

Report to Council

Report Title:	Budget Consultation 2024 Feedback		
Prepared By:	Sarah Johnson, Deputy Clerk and Trish Serratore, Chief Financial Officer		
Department:	Finance		
Date:	September 26, 2023		
Report Number:	FIN2023-25	File Number:	C11FIN, F05
Attachments:	N/A		

Recommendation:

That the Council of the Municipality of Brockton hereby receives Report Number FIN2023-25 – Budget Consultation 2024 Feedback, prepared by Sarah Johnson, Deputy Clerk and Trish Serratore, Chief Financial Officer for information purposes.

Report:

Background:

The Municipality of Brockton launched the Budget Consultation 2024 project on our community engagement website, Build Your Brockton on August 22, 2023. The Budget Consultation 2024 project includes information about how the Municipality develops its budget, municipal tax payments, and property tax bill information.

The project also included the key dates of the 2024 Budget Meetings, Budget FAQ's, a News Feed. Members of the public were also able to interact with the staff through three platforms: a 2024 Budget Survey, Q&A, and Ideas tool.

Analysis:

Staff communicated about the Budget Consultation 2024 Project through the Municipal website, social media, Council Agendas, and Brockton Buzz Newsletters.

Staff have analyzed the data received from the public regarding the Budget Consultation 2024 project, and provided a summary of statistics for Council's consideration.

Overall Engagement

The Budget Consultation 2024 Project launched on Build Your Brockton, had a total of 186 visits, 66 engaged visitors, 104 informed visitors, 138 aware visitors, including a maximum number of 27 visitors per day. Out of

the 66 engaged participants, 63 participated in the Budget Survey, 1 asked a question, and 1 submitted an idea to plant trees along the fence of Walkerton District Community School at Cemetery Road and Hinks Street.

Out of the 104 informed participants, 2 viewed the How MPAC Assesses Property video, 3 downloaded a document (2023 Tax Dollar), 2 visited the FAQ list, 40 visited multiple project pages, and 66 contributed to a tool (becoming an engaged participant). The 138 aware visitors simply visited the project page.

The 2023 Tax Dollar was uploaded to the page, as well as the Understanding Municipal Taxation document, and Understanding Your Municipal Budget document which have been provided on previous years' Budget Consultation projects.

Further information on the 2024 Municipal Budget will be uploaded to this project later in the Winter, including the Draft Tax Supported Budget, Draft Non-Tax Supported Budget, Special Council Meeting Agendas, and Council Meeting Video Recordings.

The Budget Consultation 2024 Project page on Build Your Brockton was viewed through 4 different sources of traffic: directly through the Build Your Brockton site, social media, referrals, and search engines.

2024 Budget Survey Feedback:

The anonymous budget survey was available from August 22 to September 18, 2023 consisting of 15 questions (identical to the 2022 survey). A total of 63 individuals completed the 2024 survey.

Total Survey Participation 2024	Total Survey Participation 2022 Comparison	Total Survey Participation 2021 Comparison	Total Survey Participation 2020 Comparison
63 participants (Launched Aug 22 to Sept 18)	91 participants (launched Jan 7 to Feb 3)	77 participants (launched Dec 1 to Feb 15)	24 participants (launched Jan 20 to Feb 21)

Demographics

Out of those 63 participants, 48% were between the ages of 31-50 years, 21% were between the ages of 51-64 years, 16% were age 30 and under, 14% were between the ages of 65 and above, with 2% preferring not to share their age.

68% of respondents own urban residential property in Brockton, 21% own rural residential property, 8% own agricultural property, 6% own commercial property, and 6% own multi-residential (owner or tenant) properties.

Sources of Information for Budget

Respondents identified that their top three sources for information about the Municipality's budget were:

- 1) Municipal website (51%)
- 2) Social media (48%)
- 3) Local newspaper or radio (25%)

Of note, 16% of respondents identified that they have not looked for budget information before.

Familiarity of Budget Process

Somewhat Familiar	Minimally Familiar	Very Familiar	Not Familiar
46%	24%	16%	14%

Programs and Services

Respondents identified that the value of programs and services received for their tax dollars were fair (44%), good (30%), or poor (16%).

Residents also identified their familiarity with the services and programs paid for with their tax dollars:

Somewhat Familiar	Very Familiar	Not Familiar
54%	35%	11%

When asked to rank their preference for options of dealing with increased costs to pay for Municipal services, respondents identified their most desired option as a combination of cutting service levels and a small increase in taxes and user fees. (Note: “Avg. Rank” represents the most preferred option, with the lowest number being the most preferred).

Q7 There are only a few ways to deal with increased costs to pay for Municipal services. Please rank the options (in order from 1 to 6 - 1 being most important, and 6 being least important) to balance the budget.

OPTIONS	AVG. RANK
Increase user fees	3.00
Combination of cutting service levels and small increase in taxes and user fees	3.06
Combination of increase in property taxes and user fees	3.22
Cut existing service levels to maintain current taxes	3.46
Cut existing service levels to reduce taxes	3.92
Increase property taxes	4.33

Residents were asked to identify whether they would support an increase in user fees for the following services. Residents supported an increase in user fees for all four services, though the results were very close:

Service	Support
Recreation (Ex. Rentals, Programs)	Yes
Landfill (Ex. Tipping Fees)	Yes
Cemetery (Ex. Plot, Columbarium, Niche Purchases)	Yes
Child Care (Ex. Program Fees)	Yes

Residents were also asked to indicate if they would enhance, maintain or reduce the following 6 service areas portion of municipal taxes:

Service	Overall Preference
Parks and Recreation	Maintain
Landfill	Maintain
Police	Maintain
Public Works (Roads/Operations)	Maintain
Utilities	Maintain
General Government (Administrative)	Reduce

Residents were further asked to rate their satisfaction of with the delivery of the Municipality’s various services, and identified their satisfaction, or neutral opinion with the applicable services provided; although there was some dissatisfaction on the Annual Property Tax Amount.

When asked **what information residents would like to receive from the Municipality that they are currently not receiving**, respondents provided summarized suggestions of the following:

- Many residents thanked staff for the good communication, including the information provided during the winter storm and increased recreational program advertising
- Suggestion of quick bullet points to keep busy residents informed
- More detailed information on the budget, including how money is being spent in departments throughout the year, how taxes are collected from each residential area, and where tax dollars are being allocated to
- Policing related reports on crime, vandalism, traffic statistics
- Solutions for homelessness, and addiction concerns
- Housing developments, including plans for expansion
- Drinking water test results
- Road construction
- Recreational services
- Bridge replacement
- Better communication of the background information when a decision is reached. (For example, the changes that were made to the Greenock dump and the future of that site).

Staff appreciate the comments provided, and note that some of this information is currently being provided; however, we will keep these suggestions in mind for future communications:

1) More detailed information on the budget, including how money is being spent in departments throughout the year, how taxes are collected from each residential area, and where tax dollars are being allocated to

The Municipality currently posts information about the budget on our [Current Budget webpage](#), shares press releases, and posts information on how the tax dollar is allocated within the Interim Tax Brockton Buzz Newsletter each year which is sent with the September/November Tax Bills to Brockton households and posted on our website. Staff further updated the [Property Taxes webpage](#), and included the 2023 Tax Dollar infographic on our social media, and on the Budget Consultation 2024 project in response to the inquiry on where tax dollars are going.

Accounts are also presented at each Council Meeting identifying spending for each Department.

2) Policing related reports on crime, vandalism, traffic statistics

Reports are provided on a monthly basis from the South Bruce O.P.P. on statistics affecting the South Bruce Detachment area, and specifically the Municipality of Brockton. These reports are presented to the Brockton Police Services Board (provided on their Agendas) and then further brought to Council as information. The Year End/Annual South Bruce O.P.P. Reports are published on our [Police webpage](#) and [Brockton Police Services Board webpage](#).

3) Solutions for homelessness, and addiction concerns

The Bruce Grey [Community Safety and Well-Being Plan](#) (CSWBP) was adopted by Councils in both Counties, involving over 70 community partners (including Municipalities, police services, police services boards, education, health, community and social services) to come together to discuss resident perceptions and begin to explore local data related to safety and well-being, with the goal of identifying and reducing risk factors that contribute to safety and well-being issues, using cross-sector strategies and focusing on the social determinants of health.

The CSWBP will strengthen how Municipalities collaborate with partner organizations serving residents living in our region and will provide a community of support for committees already tackling the important issues that impact safety and well-being across Bruce and Grey. Specifically, this CSWBP provides a model for collaboration, planning and action that will shape how the Municipalities of Bruce and Grey identify and respond to current and emerging issues through ongoing engagement with community stakeholders and regular assessment of local data. In many respects, the Plan formalizes and coordinates the strong history of collaboration in Bruce and Grey, and it also documents and builds on successful initiatives that are already improving safety and enhancing the well-being of vulnerable populations.

4) Housing developments, including plans for expansion

Staff updated our [Planning and Development section](#) of the website to include information about land use planning and development being conducted within the Municipality, and/or County of Bruce, including Site

Selection, Applications (such as Official Plan Amendments, Zoning By-Law Amendments, Minor Variances, etc), and Current Development.

Information is also posted on our website about available lands in the [East Ridge Business Park](#).

Chief Building Official Activity Reports including statistics on building permits, zoning certificates, and inspections are brought to Council on a monthly basis.

5) Drinking water test results

Water and Wastewater Reports are brought to Council on a monthly basis. Annual water reports are published on our [Annual Water Reports webpage](#).

6) Recreational services

Staff wish to acknowledge the efforts of the Parks and Recreation Department in creating new [programs](#) and activities over the past several months. The Parks and Recreation Department have been undertaking several projects including the creation/implementation of the Recreation Master Services and Facilities Plan, opening of the Market Garden, assistance at Summer Streetfest, organization of Music in the Park, summer day camps/swimming lessons, Tennis/Pickleball Court Rehabilitation, Olympia sponsorship, grant applications, installation of a Score Clock at the Walkerton Community Centre, and lighting replacement at the Walkerton Community Centre. Staff have increased communications of the programs and events occurring within this Department and received positive feedback from the community.

A Project Management Committee is also being established to assist with project planning for new facilities within the Municipality of Brockton and will include a Fundraising campaign to help establish the future of a new Arena. More information will be provided in the future on this topic.

7) Bridge replacement

A Business Viability Committee – Durham Street Bridge has been established to facilitate the creation and implementation of a Business Viability Action Plan in an effort to offset economic challenges for Brockton businesses, industry and residents during the bridge construction period of the Durham Street Bridge in Walkerton. The Municipality is currently [recruiting members](#) to serve on this Committee as a resident of Brockton, a business community representative, and an industrial business representative. The deadline for submissions is September 28, 2023 at Noon. The Committee will foster community support and investigate funding opportunities to support Walkerton's business community as the bridge is rehabilitated.

8) Better communication of the background information when a decision is reached. (For example, the changes that were made to the Greenock dump and the future of that site).

The decisions related to the change in hours of operation at the Greenock Transfer Station were brought forward to Council on [June 20, 2022](#), and [January 10, 2023](#), and further communicated through our website, social media, and the Brockton Buzz Newsletter, and signage was posted at the Greenock Transfer Station to notify residents.

Budget Considerations / Future Planning

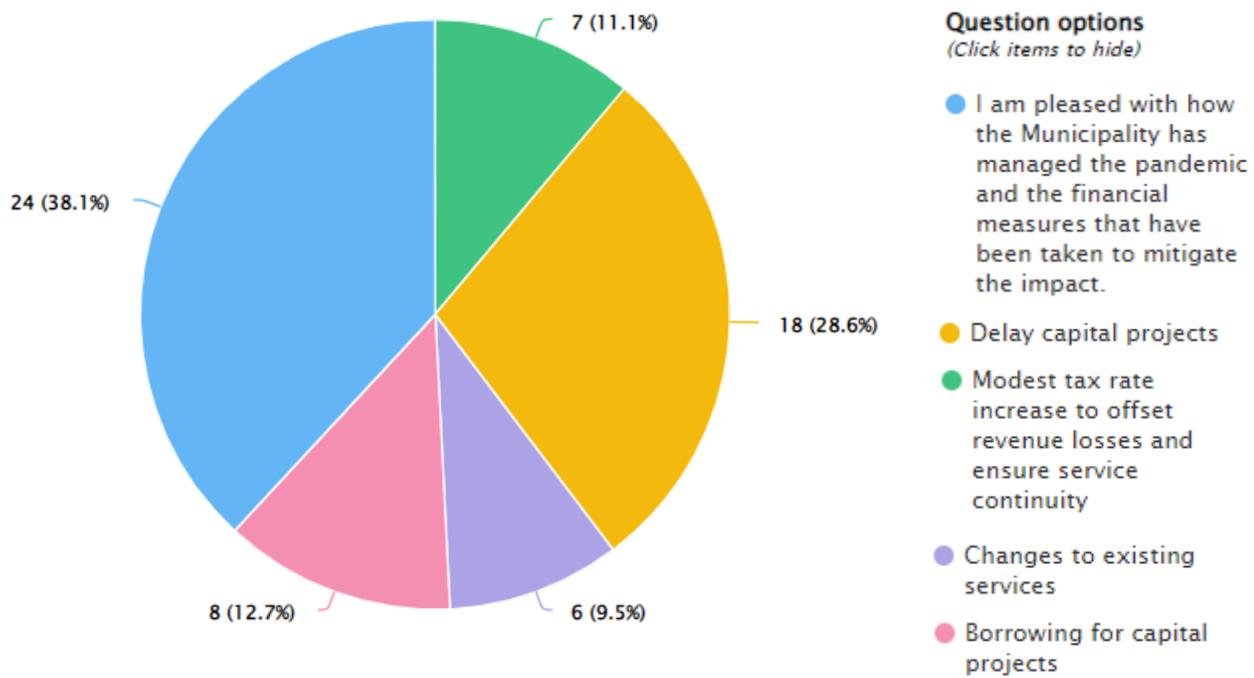
Respondents were asked to identify their **top 3 most important concerns** facing the Municipality at this time.

The top 3 concerns were:

- 1) Roads, drainage, streetlights, sidewalks etc.
- 2) Growth, development and sustainability
- 3) Provision of recreation facilities, park, trails and programs

Followed closely by public health and mental health.

Residents were once again asked to identify their opinion on **how the Municipality should continue to respond to COVID-19 pressures**:



When asked to provide **ideas for the development of future parks, trails and outdoor green spaces**, residents suggested including:

- Increased trails including the expansion of existing trails/interconnectedness, paving trails, and having bicycle lanes/trails
- Accessibility including lighting and amenities that are inclusive for all ages
- Increased trees and shaded areas
- Dog Park
- Public washroom facilities
- Increased waste disposal containers
- Increased seating areas/benches
- Parks for rural communities
- Community garden
- Outdoor gym equipment

- Parks within developments/subdivisions
- Increased EV charging stations
- History of Brockton and honouring famous residents
- Consideration to spend future tax dollars in other areas as we have many parks and trails already
- Increase winter maintenance on trails and sidewalks
- Signage and parking at River Access points

When asked to provide **ideas on how to build a better, stronger, community**, residents suggested:

- Joint Recreation Arena/Municipal Office
- Increased community festivals, events, volunteerism, and opportunities for residents to connect
- Increased involvement opportunities within the community or local government (public meetings, soliciting feedback, increased community groups) to work together for a common goal
- Obtaining more diverse perspectives from the community, and seeking input from new residents to recognize new ways of thinking
- Increased sidewalks, and water supply to keep up with the new growth
- Solutions for affordable housing
- Solutions for homelessness, addiction, and hospital staffing shortages
- Maintaining major infrastructure, including roads and utilities
- Increased recreational programs, and activities for all ages (including families and seniors)
- Outdoor recreational equipment, including outdoor gyms
- Government fiscal responsibility and accountability.
- Prioritizing what is needed in the community, and ensuring there is long-term planning for major capital expenditures
- Maintaining spending allocations within the budget, or increasing the tax rate as needed rather than spending money on items not included in that year's budget later in the year
- Increased emergency management for our community
- Conservation of heritage

In summary, Brockton residents are continuing to enjoy the programs and services provided, with a focus on recreation and increasing community events and support and inviting more diversity into our decision making. Residents are also acknowledging the need to plan ahead for the future growth Brockton will experience, noting the importance of maintaining/improving our infrastructure, managing our assets, and working on solutions to address global problems (such as homelessness, addiction, crime, and hospital staffing shortages).

Staff thank the respondents for completing the 2024 Budget Survey and sharing their participation on our community engagement website. The feedback will be considered by Senior Staff and incorporated into the development of the 2024 Budget.

Council are holding Special Council Meetings to consider the 2024 Municipal Budget on January 16, 2024 at 9:00 a.m. and January 17, 2024 at 9:00 a.m. and February 6, 2024 at 1:00 p.m.

Once the Budget is formally approved, a Press Release will be shared with the community, and the Budget Consultation 2024 Project will be archived on Build Your Brockton shortly afterwards.

Strategic Action Plan Checklist:

What aspect of the Brockton Strategic Action Plan does the content/recommendations in this report help advance?

- Recommendations help move the Municipality closer to its Vision Yes
- Recommendations contribute to achieving Heritage, Culture, and Community Yes
- Recommendations contribute to achieving Quality of Life Yes
- Recommendations contribute to achieving Land Use Planning and the Natural Environment Yes
- Recommendations contribute to achieving Economic Development Yes
- Recommendations contribute to achieving Municipal Governance Yes

Financial Impacts/Source of Funding:

- Do the recommendations represent a sound financial investment from a sustainability perspective?
N/A

Respectfully Submitted by:



Sarah Johnson, Deputy Clerk



Trish Serratore, Chief Financial Officer

Reviewed By:



Sonya Watson, Chief Administrative Officer