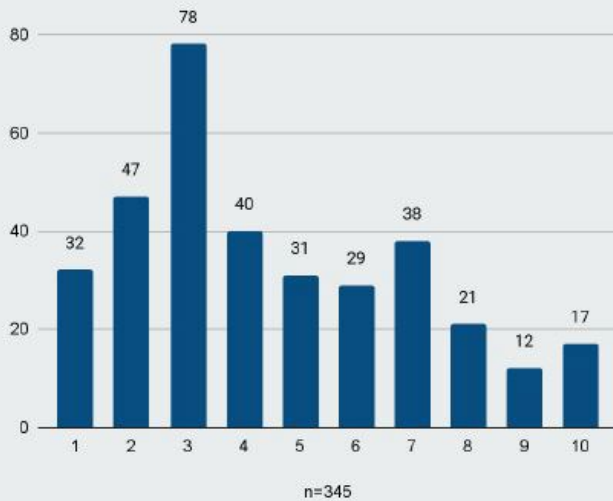
Bylaw Enforcement

Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Bylaw Enforcement?



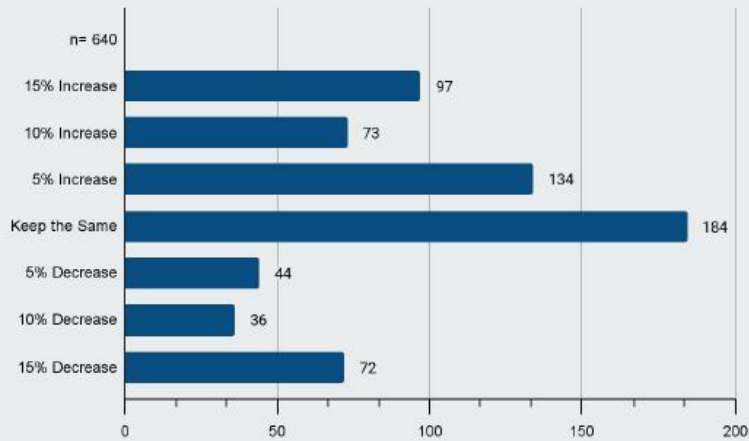
Satisfaction:

Bylaw Enforcement



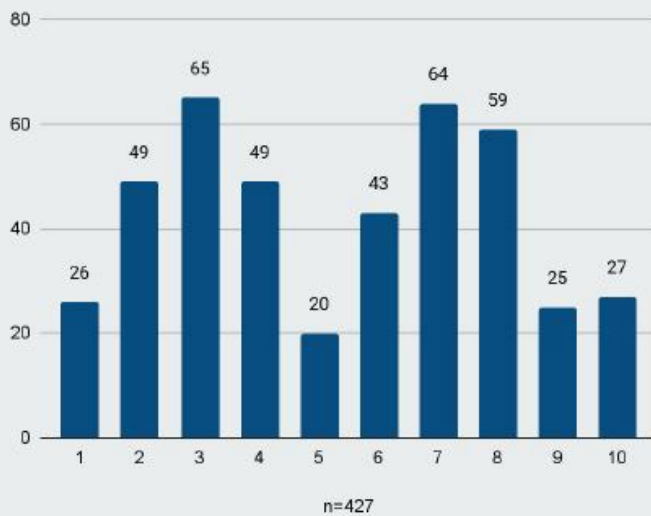
Police Services

Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Police Services?



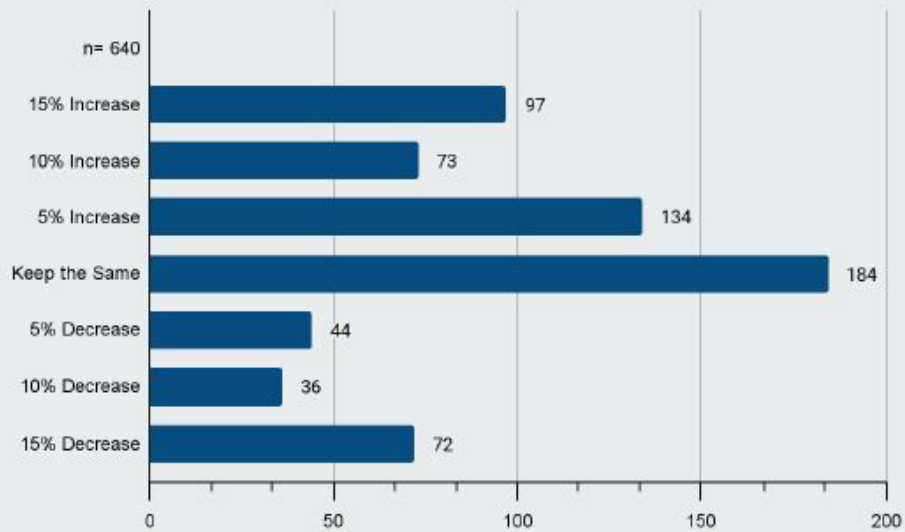
Satisfaction:

Police Services

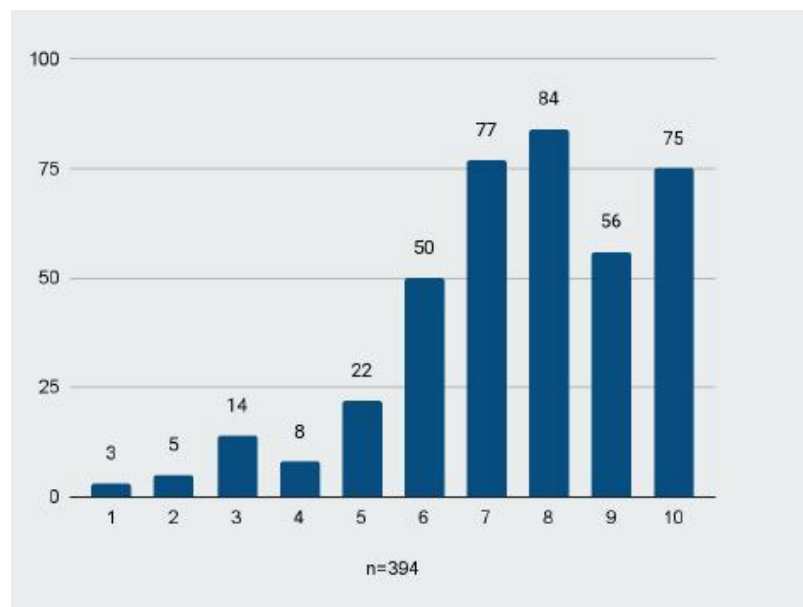


Fire Protection

Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Fire Protection?

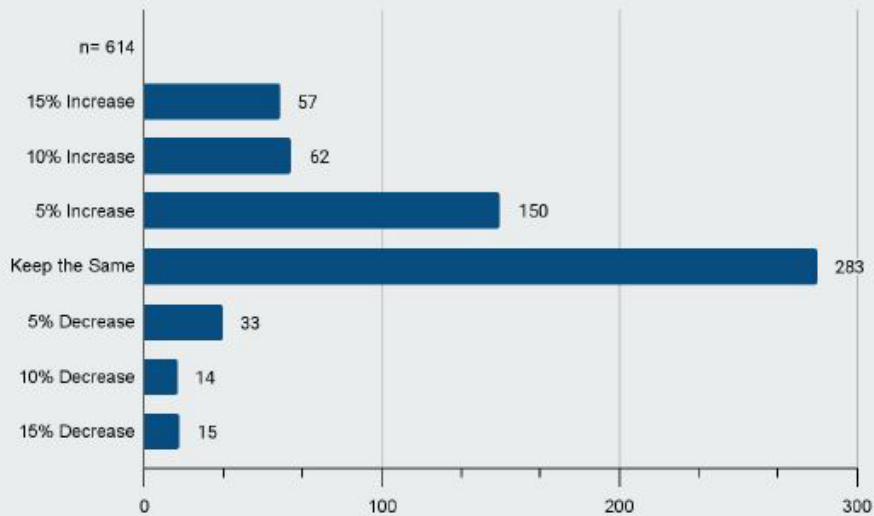


Satisfaction:

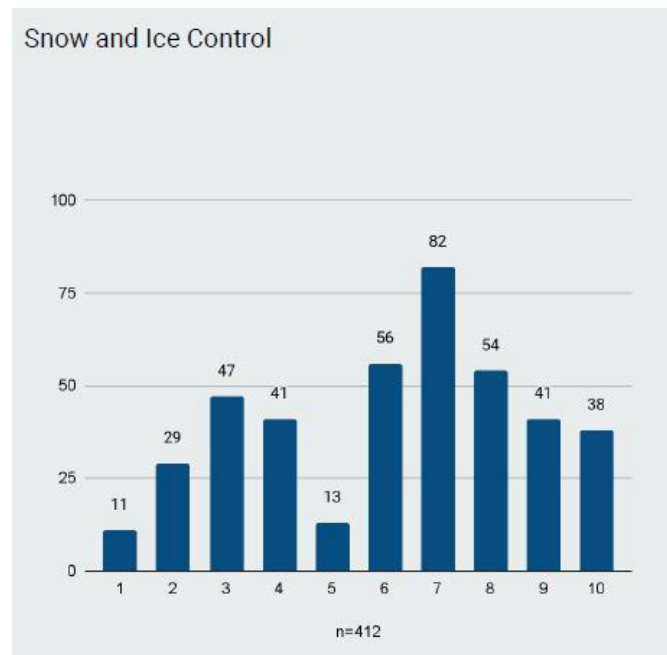


Snow and Ice Control

Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Snow and Ice Control?

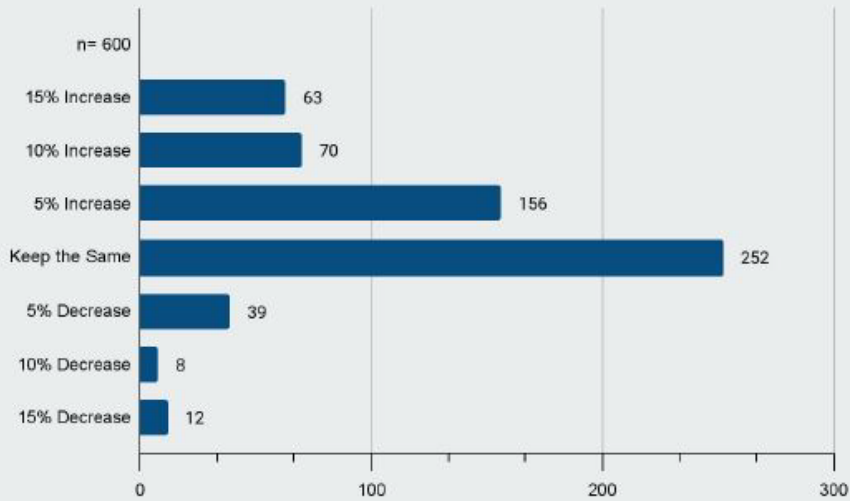


Satisfaction:



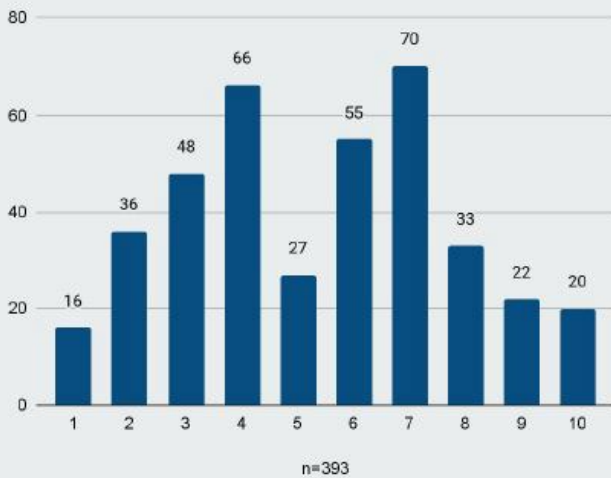
Roads and Sidewalks

Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Roads and Sidewalks?



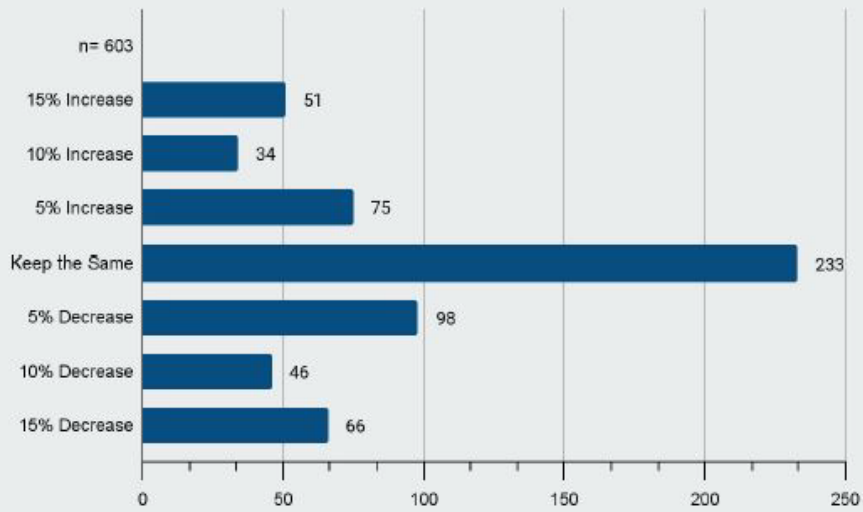
Satisfaction:

Roads and Sidewalks Services

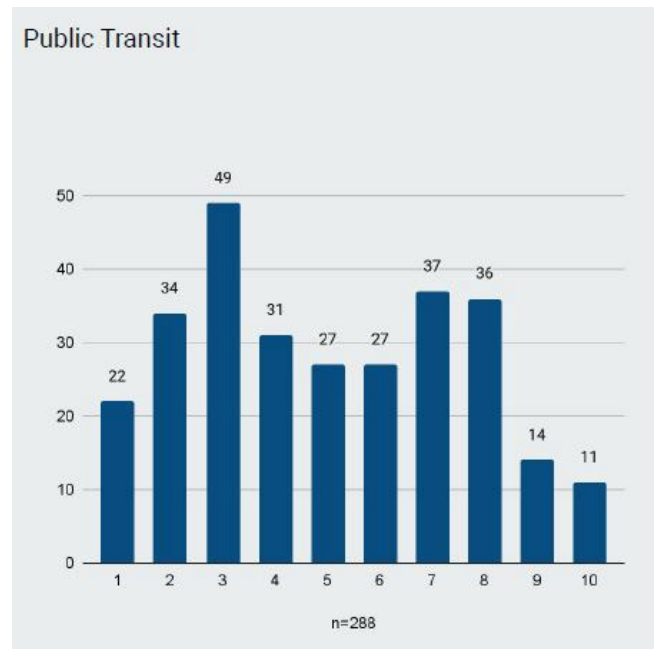


Public Transit

Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Public Transit?

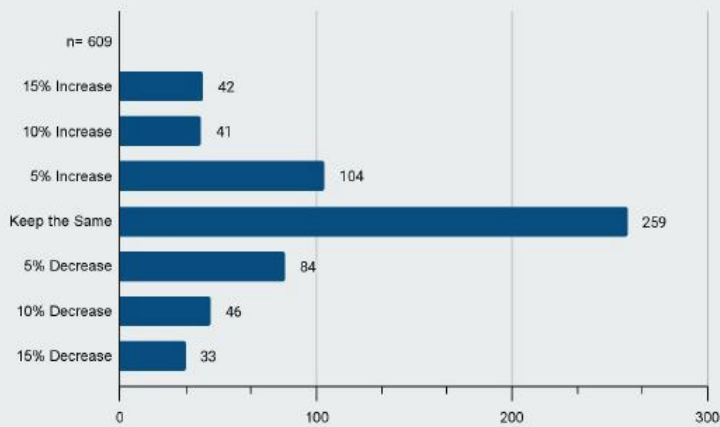


Satisfaction:



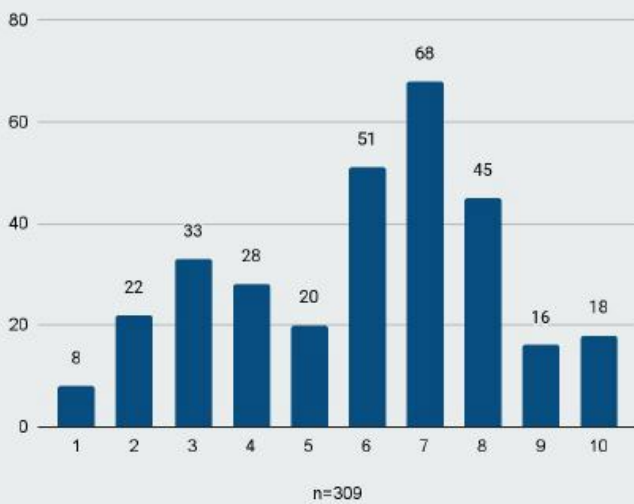
Recreational and Community Facilities

Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Recreation and Community Facilities?



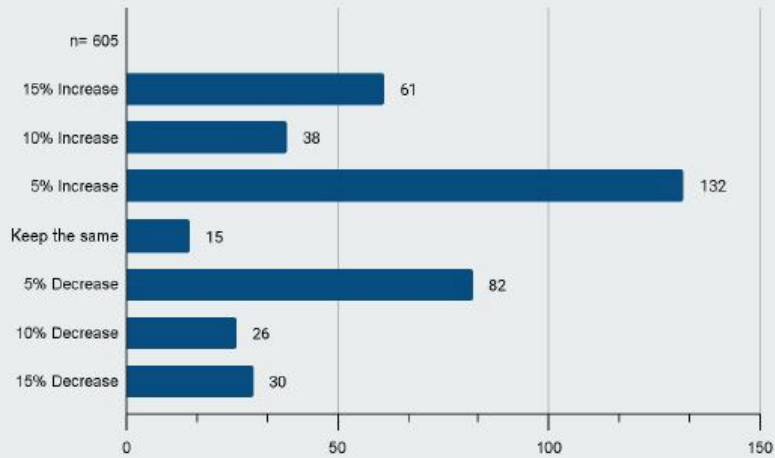
Satisfaction:

Recreation and Community Services



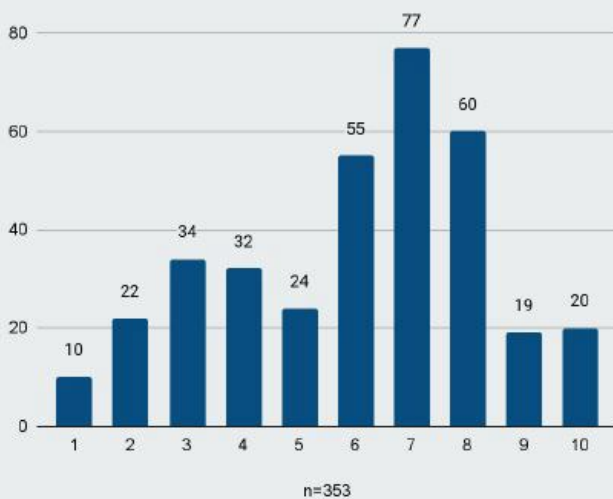
Parks, Trails, and Beautification

Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Parks, Trails, and Beautification?



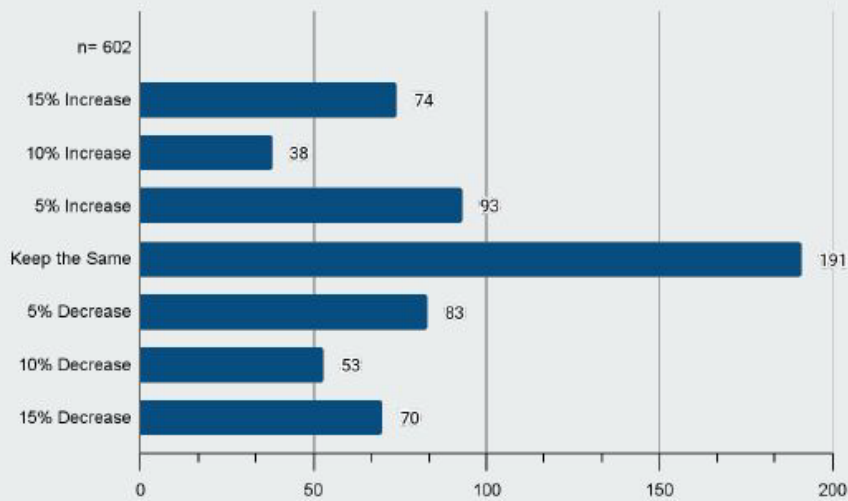
Satisfaction:

Parks, Trails and Beautification



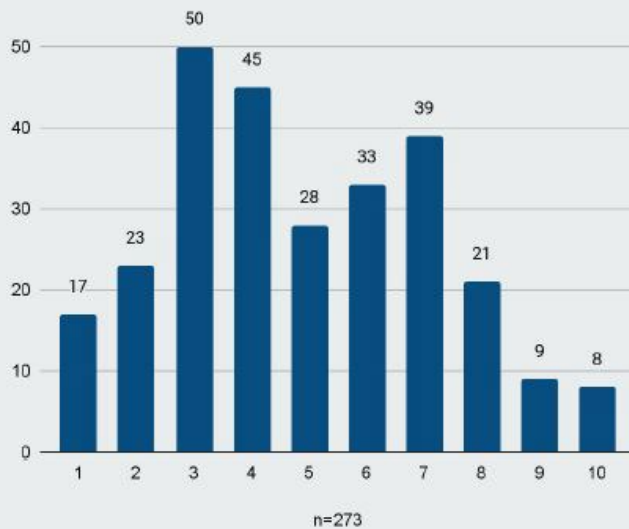
Community Support

Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Community Support services?



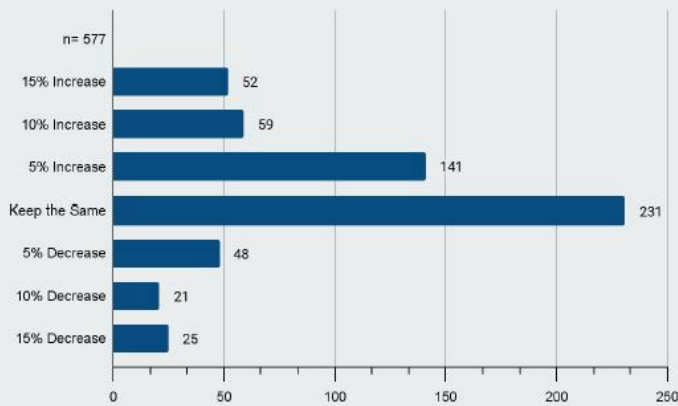
Satisfaction:

Community Support Services



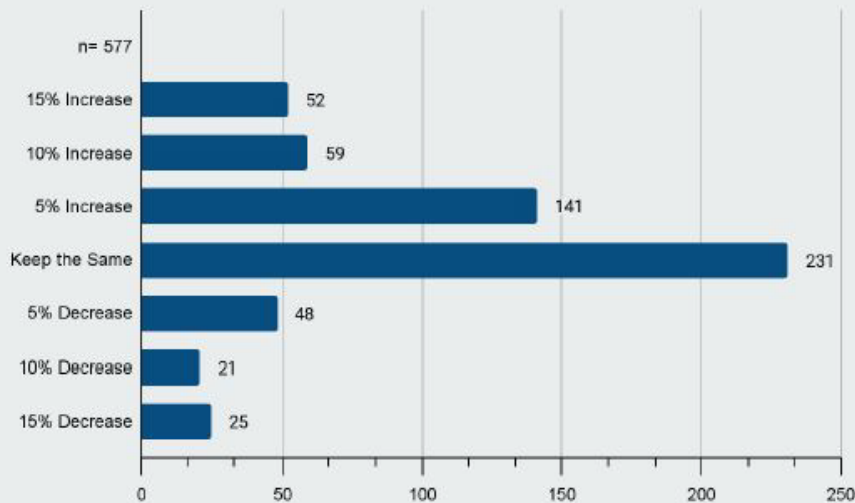
Community Planning and Economic Development

Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for attracting/retaining business and facilitating development?

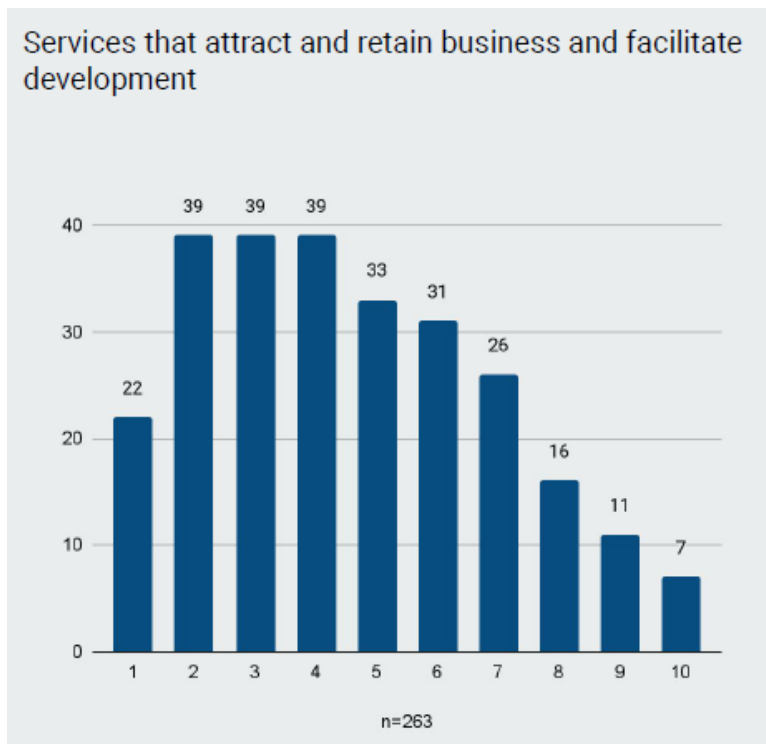
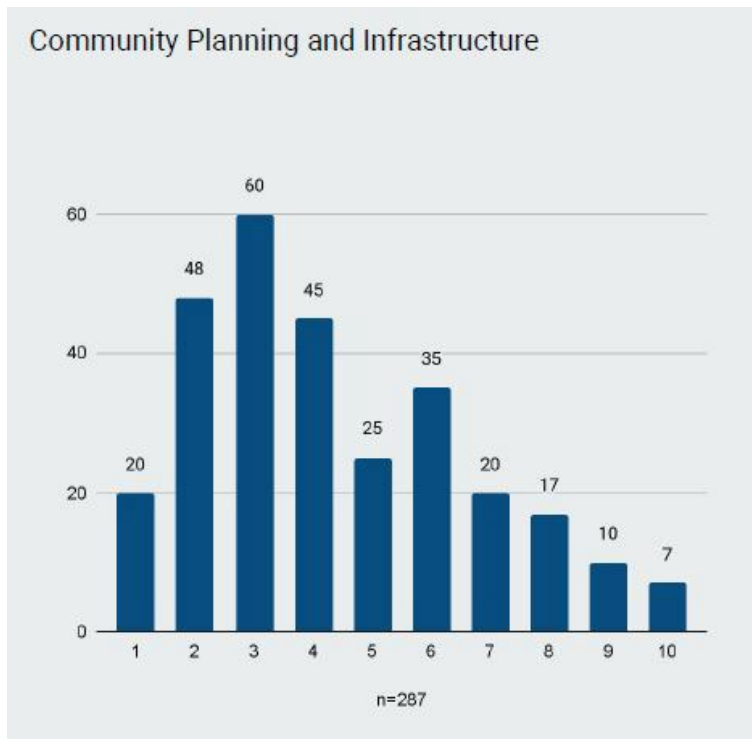


Infrastructure Management

Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Community Planning and Infrastructure?

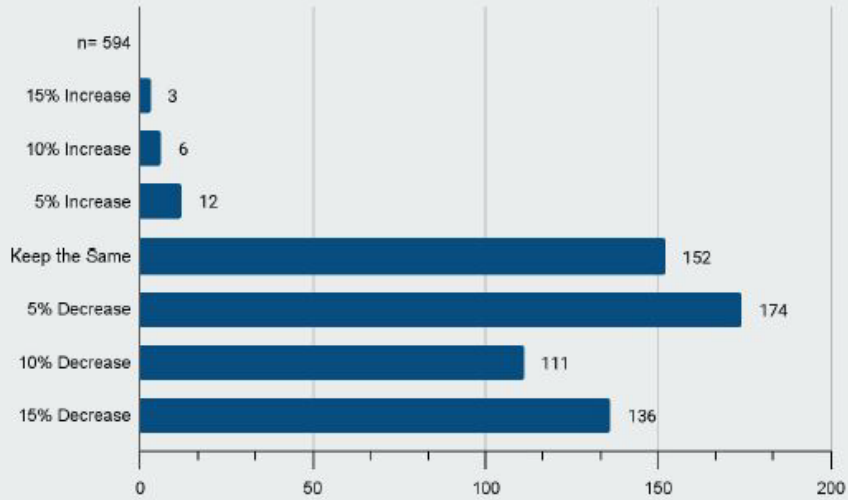


Satisfaction:



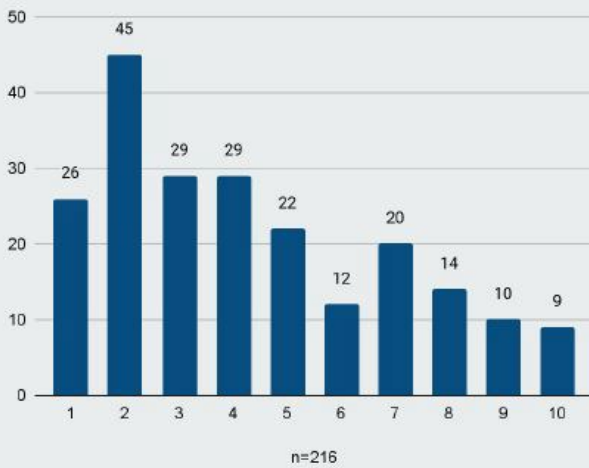
Corporate Services

Would you choose to increase, decrease, or maintain the current level of funding for Corporate Services?

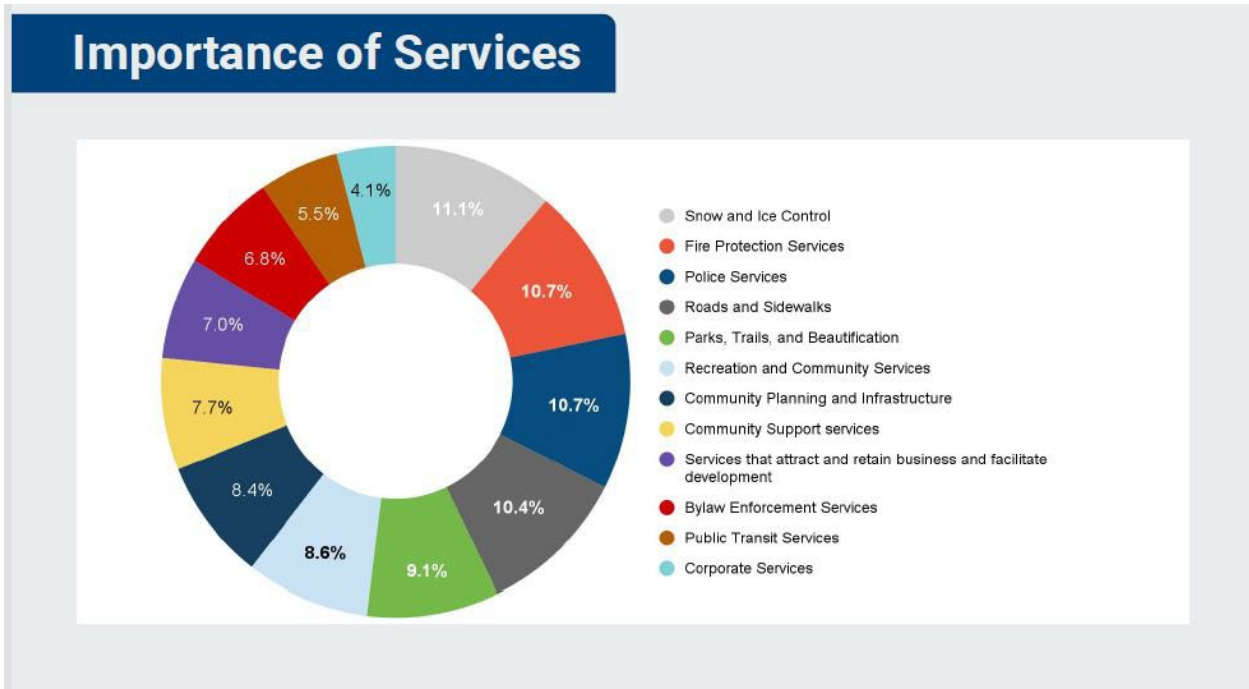


Satisfaction:

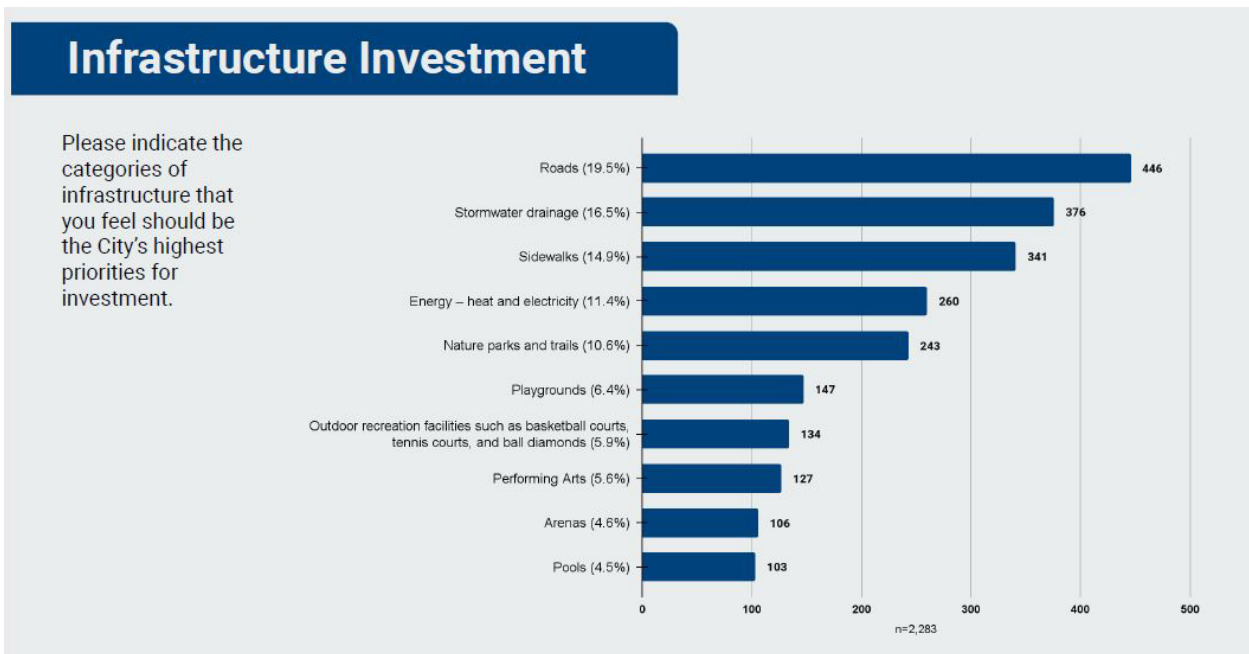
Corporate Services



Respondents were also asked how important the various services are to them:



The following table shows which infrastructure should be the City's highest priority for investment:



In the survey comments, the key topics identified for consideration of the 2023 budget are:

- Downtown crime and addiction/safety in our community
- Community planning related to all the new development -where will all these kids go to school?
- Intervention supports for our marginalized street population.
- Strategic planning to mitigate our economic reliance on our resource-based industries (diversify our economy)
- Green energy plan.
- Streamline administrative services especially in tracking and reporting for accountability. Avoid duplication, empower staff, and trust them. Back them up.

Citizen budget survey promotion

Three organic posts were each published on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The highest-performing platform was Facebook:

- Average post reach: 1,445
- Average post engagements: 68

We also boosted a post on Facebook to promote the survey for one week:

- Total post reach: 6,673
- Total post engagements: 1,300

Vista Radio advertising statistics:

- MyPGNow.ca banner ad ran from October 31 to November 13.
 - Total impressions: 26,554
 - Total clicks: 27
- A radio spot on both Vista stations ran through the duration of the banner ad.

Total cost for the Citizen Budget survey advertisements was \$1,568.

The Citizen Budget survey media release also increased our reach as it was picked up by several news outlets including CKPG News and the Prince George Citizen. 199 people said they heard about the survey through the City's social media channels while 160 people said they heard about it through the news media.

Social media comments:

Comments on social media were limited as most people clicked the link to share their thoughts on the surveys. The comments received align with what was heard in the surveys.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

This community engagement project directly impacts the ability of staff and council to address all of Council's strategic goals as the feedback from our citizens directly impacts budget and priorities for the coming year.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Total cost of advertising was \$2,128.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

One of the most important parts of community engagement is reporting back to citizens. The communications division will inform the community of what we heard from them and how that information will be used in the decision-making.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

PREPARED BY: Julie Rogers, communications manager

Meeting Date: [2022/12/05]