

VANCOUVER BUDGET **2021**

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT REPORT

PART III: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Executive summary

Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted nearly all aspects of public engagement for Budget 2021. In response to ongoing restrictions for in-person gatherings, this year's engagement approach shifted to mostly virtual options, using new and existing digital engagement tools such as the City's new digital engagement platform, Shape Your City. This year the City also piloted a new educational budget simulation tool to teach people about the City's budget, highlighting the challenge of balancing spending to maintain and improve services to the public, with limited sources of revenue.

The budget engagement typically includes an annual Civic Service Satisfaction Survey in the spring where residents are asked to rank the importance of, and their satisfaction with, City services. In 2021 that survey would have been conducted at the height of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many City services that the public would be asked to rank were suspended; therefore, this particular survey was not conducted this year.

While in-person engagement was a challenge for health and safety reasons, staff were able to do a limited amount of targeted community outreach, working with Downtown Eastside community centres, some libraries and a number of community-serving organizations.

More than 10,000 engagement touchpoints were tracked over the six-week course of the budget consultation process, not including the online social media outreach (refer to section on promotion in full report) and visits to the City of Vancouver's [budget information web pages](#). In addition to these touchpoints, there were also approximately 10,600 visits to the Shape Your City budget pages (as of October 21, 2020).

What were the core themes and findings?

The key themes and findings from the engagement conducted in 2020 for the 2021 Budget help to inform the development of the budget and validate the priorities and proposed activities and investments. Through multiple channels and points of outreach we heard the following from residents and businesses:

- Overall, when asked to rank the importance of each of City Council's five priorities, **delivery of core services** and **addressing affordability and housing** continue to be a top priority among respondents. Results differ somewhat among age groups, however, and show that **equity and critical social issues** has emerged as a top priority for respondents under the age of 40, followed by affordability and housing. Those over the age of 40 were more likely to prioritize **core services** and the **economy**.

- Respondents strongly emphasized the importance of **core services** with the **top five services being**: fire and medical services (97%); water and sewer (93%); garbage and green bin collection (92%); emergency preparedness (91%); and support for local businesses (88%).
- Consistent with previous findings, **a majority of respondents continue to feel they receive “fairly good value” for their tax dollars.**
- For **measures to balance the City budget**, respondents preferred to: **increase user fees** for City services that currently have fees, **postpone infrastructure projects** (e.g. new amenities or major repairs) and **introduce new user fees** for some City services that currently have no fees. The **least preferred options** were increasing residential or business property taxes.
- In terms of property tax tolerance, there is **support for moderate tax increases of up to 2% to maintain existing service levels**, with a drop off in support for greater increases.
- Across channels, there is a substantial amount of public interest in reassessing how public funds are spent to address racial inequities and critical social issues, particularly with respect to police services.

For a more detailed discussion around the analysis of these findings, please refer to the Talk Vancouver Budget Survey and Balance the Budget sections of the Engagement report.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the approach to public engagement for the 2021 Budget. In past years, budget engagement activities have typically occurred in phases, translating into a broader range of opportunities for public input. Due to ongoing restrictions for in-person gatherings, this year's engagement approach needed to balance a number of challenges and emerging issues, such as:

- Diminished capacity for public participation among residents, businesses and community organizations, given other pressing needs (e.g. financial instability, shifting childcare arrangements)
- Provincially-mandated restrictions on in-person gatherings, impacting traditional outreach and engagement options especially among hard-to-reach groups

The general approach to addressing these challenges was to forgo certain activities and to shift public engagement activities to more virtual options, using new and existing digital engagement tools.

Staff were able to safely do a limited amount of targeted community outreach, working with Downtown Eastside community centres, some libraries and a number of community-serving organizations.

Despite these limitations, the number of touchpoints with residents and businesses exceeded previous years – including more than twice as many survey responses as compared to the 2020 Budget engagement process. This can be partially attributed to the increased public discourse in late summer and early fall (which overlapped with the budget engagement period) around systemic racism, public safety and police services, which heightened public interest in the City's budget and spending in those areas.

The following sections summarize the general approach and methods for promoting and seeking input on this year's annual budget.

What did we hope to learn?

The public participation for the 2021 Budget was intended to:

- Understand the relative importance of City Council's priorities and types of City services
- Gauge preferences for delivering a balanced budget and managing service delivery
- Seek input on opportunities to adjust costs and revenues
- Continue to reduce barriers to participation and seek input from traditionally under-represented or systemically-excluded groups (e.g. non-English speaking residents)

What was different for engagement this year?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of this year's engagement was online, using the City's new online engagement platform Shape Your City: shapeyourcity.ca. Shape Your City is a digital space where people can, at their convenience, find out about engagement opportunities and share their thoughts on different City of Vancouver projects and initiatives.

Translation and language accessibility: Shape Your City engagement pages were created in English plus the top five languages spoken at home in Vancouver (Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Punjabi, Vietnamese and Tagalog) based on 2016 Census data, to help address language-related barriers to participation. The budget survey, factsheets, posters and email invitations were also translated into the top five additional languages. Building on efforts from previous years, we tried to use more plain language in all our materials and survey, to make it easier for people to understand key ideas (e.g. "what is a City budget?") and to encourage participation.

Community outreach: While in-person engagement was a challenge for health and safety reasons, staff were able to do a limited amount of targeted community outreach, working with Downtown Eastside community centres, some libraries and a number of community-serving organizations described in the next two sections.

Civic Satisfaction Survey: The budget engagement typically includes an annual Civic Service Satisfaction Survey in the spring where residents are asked to rank the importance of, and their satisfaction with, City services. In 2021 that survey would have been conducted at the height of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many City services that the public would be asked to rank were suspended; therefore, this particular survey was not conducted this year.

Budget simulation tool: This year the City also piloted a new educational budget simulation tool to teach people about the City's budget, focusing on the different types of revenue and spending categories. Using the 2020 Budget as a baseline, participants could increase or decrease revenue and spending categories but needed to submit a balanced budget to complete the exercise — something the City is required by law to do each year. See the full section for a more information.

How was it promoted and shared?

Online outreach: Due to the various limitations around traditional/on-the-ground options for promoting engagement, a significant portion of our efforts shifted to online tools and platforms.

The following is a summary of promotional activities:

- Shape Your City – Budget 2021 pages (in English and top five additional languages)
- The City's vancouver.ca website (landing page and budget pages)
- Information Bulletin, issued August 17, 2020
- "Your City Budget" explainer video (348 views)
- Email invitation to Talk Vancouver Panel (approx. 15,580 registered)

- Email invitations to:
 - Business Improvement Associations
 - Neighbourhood houses
 - Newcomer networks and settlement agencies
 - Community economic development groups
 - Internal City teams and their extended networks (e.g. Punjabi Market, social grant recipients)
 - Council advisory committees

Social media: Postings and activities such as quizzes on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and Reddit, helped drive traffic to the Shape Your City engagement platform, where the public could access further information and feedback tools – particularly the budget survey. While this year's budget engagement outreach campaign relied almost entirely on an organic social media strategy without paid ads, we continued to generate a high number of clicks and engagement. Our postings were also shared by other organizations on their social media accounts.

Impressions	Link clicks	Comments	Reactions	Shares & Retweets
226,839	722	703	1512	96

Traditional/offline channels: While traditional options for outreach were limited, we were still able to conduct some targeted outreach through print advertisements (Vancouver is Awesome, Ming Pao, Sing Tao, South Asian Link), posters in some of the reopened community centres and phone calls with community groups and organizations who have expressed an interest in previous years.

Who participated?

More than 10,000 engagement touchpoints were tracked over the six-week course of the budget consultation process, not including the online social media outreach (refer to previous section) and visits to the City of Vancouver's [budget information webpages](#). In addition to these touchpoints, there were also approximately 10,600 visits to the Shape Your City budget pages (as of October 21, 2020).

Engagement method	Timing	Touchpoints
Shape Your City project pages	Aug. 17 – present	1,222 interactions (via Quick Poll tool)
Talk Vancouver survey	Aug. 17 – Sept. 20	8,378 survey completes
Budget Simulation education tool	Aug. 17 – Sept. 20	551 submissions
Community outreach	Aug. 17 – Sept. 25	140 interactions*
Total touchpoints:		10,291

*Does not include interactions conducted by partnering organizations, on behalf of the City of Vancouver.

Overall this year, we saw significantly increased participation from younger demographics — over half (56%) of budget survey responses are from residents under the age of 40 (before weighting of data to reflect 2016 Census demographics). This, along with the significant overall increase in survey participation and number of touchpoints year over year, is encouraging, as the City continues to work to expand civic literacy including awareness and understanding of the budget process. More details on demographic information of participants can be found in the Balance the Budget section and Appendix A.

Community outreach

While online tools and platforms can help increase accessibility for those facing barriers related to physical mobility or scheduling conflicts such as those with young families, shift workers, and people with disabilities, we recognize this does not serve those who lack consistent access to technology. We also recognize that many community-serving organizations and non-profits were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and this in turn impacted their interest level and capacity to participate in budget engagement this year.

To offer some balance, City staff was able to offer strategic in-person outreach, with proper safety measures, to members of the community at Downtown Eastside community centres (Evelyne Saller and Gathering Place). Staff visited each site to share educational hand-outs, answer questions and facilitate feedback.

Staff also worked with a small number of community-serving organizations (such as the Binners Project and Working Gear) to promote engagement and facilitate feedback. A similar approach was adopted with ethnocultural community groups (such as Tulayan Filipino Diaspora Society), to help disseminate translated resources and promote engagement.

Talk Vancouver Budget Survey

Overview

Between August 17 and September 20, 2020, the City conducted the 2021 Budget survey using the City's Talk Vancouver survey platform, seeking input from Vancouver residents and business owners/operators. Hard copies of the survey were also available as part of in-person outreach through community-serving organizations (as mentioned in the introduction) and upon request. In total, 8,378 submissions were received, including responses from 7,573 residents and 805 businesses. This year, we received a much higher response to the budget survey — a 148% increase in the number of residential respondents compared to 2019 (7,573 vs. 3,042), including increased participation among people under the age of 40 (56% of responses before weighting). The number of responses from businesses were also slightly higher this year (805 vs. 752 in 2019).

As outlined in the introduction, residents and businesses were invited to participate through emails to the Talk Vancouver panel membership, the City's website (vancouver.ca), a media announcement, social media postings to the general public and other channels. The City also worked with a third-party research firm to help recruit additional responses, to help address demographic gaps in participation, and to expand the reach of the survey.

To help ensure the survey sample was reflective of the overall Vancouver population, the City monitored demographic representation and set targets where needed:

- For residential respondents, targets were set for age, gender and for the five geographic regions of the city: Downtown and West End, the Northeast (north of 16th Avenue and east of Main Street), the Northwest, the Southeast and the Southwest.
- For businesses, the City collected input from owners/operators of businesses of varying sizes (measured in terms of employee count). Targets were set to help ensure small, medium and large businesses in the city were represented in the results

See Appendix A for demographic breakdown of respondents as compared to Census data (on which weighting was based).

Interpreting and viewing the results

Weighting was used to ensure the results matched the 2016 Statistics Canada Census data for residents of Vancouver on age and residential zone (with an acceptable weighting efficiency of 83% for the resident sample). Business respondents were weighted based on business size i.e., number of employees (weighting efficiency 97% for the business sample). Note: Weighting based on gender did not make a significant difference in results, and so it was not applied.

Where relevant, subgroup analysis of results by age are provided. Staff also explored subgroup analysis by ethnicity. However, in most cases sample size for different ethnic groups was too small to provide reliable results (e.g. data could not be extrapolated to the subgroup, due to limited number of responses). Ethnicity-based analysis and reporting should be considered as part of future Budget engagement processes, looking to emerging and best practices in this area.

Additional notes:

- Staff reviewed and flagged potential duplicate survey responses looking at IP addresses and other potential indicators (e.g. date and time stamps). In total, only about 100 surveys were removed or about 1% of total responses.
- Some totals in the report may not add to 100%, and some summary statistics (e.g., measures of “total willingness”) may not match their component parts. The numbers are correct, and the apparent errors are due to rounding

Detailed online survey results

Council priorities

Council identified five priorities to guide spending for Budget 2021:

- Deliver quality core services that meet residents’ needs
- Address affordability and the housing crisis
- Protect and build a resilient local economy
- Increase focus on equity and critical social issues
- Accelerate action on climate change.

For Budget 2021, members of the public were provided with expanded descriptions (refer to Appendix B) of these priorities and asked to rank them in order of importance: *“Thinking about the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has affected residents and businesses, how important do you think each of the following City services/programs are to the community?”*

The top Council priority for both resident and business respondents was the **delivery of core services** – which was ranked, as an average, in the “top two” for 57% of respondents. This was followed by **affordability and housing** for residents (48%) and the **economy** for businesses (51%). See Appendix A for the full one-to-five ranking breakdown.

What emerged differently among residents this year were significant differences in priorities between the different age groups:

- Residential respondents **under 40** years of age ranked affordability and housing (61% ranked in the top two) followed by equity and social issues (48%) as top priorities, with the delivery of core services in third place (36%).
- Meanwhile those **over 40** were more likely to prioritize delivery of core services (74% ranked in the top two) followed by the economy (55%). We saw similar age differences in Budget 2020 with those younger respondents emphasizing housing and affordability and older respondents emphasizing core services.

Ranking of Council Priorities: Percentage of Ranks by Age Groups in the Top Two

	Delivery of Core Service	Affordability and Housing	Economy	Equity and Social Issues	Climate Change
RESIDENTS	57%	48%	42%	32%	21%
<40 yrs	36%	61%	27%	48%	28%
40-59 yrs	71%	39%	54%	20%	15%
≥60 yrs	76%	36%	55%	16%	17%
BUSINESSES	57%	41%	51%	31%	20%

Council priorities – Budget 2021 and Budget 2020 comparison

The **delivery of core services** and **affordability and housing** continue to be top priorities in Budget 2021 as they were in Budget 2020, but their importance has softened, with greater importance placed on **equity and critical social issues** and the **economy**. It is interesting to note that:

- This year over one third (35%) of respondents ranked equity and critical social issues as a top priority (in their top two) compared to 11% last year.
- An increased number of businesses (51%) ranked the economy as a top priority compared to 38% last year. This also holds true for residents.
- Accelerating action on climate change appears to be less important for respondents this year (21% on average for Budget 2021 versus 35% for Budget 2020).

Ranked Council priorities: Budget 2021 versus 2020 (Percentage of Ranks in the Top 2)

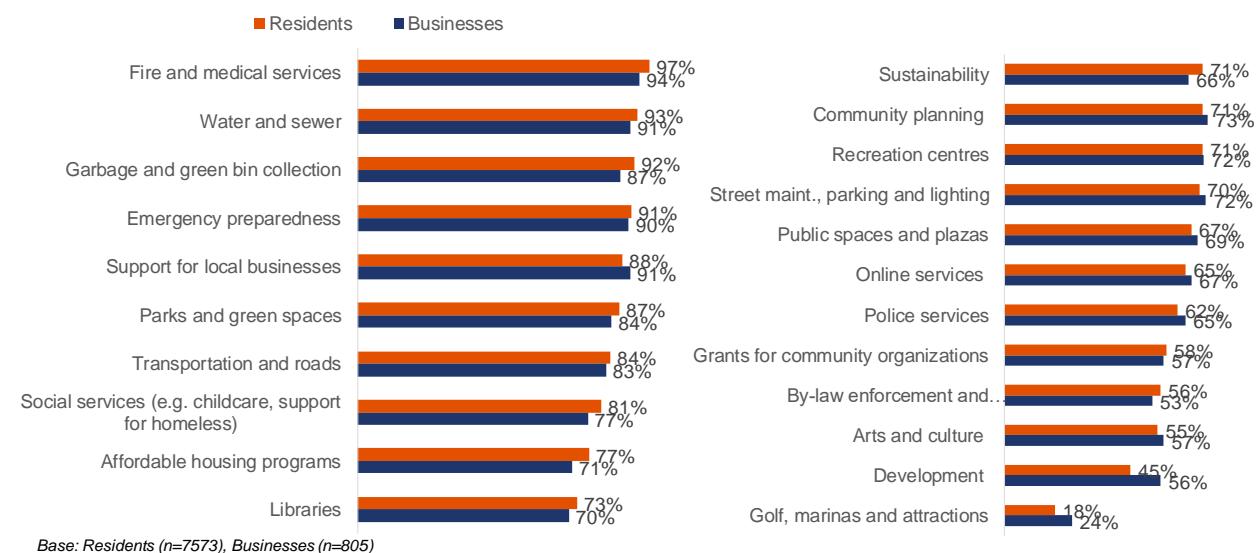
Council Priority	Budget 2021		Budget 2020	
	Residents	Business	Residents	Business
Delivery of Core Services	57%	57%	63%	64%
Affordability and Housing	48%	41%	60%	54%
Economy	42%	51%	30%	38%
Equity and Social Issues	32%	31%	11%	11%
Climate Change	21%	20%	36%	33%

Services and program priorities

New to the 2021 Budget survey, we asked the public to rate the importance of City services and programs to the community in the context of COVID-19: *“Thinking about the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has affected residents and businesses, how important do you think each of the following City services/programs are to the community?”*

A vast majority of respondents emphasized the importance of **core services**, such as fire and medical services, water and sewer, and garbage and green bin collection. Residents and businesses were fairly similar in how they ranked the importance of services, with some differences in the strength of the rating. With the exception of golf and marinas at least half of respondents, on average, think all of these services are important.

Perceived Importance of Different City Programs and Services



Thinking about the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has affected residents and businesses, how important do you think each of the following City services/programs are to the community?

There were notable differences in levels of importance of various services between age groups. Respondents under the age of 40 placed less importance on “law and order” type services (i.e. police services and by-law enforcement and inspections) and more importance on services related to equity and social issues (e.g. grants for community organizations and social services), alongside sustainability and affordable housing. For example:

- 37% of respondents under the age of 40 rated “Police Services” as important compared to 79% among 40-59 and 87% among those 60 and above
- 79% of respondents under the age of 40 rated “Grants for community organizations” as important compared to 49% on average among those who were older

Support for measures to balance budget

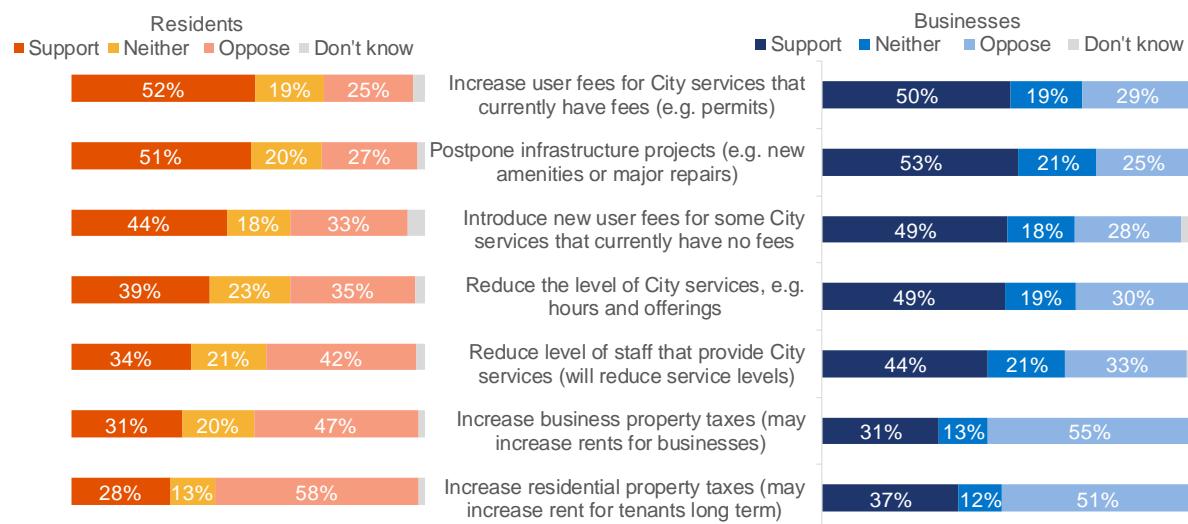
As part of the survey, respondents were asked about their preferences for balancing the City's budget: "The City has a number of financial tools that can be used to balance the budget. Tell us how much you support or oppose each of the following options."

Respondents were open to a variety of tools and, on average, the measures that residents and businesses supported the most are as follows:

- **Increase user fees** for City services that currently have fees (51% on average)
- Postpone **infrastructure projects** e.g. new amenities or major repairs (52%)
- Introduce **new user fees** for some City services that currently have no fees (47%)

Businesses were more likely to support the reducing the level of City staff compared to residents (49% versus 39%).

Preferred options for balancing the City's budget



Base: Residents (n=7573), Businesses (n=805)

The City has a number of financial tools that can be used to balance the budget. Tell us how much you support or oppose each of the following options.

As with the other survey questions, there are differences between age groups in terms of support for these options:

- Those under 40 show less support overall for the options presented to balance the budget. For example, 23% of those under the age of 40 support reducing City staffing levels versus 40% among those 40-59 and 45% among those 60 and above.
- One option that respondents under the age of 40 do support to a greater extent than those who are older is increasing business property taxes (37% among those under 40 are supportive vs. 30% among the 40-59 age group, and 23% among those 60 and above).

Other suggestions for balancing the City's budget

In addition to the list of options for balancing the budget, the survey asked: “*Do you have any other ideas to help balance the budget?*” A total of 3,878 open-ended comments were received, summary in table below. Some of the suggestions that respondents provided were aligned with the current social and economic context, such as interest in reducing police spending and postponing large capital expenditures. Suggestions were otherwise similar to those from the last year.

Summary of top themes

Cost Reductions	Revenue Increases
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce police funding and costs (approximately 30% of comments) • Reassess staffing needs and salaries, especially for non-essential services (approximately 11% of responses) • Review operations in various departments and streamline processes to reduce duplication or redundancies (approximately 5% of responses) • Focus less on priorities that are typically the purview of other levels of government (e.g. housing, social services) or believed to be non-essential (e.g. extensive studies, arts and cultural grants, new amenities) and more on delivering the ‘core services’ that are typically expected of municipal governments – such as public safety, utilities, waste, streets (approximately 7% of responses) • Defer large capital infrastructure projects that are not related to major repairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase taxes (~27%), particularly for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Empty homes and investment properties – Large businesses, corporations and developers – Or consider progressive tax approaches • Increase fees – particularly for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Development permits – Parking permits – Certain recreational activities like golfing or access to marinas • Increase fines and enforcement – particularly for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Traffic and parking violations – Short-term rental violations – COVID-19 safety violations – Littering • Advocate to senior levels of government for more funding support for housing, homelessness, health services and climate action

*Note: Percentages for categories are not mutually exclusive

Tax tolerance

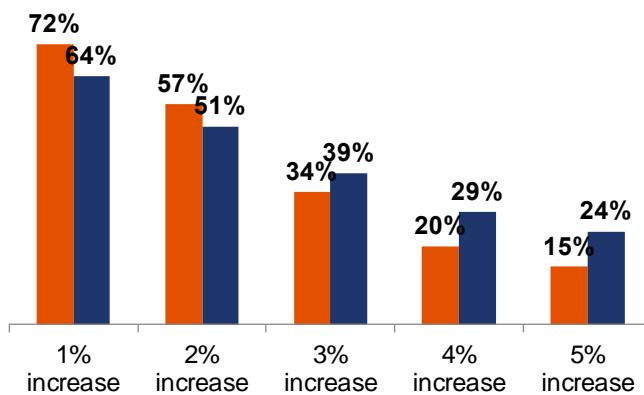
As with previous budget surveys, the Budget 2021 survey asked respondents about their willingness to pay a tax increase to maintain services at current levels: “*If the City of Vancouver needed to increase residential or business property taxes in order to cover increased costs for existing programs and services, without reducing programs or service levels, how willing would you be to pay an increase of...?*” (list of tax levels provided). This year an additional tax level increase of 5% was tested.

Tax tolerance among property owners: The majority of residents and business property owners are willing to pay a 1% tax increase to cover the increased cost of maintaining current services (68% on average). Just over half are willing to pay a 2% tax increase on average. Tax tolerance drops off at levels at or beyond 3% (less than 50% willing). Business respondents show somewhat more willingness to pay tax increases at higher levels than residents.

Among residents, age is not a significant predictor of tax tolerance. Across all age groups, respondents who are property owners are most willing to pay tax increases of 1-2%, with drop-offs in willingness at 3% or above.

Willingness to pay tax increase among property owners

■ Resident property owners ■ Business property owners



Base: Resident property owners (n=3284), Business property owners (n=462).

If the City of Vancouver needed to increase residential or business property taxes in order to cover increased costs for existing programs and services, without reducing programs or service levels, how willing would you be to pay an increase of....

Historical comparisons

Over time, there have been fluctuations in the willingness of residential and business property owners to pay increased taxes for maintaining existing services. Levels of tax tolerance are stable for the 1-2% tax increase and are comparable to last year. The majority of respondents do not support tax increases at or above 3%; however, this year there is a higher tax tolerance for a 3% tax increase among both residents and businesses (37% vs. 29% in Budget 2020). Among businesses, there is some greater tolerance for a 4% tax increase this year (29% vs. 21% in Budget 2020).

Tax tolerance owners – historical comparison

	Budget 2021*		Budget 2020		Budget 2019		Budget 2018		Budget 2017	
Rate increase	Res.	Bus.	Res	Bus.	Res.	Bus.	Res.	Bus.	Res.	Bus.
1%	72%	64%	71%	65%	66%	59%	66%	57%	71%	68%
2%	57%	51%	55%	54%	47%	44%	47%	41%	52%	47%
3%	34%	39%	28%	29%	23%	16%	22%	19%	26%	22%
4%	20%	29%	18%	21%	15%	7%	14%	12%	18%	16%
5%*	15%	24%	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

*Note: 5% is new option added for 2021 Budget survey.

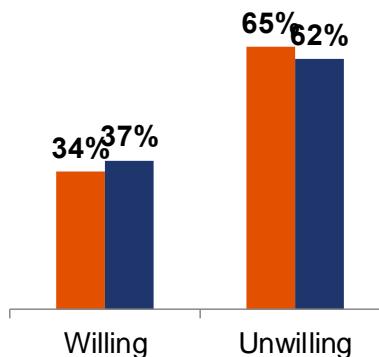
Tax tolerance among renters

Renters were asked about their willingness to pay an increase in rent to maintain current City service levels (as a result of a property tax increase passed along by property owner): “...would you be willing to pay more per month in rent, in order to maintain the current level of services provided by the City of Vancouver?”

On average, 36% of residential and business property renters surveyed are willing to pay higher rent – this is somewhat lower than last year’s 42%. A number of respondents commented (via email) that there may not be a direct correlation between property tax increases and rent increases (e.g. other factors such as market pricing and Provincial legislation regarding rent increases may also be contributing factors). Across all ages, less than 40% of renters willing to pay a rent increase.

Willingness to pay increases in rent

■ Residential renters ■ Business renters



Base: Resident renters (n=3866), Business property renters (n=568)

Thinking about this, would you be willing to pay more per month in rent, in order to maintain the current level of services provided by the City of Vancouver?

Historical comparisons

Over time, there have been significant fluctuations in the willingness of respondents who rent their residences to pay an increase in rent. This year there is a reduction (34%) from last year's high of 41%. This is a similar pattern among business operators who rent.

Tax tolerance renters – historical comparison

	Budget 2021		Budget 2020		Budget 2019		Budget 2018		Budget 2017	
	Res.	Bus.								
Willingness	34%	37%	41%	42%	37%	27%	27%	32%	38%	42%

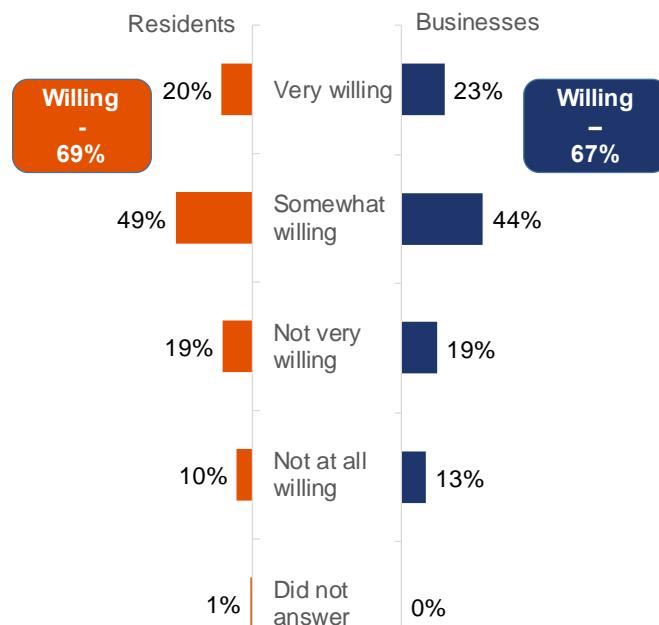
Support for user fees to maintain or improve service

Respondents were asked specifically about their support for increasing user fees for services they or their business use: “*Would you be willing to pay more in user fees for the services you or your business use in order to maintain or improve them?*”

Over two-thirds (68%) of residents and businesses surveyed are willing to pay more in user fees. Businesses are somewhat more willing this year to pay these fees (67% vs. 61%), while residents remain the same (69% vs. 71%).

While a majority of respondents are generally willing to pay more in user fees, those 60 years and older are somewhat less willing (63% on average vs. 72% for those less than 60).

Willingness to pay more in user fees



Base: Residents (n=7573), Businesses (n=805)

Would you be willing to pay more in user fees for the services you or your business use in order to maintain or improve them?

Historical Comparisons

Over time there have been small fluctuations in the willingness of residential respondents to pay more in user fees, with the majority willing to pay more for programs and services they use (between 69% to 73% willing).

Willingness to pay user fees – historical comparisons

	Budget 2021		Budget 2020		Budget 2019		Budget 2018		Budget 2017	
	Res.	Bus.	Res	Bus.	Res.	Bus.	Res.	Bus	Res.	Bus.
Willing (Very/ Somewhat)	69%	67%	73%	61%	74%	61%	70%	60%	70%	62%

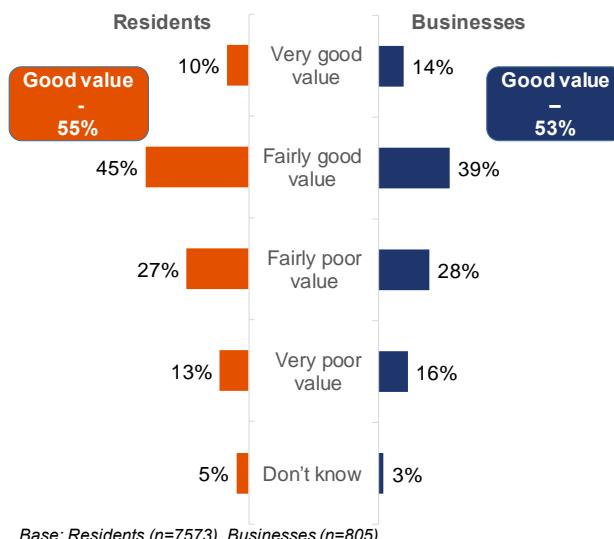
Value for tax dollar

Respondents were asked about their perceptions of value associated with their tax dollars:
 "Considering the services you receive from the City; how much value do you feel you receive for your tax dollars?"

Overall, half of residents and businesses (54%) feel they get good value for their tax dollar, while 40% believe the value is poor.

Note: this question was included in the Budget survey this year, but is generally included in the annual Civic Satisfaction Survey.

Perception of Value for Tax Dollars



“Balance the Budget” Simulation Tool

Overview

This year a new educational tool called “Balance the Budget” was used to teach people about the different elements of the City’s budget.

Using the 2020 Budget as a baseline, participants could increase or decrease revenue and spending categories but needed to submit a balanced budget to complete the exercise, something the City is required by law to do each year.

The primary objective of this tool was to raise awareness of the challenges and trade-offs involved in balancing the City budget. It was also an opportunity for the public to provide input about areas of the budget in which they would prefer the City increase or decrease funding.

Who participated?

Between August 17 and September 20, 2020, a total of 551 responses were submitted.

- The majority of budget simulation respondents indicated that they were a City of Vancouver resident (97%).
- Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%) said they were under the age of 40 — with the majority of responses coming from those in the 20-29 and 30-39 age groups (37% and 32%, respectively).
- For gender, 49% of respondents indicated they were female, 45% male, 3% transgender, and 3% “none of the above”.

Results

As noted on the City’s “Balance the Budget” webpage, this year’s budget simulation pilot was intended primarily for educational and informational purposes.

While there was a wide range of public inputs for each revenue and expense category, the findings here are shown as averages to give a general indication of the feedback. Key observations include the following:

- Most respondents did not make significant changes to sources of revenue
- The top three spending categories that saw an increase in funding were:
 - Social Support, Housing and Administration - 105% increase
 - Sustainability - 81% increase
 - Social Policy and Culture - 29% increase

- Meanwhile, the top three spending categories that saw a decrease in funding were:
 - Police Operations - 31% decrease
 - Police Other spending - 26% decrease
 - Police Administration - 21% decrease

Open-ended comments reflected differences of opinion of spending priorities, particularly around police spending, which can be attributed to the increased public discourse in late summer and early fall around systemic racism (taking place during the budget engagement period). More detailed findings can be found in Appendix B.

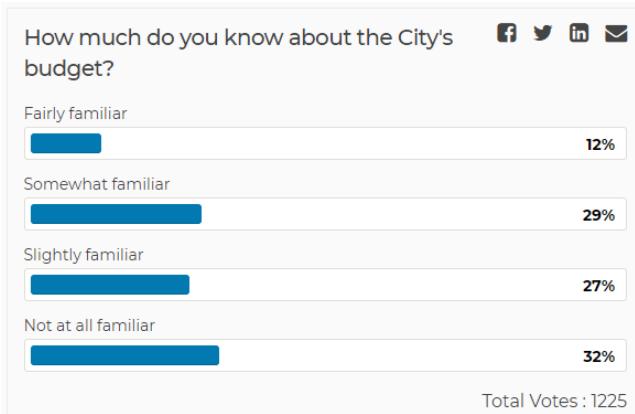
Conclusion

Thank you to everyone who, amidst very challenging times, provided feedback for the 2021 Budget. Public input helps inform draft departmental service plans and, ultimately, City Council's decision-making.

Reflections on future opportunities and ideas

Results from this year's budget engagement reflect the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our economy and emphasized the need to maintain core City services for residents and businesses. It has also echoed the rising concerns that people, especially those in younger age groups, have around social disparities, public safety and systemic racism. While this year's budget engagement approach shifted considerably from previous years, due to the pandemic, some of the challenges that emerged helped highlight opportunities for future exploration and improvements:

Improving people's understanding of the City's budget: During the engagement period, a "quick poll" was conducted on the Shape Your City platform to gauge people's understanding of the City's annual budget. The results show that there are definitely more opportunities for the City to expand its education efforts around the budget planning process and associated services. Increasing the financial literacy of our residents and businesses can help facilitate more in-depth budget engagement for future years.



Reducing barriers to engagement: While an increasing number of residents and businesses are gaining access to digital devices and online tools, there remain many – such as elders, newcomers and those experiencing poverty – who are being further excluded by the shift to online engagement. We also recognize that the conventional tools used for engagement at the City, such as surveys, are not always the most effective or sensitive way to reach certain segments of our population who have been historically under-represented in the City's engagement efforts. City staff continue to explore various approaches and tools that better suit different segments of our population.

Better understanding who we are hearing from: Recognizing that the City serves a very diverse population and that people's identities will invariably impact their experience and access to our services and programs, it is important to be able to identify the gaps and also ensure that we are hearing from a diverse audience. This year's process has highlighted the need for the City to develop better ways of collecting race and/or ethnicity data. Statistics Canada recently updated its demographic questions about race and ethnicity, and City staff will be exploring how to align with Census population data while ensuring people can see themselves in the list of options provided or be able to self-identify. Other types of demographic data collection that could be explored to help inform future budget engagement processes include household income data and neighbourhood data.

In closing, staff will continue to explore opportunities for improvements to the City's annual budget engagement process while collecting year-to-year data for comparison purposes.

Appendix A: Talk Vancouver survey respondent profile and demographic variables

The tables on the following pages show demographic variables for residents and business size for business owners to provide a respondent profile. The corresponding proportions in the Vancouver population from Census 2016 data are also shown for variables that were weighted on. Results for residents were weighted on age and residential zone to Census 2016 data, and data for businesses were weighted to business size based on Statistics Canada data.

Profile of resident respondents

Type of respondent	Total	Talk Vancouver panel members	Local research firm panel members	City website and social media
Resident	7,573	2,261	359	4,953
Business	805	188	114	503
Total	8,378	2,449	400	5,529

Demographic group	Original survey sample - residents	Vancouver population (Census 2016)
Age (weighted)		
18-39	56%	44%
40-49	15%	16%
50-59	12%	16%
60 and over	17%	24%
Residential zone (weighted)		
Downtown: Downtown and West End	19%	17%
Northwest: north of 16th and west of Main	23%	16%
Northeast: north of 16th and east of Main	25%	17%
Southwest: south of 16th and west of Main	14%	19%
Southeast: south of 16th and east of Main	19%	31%
Downtown: Downtown and West End	19%	17%

Demographic group	Original survey sample - residents	Vancouver population (Census 2016)
Gender (not weighted)*		
Female	51%	51%
Male	39%	49%
Transgender	1%	n/a
None of the above	2%	n/a
Prefer not to say	6%	n/a

*Note: Weighting gender did not significantly change results and weighting for sample efficiency is acceptable (>80%) – 83%

Geographic origin and selected ethnicity*	Survey sample –residents
Indigenous	3%
North America Canadian American	56% 3%
Europe British Isles (e.g. English, Scottish, Irish, Welsh) Central Europe (French, German, Polish etc.) Eastern European (e.g. Russian, Ukrainian, Croatian, etc.) Northern European (Swedish, Danish, Latvian etc.) Southern European (Greek, Italian, Spanish etc.)	19% 8% 5% 3% 3%
Asia Chinese South Asian (e.g. Punjabi, Indian, Tamil, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, etc.) Southeast Asian (Filipino, Thai, Vietnamese etc.) East Asian	11% 3% 3% 2%
Central/South American	2%
Africa	1%
Additional Regions (e.g. Middle Eastern, Oceania, Caribbean)	3%
Other	2%
Prefer not to say	5%

*Note: Respondents could select up to two ethnic groups to describe their background

Housing tenure	
Rent	51%
Own	43%
Live in Vancouver but do not rent or own	6%

Profile of business owner respondent

Business size* (weighting applied)	Survey sample - businesses	Survey sample – businesses (Grouped by Size)	Vancouver business size* (Statistics Canada)
0 employees (i.e., you are self-employed with no other employees)	15%	52%	58%
1-3 employees	37%		
4-9 employees	23%	23%	18%
10-24 employees	12%	20%	22%
25-99 employees	8%		
100 or more employees	5%	5%	2%

Business property tenure

Rent	68%
Own	33%

Full Ranking of Council Priorities (Ranks 1-5) Online Survey

Budget Priorities (shown in order of top two ranking for residents)	RANK	Residents n=7,573	Businesses n=805
Deliver Quality Core Services that Meet Residents' Needs	1	39%	34%
	2	18%	23%
	3	15%	15%
	4	16%	15%
	5	12%	14%
Address Affordability and the Housing Crisis	1	27%	20%
	2	21%	21%
	3	24%	28%
	4	17%	19%
	5	11%	13%

Budget Priorities (shown in order of top two ranking for residents)	RANK	Residents n=7,573	Businesses n=805
Protect and Build a Resilient Local Economy	1	11%	21%
	2	31%	30%
	3	19%	17%
	4	16%	15%
	5	22%	17%
Increase Focus on Equity and Critical Social Issues	1	14%	16%
	2	17%	15%
	3	20%	18%
	4	26%	27%
	5	22%	24%
Accelerate Action on Climate Change	1	8%	9%
	2	13%	11%
	3	22%	23%
	4	25%	25%
	5	32%	32%

Appendix B: Description of Council Priorities

Vancouver City Council has approved the following Council Priorities to guide City spending for Budget 2021.

- **Deliver quality core services that meet residents' needs.** Examples include: libraries, policing, fire and rescue services, and utilities including water and sewer, facilities such as recreation centres, transportation and other city infrastructure.
- **Address affordability and the housing crisis.** Examples include: improved social and non-market housing options, better protection for renters, and faster permitting to put more types of housing overall, and more affordable housing, on the market more quickly.
- **Protect and build a resilient local economy.** Examples include: affordable housing for workers, improved transit options, and support for local businesses to recover from the pandemic.
- **Increase focus on equity and critical social issues.** Examples include: continued focus on Reconciliation, addressing racism and discrimination both past and present, supports for the homeless, actions to address the opioid crisis, improved childcare and social housing options, and better accessibility to services for all.
- **Accelerate action on climate change.** Examples include: public building retrofits and improved construction to reduce emissions, zero emission space and water heating, planning for sea level rise, active transportation.

Appendix C: Budget Simulation Summaries

Summary of public input for revenue

Revenue Category	% Change Compared to Budget Sim. Average	\$ Amount Change Compared to Budget Sim. Average	Baseline: 2020 Budget \$ Amount
Investment income	2%	\$315,586	\$15,200,000
Licence and development fees	2%	\$1,595,263	\$95,438,615
Property taxes	1%	\$10,959,078	\$890,627,152
Bylaw fines	0%	\$87,094	\$21,714,269
Cost recoveries, grants and donations	0%	\$139,206	\$60,875,120
Revenue sharing	0%	\$5,561	\$19,150,000
Parking	0%	-\$59,894	\$76,747,825
Utility fees	0%	-\$646,232	\$329,698,362
Rental, leases and other	-1%	-\$302,103	\$40,014,064
Program fees	-2%	-\$1,404,653	\$65,813,242

Summary of public input for spending

Spending Category	% Change Compared to Budget Sim. Average	\$ Amount Change Compared to Budget Sim. Average	Baseline: 2020 Budget \$ Amount
ACCS - Social Support, Housing & Admin	105%	\$29,507,483	\$28,086,830
PDS - Sustainability	81%	\$3,349,625	\$4,160,321
ACCS - Social Policy & Culture	29%	\$2,320,760	\$8,100,975
Fire - Emergency Management	24%	\$399,433	\$1,640,485
ACCS - Grants	21%	\$4,668,527	\$22,744,105
Fire - Training, Prevention & Other	19%	\$1,884,998	\$10,126,099
PDS - Long Range Planning	17%	\$1,787,475	\$10,447,635
Britannia Community Services	15%	\$819,559	\$5,494,303
Library	12%	\$6,540,458	\$55,281,365
PDS - Current Range Planning	11%	\$1,421,988	\$12,740,092

Spending Category	% Change Compared to Budget Sim. Average	\$ Amount Change Compared to Budget Sim. Average	Baseline: 2020 Budget \$ Amount
Parks - Parks Maintenance & Operations	10%	\$3,846,484	\$39,386,965
ACCS - Other	9%	\$89,661	\$1,006,790
ACCS - Civic Theatres	8%	\$1,215,709	\$15,127,726
Parks - Recreation	7%	\$3,620,566	\$53,960,829
Engineering & Utilities - Public Works	6%	\$6,550,562	\$105,536,826
Fire - Fire & Medical	6%	\$7,301,900	\$118,612,829
Parks - Admin & Business Support, Park Dev't	4%	\$327,196	\$8,807,286
PDS - General	4%	\$174,038	\$4,799,544
Development, Buildings & Licensing	1%	\$494,015	\$41,368,073
Engineering & Utilities - Utilities	1%	\$2,963,788	\$375,413,203
Corporate Support - Technology Services	0%	\$87,438	\$35,954,040
Mayor & Council	-1%	-\$24,465	\$3,447,601
Parks - Parking	-2%	-\$27,771	\$1,634,814
Fire - Other	-2%	-\$244,046	\$13,274,347
ACCS - Mountain View Cemetery	-3%	-\$64,834	\$2,312,192
Corporate Support - Debt, Capital & Contingencies	-4%	-\$4,478,587	\$126,483,920
Parks - Other	-4%	-\$548,140	\$14,341,176
Corporate Support - Finance, Risk, SCM	-4%	-\$764,575	\$19,956,461
Corporate Support - REFM	-4%	-\$1,442,133	\$32,700,207
Corporate Support – Other Support Services	-6%	-\$4,727,110	\$85,063,273
Parks - Golf, Marinas & Attractions	-10%	-\$1,851,989	\$17,737,635
Police - Investigations	-16%	-\$14,621,442	\$93,472,731
Police - Administration	-21%	-\$12,322,794	\$58,990,959
Police - Other	-26%	-\$6,406,834	\$24,674,393
Police - Operations	-31%	-\$49,557,748	\$162,392,620



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