OUR CITY. OUR FUTURE.

BUDGET 2022



What We Heard From Public Engagement
Dec. 2 2021

ST. JOHN'S

Disclaimer

- This document aims to provide a summary of what was heard from participants during the public engagement process. It is not meant to reflect the specific details of each submission or conversation word-for-word.
- The City produces a What We Heard document for every city-lead project where public engagement is used to share back with the community the commentary collected and to ensure we heard you correctly.
- The City protects the privacy of those who provide their feedback as per Access to Information and Privacy Legislation.
- The full scope of commentary is used by the project team, city staff, and Council to help inform recommendations and decisions.

Context and background

- Planning for Budget 2022
- New assessment cycle base date is Jan. 2020 – notifications to public sent June 2021
- Expected shortfall is $13 million
- There has been a slight decrease in assessed values of property (around 4.5% for residential and 2.6% for commercial) and while the City's annual budget increases have hovered around 1.2%, some of the City's operating costs for 2022 are expected to increase in areas such as fleet and debt servicing (payment on borrowing for capital projects).
- Economy continues to shift and be fragile in some areas while other areas see significant growth
- Pandemic continues with impacts on service delivery
- Federal and provincial election year, the full policy implications of which are still unknown
- 2021 is a review year for the City’s strategic plan goals as new council was elected
- The City has made progress against current strategic plan, 80% of all planned activities to 2021 are complete
- The City’s continuous improvement efforts continue to find efficiencies and improvements
- Feedback collected through other public engagement projects including such things sidewalk snow clearing, affordable housing, Downtown Pedestrian Mall, youth engagement, etc..

Context and Background

- Other City plans and strategies are in various stages of development/review or implementation:

Bike St. John's Master Plan	Resilient St. John's Climate Plan
Healthy Cities	Economic Development
Envision	Arts Plan
Affordable Housing	Advantage – placemarketing
Parks and Open Spaces	Urban Forest Master Plan

- Citizen Satisfaction Survey – statistically valid data from 2020 and comparative to 2018 showing increases in most areas, still room for improvement
  - 87% of citizens suggest the City should balance investments between providing basic services and additional programs/services to enhance quality of life
  - Citizens strongly support the City's current strategic directions with ratings of 8 or more out of 10 as important
    - Sustainable City 92%
    - Effective City 87%
    - City that Moves 78%
    - Connected City 77%
  - When asked which capital projects they support residents noted the following within their top 3: city-owned and operated non-profit housing 61%, initiatives to improve energy efficiency, reduce greenhouse gases and reduce operating costs 56% Green spaces and outdoor facilities 54%, Recreation and community facilities 50% Parks and playgrounds 43% Cycling infrastructure (trails/bike racks) 21%

Purpose of Public Engagement



Inform residents, businesses, and other stakeholders about the City's budget shortfall and seek their feedback on budget priorities and considerations for 2022 and beyond.



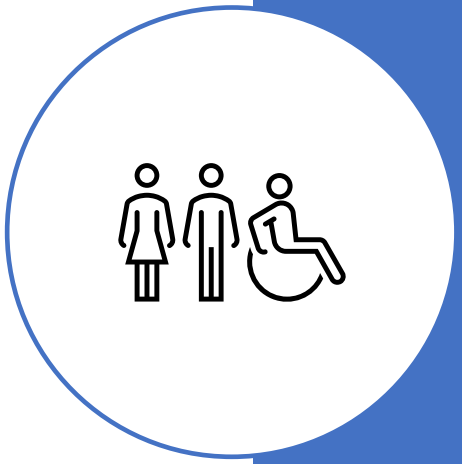
Share information about how the city funds programs and services and the sources of revenues and expenditures.



Provide information to staff who will make recommendations to Council on decisions for Budget 2022.

Stakeholders

- Residents of St. John’s
- Business community
- City Advisory Committees



Promotion of Public Engagement



- PSA: July 7: Budget Engagement Begins
- Website Posts: June 7: Understanding City Budgeting; July 13: Tax Receipt Tool, Dec. 3 Understanding Mill Rate
- Ads: VOCM Leaderboard July 12-18 (498,225 impressions and 205 engagements) Telegram June 19 & 26; July 10, 17, 24 & 31; August 07 &14
- Five newsletters through engagestjohns.ca – more than 3200 registered users each

Promotion of Public Engagement



- Twitter – July 7, 10, 13, 19, 23, 28; Aug. 2, 11, 17, 22; Oct. 7 **(Total Impressions: 76,784; Total Engagements: 554)**
- Facebook – July 7, 13,19,23,28; Aug. 2, 11, 22; Oct. 7 **(Total Reach: 24,889; Total Engagements: 2454)**
- Instagram –July 7, 10, 13, 23, 28; Aug. 11, 17, 22; Oct. 8 **(Total Reach: 1976; Total Impressions: 2491)**
- YouTube: Understanding City Budgeting - 110 views; Budget Bitable – 982 views

Points of Engagement

- 1500 visits to EngageStjohns.ca, 85 actively engaged
- Ad hoc budget advisory committee
- Meetings with City-Business Roundtable
- Booth at Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) Event Oct. 27, 2021 – 45 people
- LIP focus group
- City Advisory committees
  - Seniors
  - Inclusion
  - Arts and Culture
  - Affordable Housing
  - Environmental and Sustainability Experts Panel
- Submission from the Arts and Culture Advisory Committee
- Eight (8) emails/phone calls
- Virtual Public Session – 9 people attended

What we heard across all feedback channels

Themes

- Impact of changing demographics
- State of small business
- Cost of living
- Who pays tax/how to establish tax rates
- What Council should focus on
- Equity/gaps in service
- Cost of service

What we heard about changing demographics

- Need to consider impact on marginalized groups such as those living in poverty, newcomers, LGBTQ+, people on fixed incomes, people with mobility issues or other disabilities, in our policy and budget decisions
- Need to understand impact of pandemic on certain sectors like the arts/artists
- Decisions about the budget and service impacts the retention of youth and newcomers as well as seniors and the choice to stay here for those who live here or to choose here for those who do not – determines how people perceive the city as a place to live

What we heard about small business

- Small business is already taxed enough
- Create a sliding scale to tax small businesses less than larger ones
- Need to consider artists as business and profit margins are already tenuous with reduction in box office due to capacity issues with COVID
- Consider a tax break for art studios
- Collect unpaid taxes from businesses

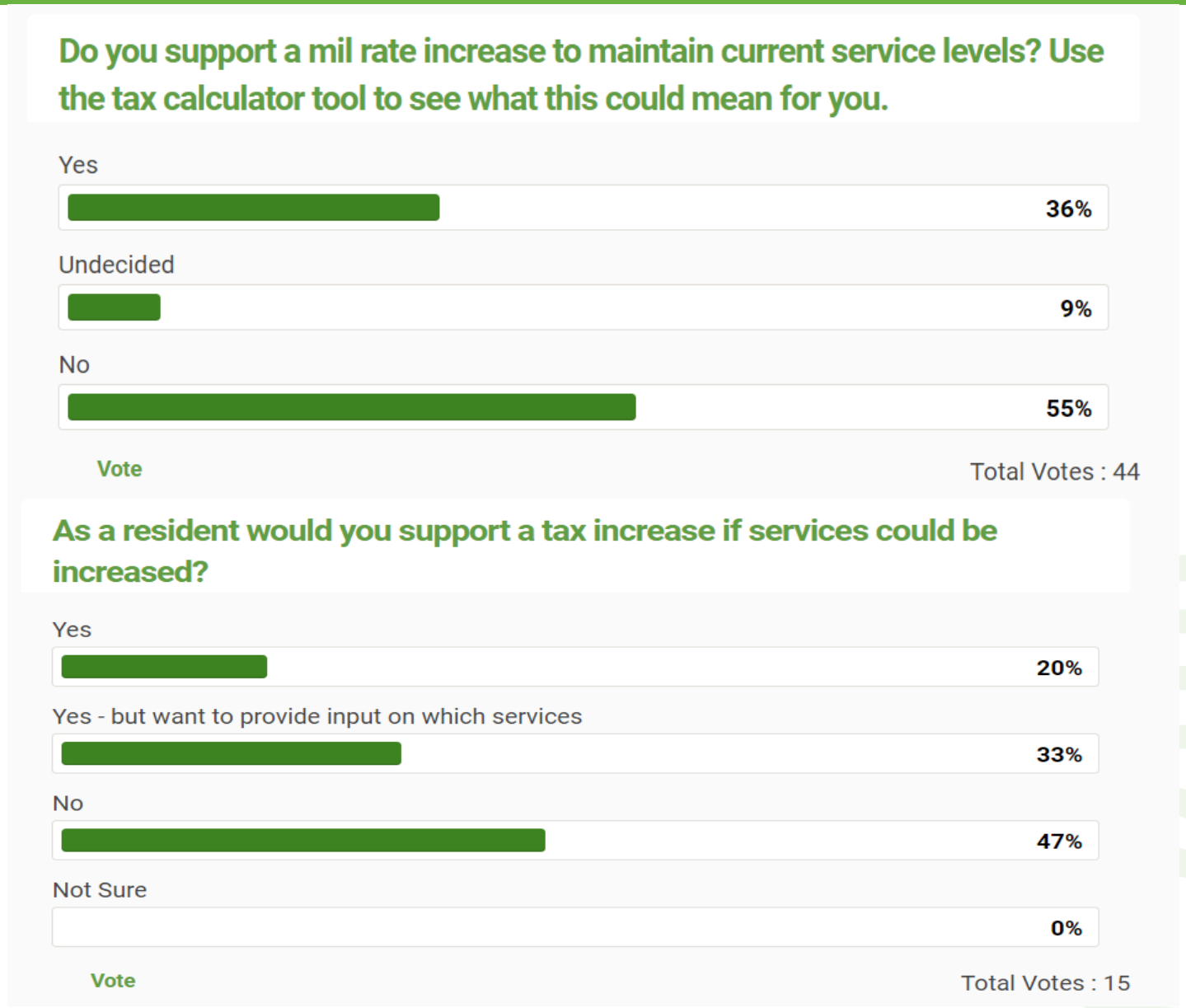
What we heard about cost of living

- Keep taxes stable
- Need to be an affordable city
- Consider all elements of someone's ability to pay (taxes and for services)
- Need to collectively reduce spending to keep costs as low as possible for taxpayers and service users

What we heard about who pays tax/tax rates

- Memorial University should pay tax on their properties
- Provincial and federal buildings should pay property tax
- Set the mil rate according to the cost of providing the service, i.e., to certain areas of the city
- Consider impact of any changes on all residents, people who do not have a car, persons with disabilities, etc.
- Have fairness in spending, view that some areas of the city have better/more services than others
- Business community do not want the shortfall passed on to the business owners who are already struggling
- Tax increase should be a last resort, some suggested cutting taxes

Two quick polls on Engage StJohns.ca



What we heard about Council and what they should focus on

- Strategy and not the day to day
- Have a tone of hopefulness and looking to the future
- Consider benefit of full-time Councillors
- A few people said focus should be on “core” services
- Do not use austerity measures to address shortfall, creates more issues/inequity
- Monitor expenditures, use zero-based budgeting
- Consider whether city should be in the housing business
- Create a welcoming city for all
- Consider areas of the city that have limited access to water and sewer

What we heard about services

- The most frequently noted areas were:
  - Sidewalk snow clearing, public transit, affordable housing, accessibility. Some suggested the City revisit its What we Heard on Sidewalk snowclearing and recommendations from the Public Transit Review
- Other specific items mentioned included crosswalks, automatic walk signals, recreation programs and access to them such as after school and pools
- Need for active transportation, walking trails, pedestrian safety, traffic calming
- Need for neighbourhood level services
- Importance of streets rehab, fire hydrants, sanitary sewers, clean water and storm sewers
- Streamline the permitting process and improve information and communications especially for newcomers looking to start home-based businesses

What we heard about services

- Need to access information about programs and services easily
- Address climate change
- Consider access to libraries in all locations of the City (connect to City recreation facilities)
- Feelings of inequity in service depending on where you live – locations noted were Southlands, Kilbride, Thorburn Rd.
- Keep the city clean/address litter
- More recycling infrastructure
- Need access to public wifi, especially in the downtown and parks

What we heard about cost of services

- Have policies that reduce urban sprawl, thereby reducing cost of providing those services
- Consider privatization of Metrobus and recreational services
- Sell the Mary Brown's Centre
- Have a transportation plan that considers how people move around so cost of service can be reduced
- Comment on city salaries being too high, need to review and compare against similar organizations

What we heard about the arts

- The Arts Advisory Committee made the following specific recommendations :
  - that the City of St. John’s implement a percentage of all capital construction cost be set aside to pay for public art procurement and installation.
  - that the City of St. John’s exempt all arts and culture home-based businesses (both home office and home occupation) from any new application fees.
  - that the City of St. John’s conduct an arts space needs analysis in 2022.

What else we heard

"Has to be a city that works for everyone"
- Member of IAC

"I want to live in a city where buses come more often than once an hour and where it's safe to travel by bicycle or on foot."
- EngageStjohns.ca user

"Core and quality of life are interconnected and need to be treated that way from a policy perspective."
-IAC member

Next Steps



Council to review all feedback and consider for budget decisions



Budget is released

Dec 13. 2021

To stay informed



- Follow the project page or sign up to receive notifications at engagestjohns.ca