

Background

As part of the City's commitment to engage and educate residents on the budget process, an interactive, online budget tool was made available to receive public comment. This was the second year the public input tool was used.

The online tool was modified for the 2018 budget process based on feedback received during the 2017 budget engagement. Improvements to this year's tool included the addition of impact bars, which described the effect of an increase or decrease in service levels based on the resident's choices. The tool was also modified to a tax model, allowing residents to see the direct link between their choices and the impact on their own property taxes.

The interactive tool provided an easy and convenient way for residents to participate in the budget process and to comment on where their priorities lie for the 2018 budget.

Communications and Promotion

This year's budget input tool was promoted through various methods including:

- Digital billboard ads
- Print and online ads
- Posts to social media (paid and earned)
- A banner on the City's website homepage
- Information cards distributed at City facilities, including the Greater Sudbury landfill, the Market, Citizen Service Centres and Libraries. The information cards were also distributed at various events, and were provided to Council to use at their discretion.
- Radio programming including a week-long trivia segment and an interview on popular morning shows.

Results

This year, 373 responses were received during the six-week period the input tool was available.

In all but one service area listed on the tool, the majority of residents chose to keep the status quo funding. Only minor increases or decreases are seen.

The services in which resident choices deviated most from the current funding levels were Roads Maintenance, Fire Services, Paramedic Services, and Libraries and Museums.

Approximately 50 per cent of respondents chose an increase in funding for Road Maintenance. This was the only category where respondents tended toward a significant increase.

Just over 40 per cent of respondents chose a decrease in funding for both Fire and Police Services.

The Libraries and Museums category is the only one in which the most popular answer was not the status quo. Approximately 47 per cent of respondents chose a decrease in funding for the service area.

The tool included several categories where residents were not able to make adjustments to funding levels. These included:

- Social Services
- Corporate Administration
- Economic Development
- Outside Boards (Sudbury & District Health Unit, Nickel District Conservation Authority)
- Other (Office of the Mayor, Council, Office of the CAO, Auditor General, Planning and Development, Animal Control/Bylaw)

These represented areas that are funded mainly by senior levels of government, are legislated, are outside boards, or provide support services (corporate administration) to operating departments. It is important to note that funding levels for support services, such as Finance and IT, is directly affected by funding levels in the operating departments.

A full report on the results and comments received from the online public input tool is attached as Appendix A with results of the French tool attached as Appendix B. A bar graph for each question shows the total responses for each funding level option.

- The centre bar represents the forecasted tax increase based on preliminary numbers in May.
- The vertical line shows the average amount citizens want to spend on the particular service area.
- The numbers above each of the bars depict the number of respondents who chose that funding level.

- The 3.5 per cent centered below the graph represents the proposed funding level for 2018. Options to the left are decreases to the proposed funding level and options to the right are increases to the proposed funding level.

In addition to comments from the online tool, correspondence was forwarded by the City of Greater Sudbury's Sustainable Mobility Advisory Panel for consideration during the 2018 Budget process and is attached as Appendix C.

Please note, rude or vulgar comments, or comments that contained identifiable individuals have been redacted.

Next Steps:

Several open-house style community meetings will be held following the tabling of the budget document in early November. The City's Chief Administrative Officer and Chief Financial Officer will be in attendance to provide information on the 2018 budget and answer questions.

As a result of last year's budget process evaluation, six information sessions have been scheduled in convenient locations throughout the city.

Information sessions details will be communicated to the public using a variety of advertising methods.

Resources Cited:

Finance and Administration Committee Report, 2018 Budget Direction

<http://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=agenda&action=navigator&lang=en&id=1170>

Finance and Administration Committee Report, 2017 Budget Process Evaluation

<http://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=agenda&action=navigator&lang=en&id=1169&itemid=12695>