

Proposed 2026-2027 Capital Budget Survey Results



Prepared by:
Kristyn Lovato-Day, Policy & Research Analyst
Corporate Services Department
November 27, 2025

Executive Summary

In November 2025, the Finance Division conducted a survey for the Proposed 2026-2027 Capital Budget. The survey was open to the public and distributed electronically through the City's Get Involved engagement site and on paper. 27 responses were received.

In this short survey, respondents were asked about the new two-year Capital Budget, the format changes, their high-level opinions of the capital budget as proposed, and where they thought significant changes should be made.

Of note, the survey identified that the reaction to the changes in the Capital Budget Document this year have been largely neutral. The survey also highlighted some respondents' opinion that there should be a focus on roads.

These survey questions will be used in subsequent years to gauge how changes to the budget documents and process impact public opinion. It is important to note that this is difficult to measure without a representative sample, and any future comparison must be used with caution.

Method

In November 2025, the Finance Division of the Corporate Services Department distributed a survey for the Proposed 2026-2027 Capital Budget using the City of Thunder Bay's Get Involved public engagement platform. Paper surveys were also made available at the Thunder Bay Public Library Branches and at City Hall. The survey was published on November 18, 2025, and closed at midnight on November 25, 2025.

The survey was advertised in the following manner:

- Thunder Bay Talks on October 22, 2025;
- A segment on The Minutes Podcast;
- Television, print, and radio media interviews;
- Social media posts;
- Media release with the release of the Capital Budget;
- Posted on the front page of the Get Involved platform; and
- On the City of Thunder Bay website – on the home page and the Budget page.

The sample was not random and likely includes more people who are engaged with the City or have a particular interest in the budget (homeowners who pay property taxes).

Statistical Significance

The study was not conducted as a random sample of the population, but as a self-directed survey and should be considered as a feedback mechanism and not a representation of the greater population.

The survey received 27 responses from the public – all electronic through Get Involved Thunder Bay. As the sample is quite small, the results cannot be extrapolated to the entire population of

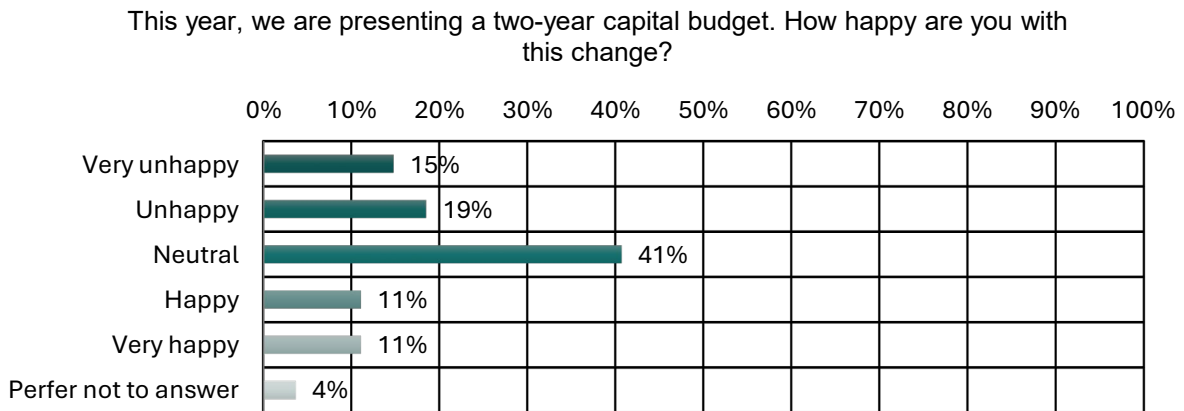
the City of Thunder Bay without a large margin of error and must be referred to as the opinions of the respondents of this survey.

It should be noted that while not statistically significant, the feedback is still important to a transparent and thorough public budget process. Survey results in this situation should be treated as a sample and not a reflection of all opinions, and interpretation should be done with caution.

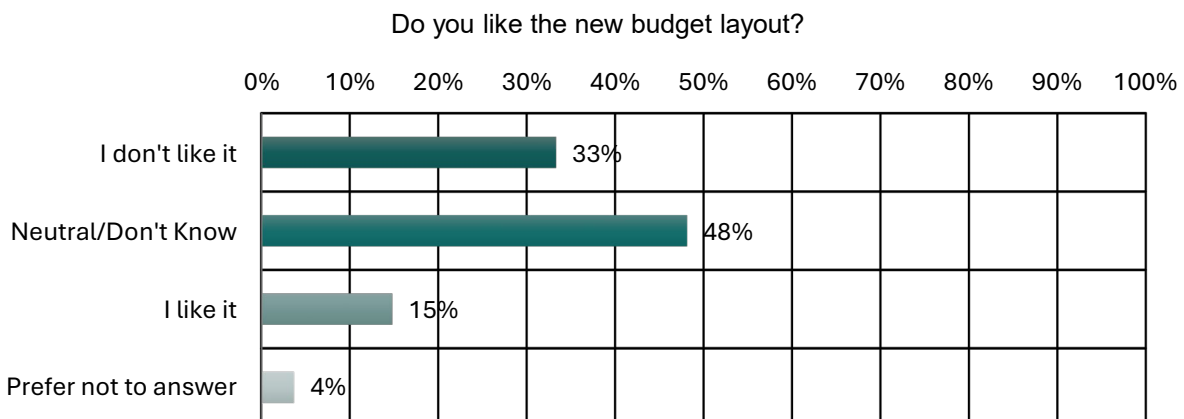
Results

Questions Regarding Layout/Presentation

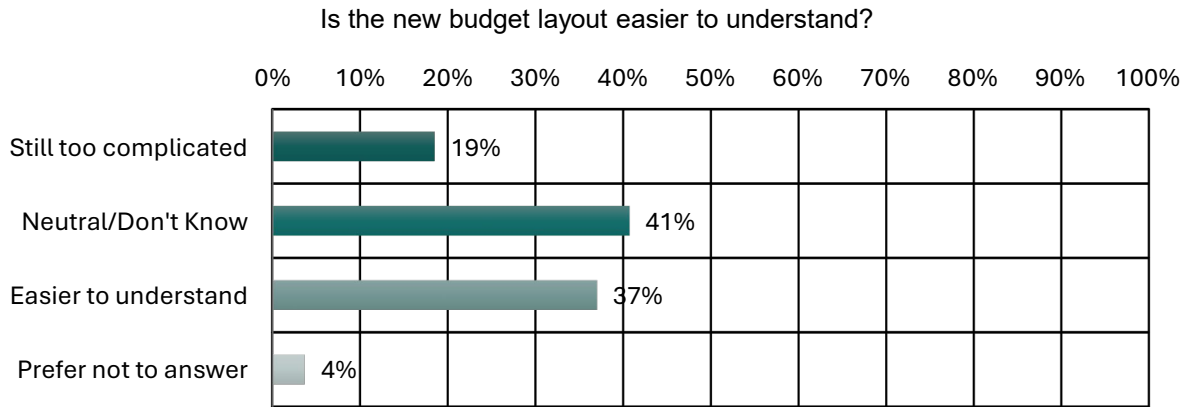
The respondents were provided a copy of the Proposed 2026-2027 Capital Budget and asked if they were happy with the new two-year capital budget. Respondents were given 5 choices for this question, ranging from very unhappy to very happy. The majority of respondents were neutral about this change (41%).



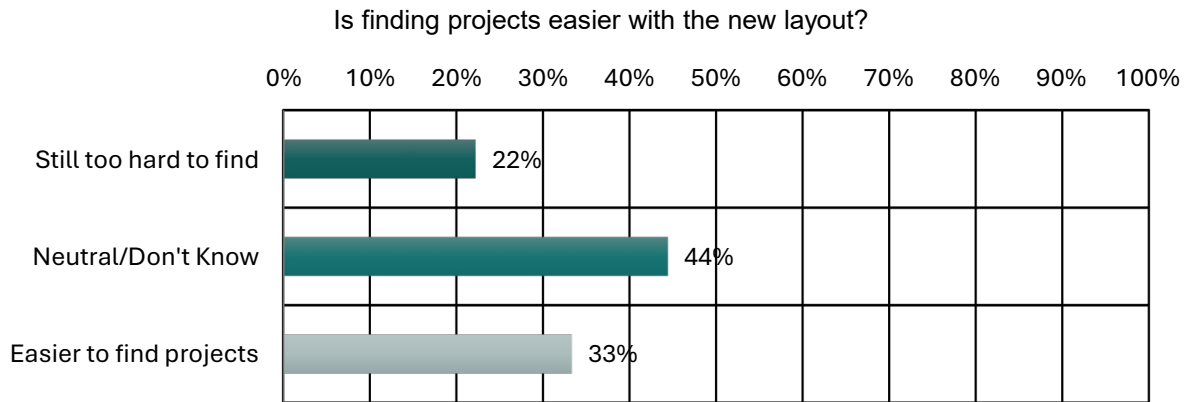
When asked if they liked the new budget layout, most respondents felt neutrally or didn't know (48%). 19% like the new layout, and 33% answered negatively.



When asked if they found the new layout easier to understand, 37% of respondents answered positively, that it was easier to understand, with 41% neutral/don't know, and 19% stating it is still too complicated.



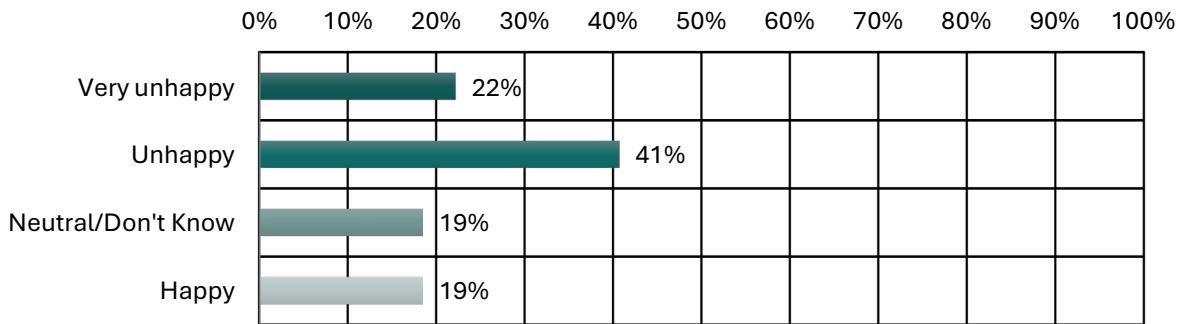
When asked if the new budget layout made finding projects easier, the majority of respondents remained neutral (44%), while stated that it was easier to find projects (33%).



Questions Regarding Budget Content

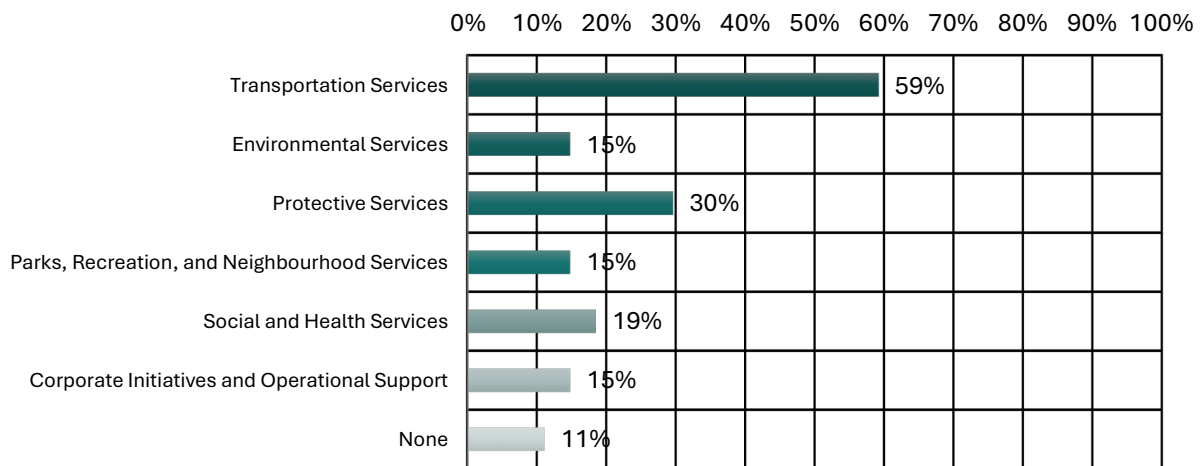
Respondents were provided with a graph of the proportions of the budget by service area and asked how happy they were with the overall Proposed 2026-2027 Capital Budget on a five-point scale. The Proposed Capital Budget Document has descriptions of each service area included. The majority of respondents reported being either very unhappy (22%) or unhappy (41%). Zero respondents reported being very happy. This is a slight decrease in negative feelings from 2025 (68%).

Overall, how happy are you with the Proposed 2026-2027 Capital Budget?



Respondents were provided with a short text introduction to explain the proportion of the budget that is tax-supported, and a graph to show the proportion of tax funds by service area, then were asked if there was a service area that they felt required a significant change in tax-based funding. Respondents were able to choose as many service areas as they wished. 59% of respondents answered that Transportation Services required a significant change in capital funding. The next highest chosen service area was Protective Services. 11% of respondents did not want to see any significant change in tax-based capital funding.

Is there a service area that you feel needs a significant change in tax-based funding?



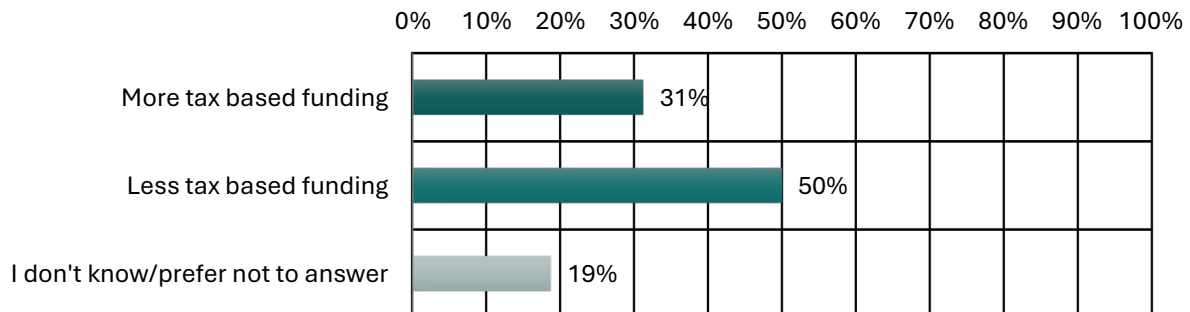
If a respondent chose a service area to significantly change, a follow up question was presented, asking what change they would like to see to that service area. It should be noted that due to space considerations, paper surveys had this follow up question as a single question as they had extra space to write notes if they wished.

Transportation Services

16 people (59% of all survey respondents) reported wanting to see significant change to Transportation Services. This was the most chosen answer for this question this year. Of those

18 respondents, the majority wanted to see less tax-based funding spent. This is the opposite of the results in the 2025 survey.

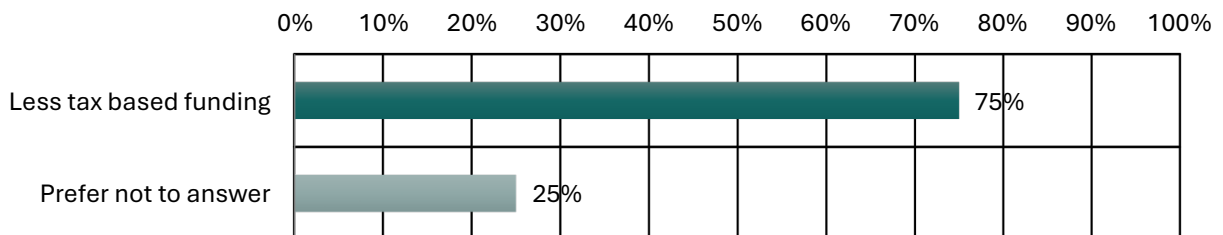
What significant change would you like to see to Transportation Services?



Environmental Services

Four people (15% of all survey respondents) said they would like to see a significant change to Environmental Services. Three reported wanting a decrease and one chose not to respond. This is similar to the results of the 2025 survey.

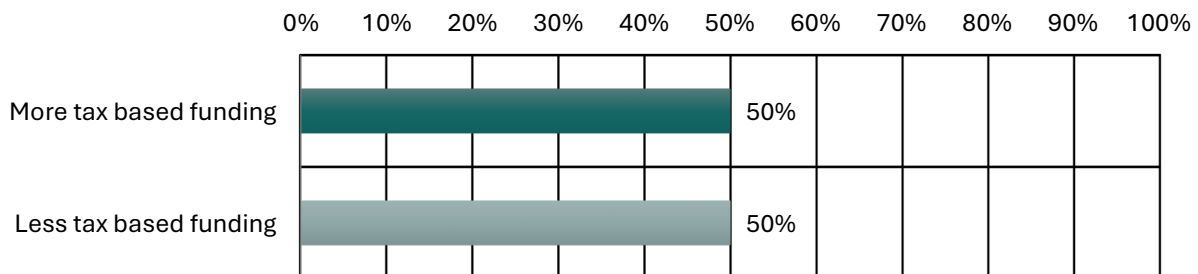
What significant change would you like to see to Environmental Services?



Protective Services

Eight people (30% of all survey respondents) said they would like to see a significant change to Protective Services. The respondents were evenly split for an increase or a decrease. In the previous year, 94% of respondents to this question felt there should be an increase.

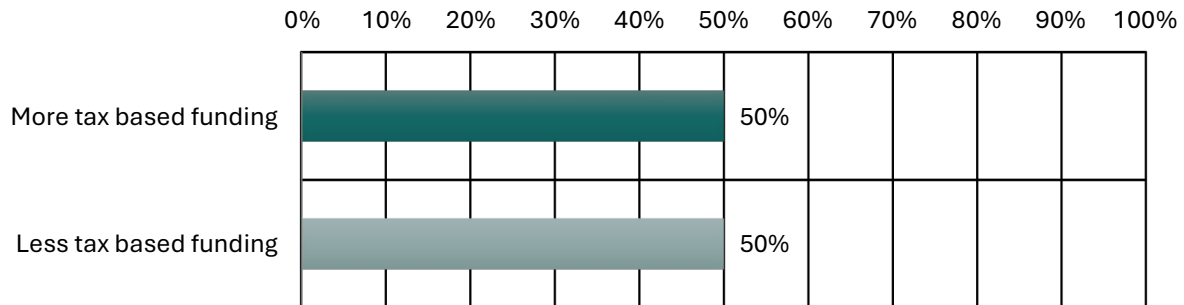
What significant change would you like to see to Protective Services?



Parks, Recreation, and Neighbourhood Services

Four people (15% of all survey respondents) said they would like to see a significant change to Parks, Recreation, and Neighbourhood Services. These respondents were split evenly regarding wanting an increase or decrease. This is a deviation from the previous year where the majority of respondents to the survey wanted to see an increase for Parks, Recreation, and Neighbourhood Services.

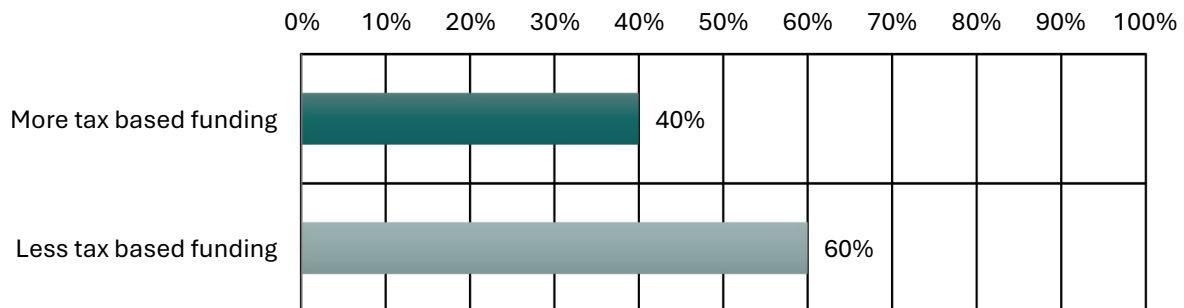
What significant change would you like to see to Parks, Recreation, and Neighbourhood Services?



Social and Health Services

Five people (19% of all survey respondents) said they would like to see a significant change to Social and Health Services. The responses to this question were split relatively evenly with 41% supporting more tax-based capital funding and 48% requesting less.

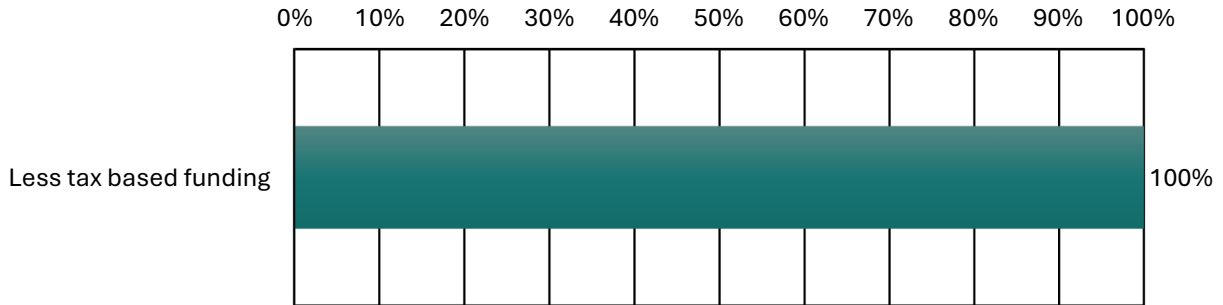
What significant change would you like to see to Social and Health Services?



Corporate Initiatives and Operational Support

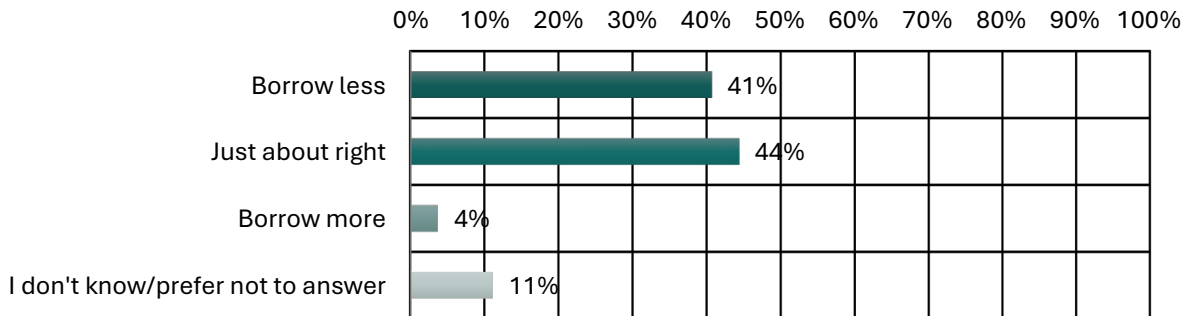
Four people (15% of all survey respondents) said they would like to see a significant change to Corporate Initiatives and Operational Support. All of these respondents wanted to see less tax-based capital funding here.

What significant change would you like to see to Corporate Initiatives and Operational Support?



The final question provided a short description of the City’s debenture policy and a graph showing the proportions of debenture spending, then asked if the respondents are comfortable with the current level of annual borrowing. The majority of respondents felt that the City borrows just about the right amount for capital spending. This is a shift from the previous year where respondents requested that the City borrow less.

Are you comfortable with the current level of annual borrowing?



Comments

There were two opportunities to provide free text comments: one at the end of the layout questions, and one at the end of the survey.

Respondents were asked “Are there other changes that would help make the budget process and documents easier to understand?” There were eight comments left (30% of respondents). As there were so few responses, there were no major themes. The comments suggested the following:

- One comment asked to keep the capital budget to one year only.
- One comment requested graphs showing timelines and annual amounts for debenture repayments. It should be noted that debenture repayments fall into the Operating Budget and would be outlined there.
- One comment suggested mirroring the Federal budget showing investing compared to operating costs.

- One comment suggested having more opportunities in the survey to provide written answers.

The rest of the comments fell more into general comments, rather than a focus on making the process and documents easier to understand:

- One comment requested specific commercial development.
- One comment requested a focus on fixing roads.
- One comment discussed stopping the debt financing plan.

14 comments were left in the general text question at the end of the survey (52% of respondents). Again, as there were so few responses, there were no major themes. However, the comments include:

- Two comments requested more focus on fixing roads.
- Two comments that service users should fund the services (roads and recreation facilities) instead of the tax base.
- Two comments provided feedback for the operational budget.
- One comment requested specific commercial development (this was the same person who left the previous comment).
- One comment reiterated their request to decrease funding for social services.
- One comment requested a capital focus on modernizing facilities to support growth.
- One comment discussed taxes being too high.
- One comment requested the City to stop borrowing to fund projects.
- One comment mentioned project completion timeliness and accountability measures for not meeting deadlines.

Conclusion

The 2026-2027 Proposed Capital Budget survey received minimal engagement, causing difficulties in gauging public opinion.

Respondents identified that further budget format changes have been neutral this year, and that that there should be a focus on roads maintenance.

Some of the survey questions will be used in subsequent years to gauge how changes to the budget documents and process impact public opinion. It is important to note that this is difficult to measure without a representative sample, and any future comparison must be used with caution.