



REPORT

File No. 1700-02

DATE: February 22, 2018
TO: Mayor and Council
FROM: Debra Oakman, Interim Chief Financial Officer
SUBJECT: Citizen Budget – Public Input to the 2018 Financial Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Finance Committee receive Citizen Budget Survey Results Report

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER’S COMMENTS:

I concur with the recommendation.

Mac Fraser, CAO

MF/eb

ORIGIN/PURPOSE:

To provide the Citizen Budget Survey Results Report for the 2018 City of Powell River Five-Year Financial Plan.

BACKGROUND:

The Citizen Budget Survey for the 2018 budget was visited by 958 visitors, with 154 submitted responses. In 2016, the City used Citizen Budget to consult with residents on the 2017 budget. This online budget consultation received 451 visitors during that period, with 100 submitted responses.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY:

Community Engagement – The City will facilitate the community being informed and involved in local matters and initiatives:

Financial Resiliency – The City will strive towards long-term financial sustainability and best practices in internal processes.

ANALYSIS AND IMPACT:

In its second year of availability to Powell River taxpayers, the Citizen Budget drew more than double the number of site visits, and 50 per cent more responses than last year’s version.

Respondents to the survey were asked whether they would increase, decrease or maintain the general tax rate. Of those responding, 17 of the 154 respondents favour a zero per cent increase. A total of 18 people voted for increasing the general tax rate between one and two per cent. The largest number, 52, voted for a two per cent general tax rate increase. There were 47 votes for a three per cent increase and 20 for a four per cent increase.

The survey then sought feedback on taxation regarding 10 City services, covering all aspects of civic function.

Service	Decrease	Maintain	Increase
Transit	54	79	21
Fire	34	79	41
Police	20	98	36
Roads, Transportation	15	72	67
Recreation	34	94	26
Parks	36	82	36
Bylaw	60	72	22
Planning	31	84	39
Cultural	54	65	35
Solid Waste	19	93	42

Respondents also had the opportunity to leave comments regarding their thoughts about the 10 services. There were 244 comments made.

The largest age group responding to the survey was in the 35 to 44 age range, with 31 respondents. Next was the over-55 age range, with 30 responses. This was followed by: 45 to 54, 23 responses; 25 to 34, 18 responses; 18 to 24, five responses, under 18, zero responses.

In terms of residency, 72 people have lived in Powell River for 10 years or more. For six to nine years, there were 13 respondents; from two to five years, 11 respondents; less than two years, nine respondents.

This year's Citizen Budget was different than last year's in that it used a balanced budget model, where participants were challenged to balance the City budget. Last year's Citizen Budget was based on the tax module, which required residents to vote on how their tax dollars were spent. Calculations were made on the participants' property values and was interactive with the tax spending decisions made by the participant.

With the new model, the operating budgets of the 10 individual cost centres, or services within the City budget, were displayed with a slide impact bar, allowing the participant to either increase the budget, decrease the budget or leave the budget as it is for the particular service. If a participant increased a cost centre's budget, they were required to decrease another by an equivalent amount to balance the budget. Additionally, participants were able to change the 2018 property tax increase, which is slated at two per cent, or approximately \$260,000, in the coming year.

A breakdown of web traffic sources indicates that 47 per cent of visitors came from Facebook referrals, 32 per cent of the respondents came from direct sources, 15 per cent came from the City of Powell River website, three per cent came from Google, one per cent Twitter and two per cent were from other referrals.

The Citizen Budget was online from November 3, 2017, to February 10, 2018. The median time to complete the survey was six minutes.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The cost to use Citizen Budget's balanced budget module is \$2,750.00.

STAFF TIME/INPUT:

Staff time to create the documentation required for the Citizen Budget is estimated at 2 hours and review of the information is estimated at 2 hours.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION:

This report will be circulated on the Finance Committee agenda, posted on the City's website for public review and discussed at a public meeting.

Respectfully prepared by,

Paul Galinski
Communication Contractor

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Oakman, CPA, CMA
Interim Chief Financial Officer

PG/DO/sb/