

2025 Proposed Capital Budget Survey Results

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Executive Summary

In November 2024, the Finance Division conducted a survey for the 2025 Proposed Capital Budget. The survey was open to the public and distributed electronically through the City's Get Involved engagement site and on paper. 93 responses were received.

In this short survey, respondents were asked about the new format of the capital budget, 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 have been largely positive and a step in the right direction to increase transparency and understanding of the City's budget process. The survey also highlighted the public's opinion that some major projects should be paused, cancelled, or scaled back to decrease spending.

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.

Method

In November 2024, the Finance Division of the Corporate Services Department distributed a survey for the 2025 Proposed 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 October 30, 2024, and closed at midnight on November 12, 2024.

The survey was announced with a media release and was advertised on the Get Involved platform and the City of Thunder Bay Facebook page as a self-directed survey. To increase reach, the survey was advertised on the City Hall lobby screens and with a paid Meta ad (for social media platforms). 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 93 responses from the public – 89 electronic and 4 paper surveys. 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.

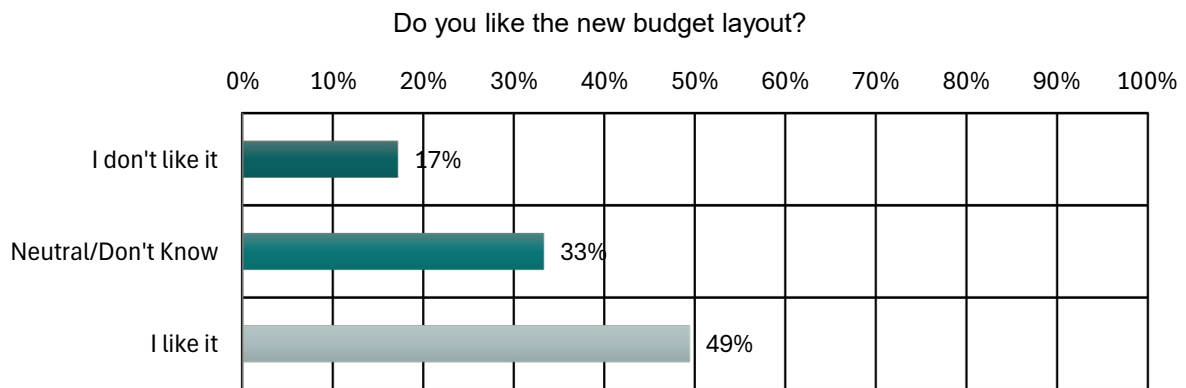
It should be noted that while not statistically significant, the feedback is still important to a transparent and thorough public budget process. Survey results in this situation should be

treated as a sample and not a reflection of all opinions, and interpretation should be done with caution.

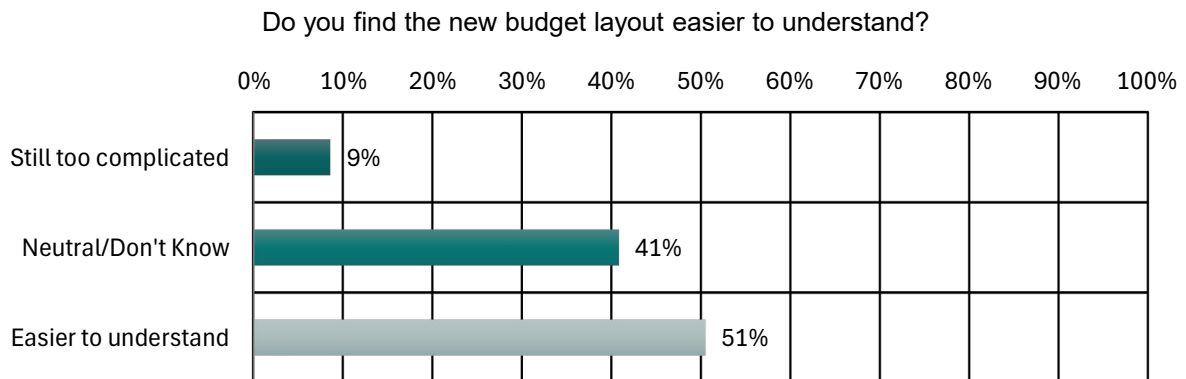
Results

Questions Regarding Layout/Presentation

The respondents were provided a copy of the 2025 Proposed Capital Budget and asked if they liked the new budget layout. Respondents were provided three choices for this question. Most respondents answered positively (49%). It should be noted that two respondents reported the layout had improved but needed more changes, so they chose “I don’t like it”.

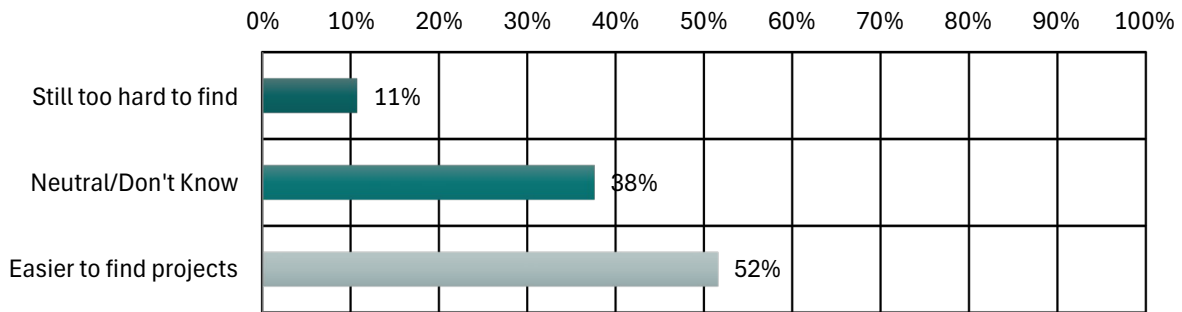


When asked if they found the new layout easier to understand, 51% of respondents answered positively, that it was easier to understand, with 41% neutral/don't know, and 9% stating it is still too complicated.



When asked if the new budget layout made finding projects easier, the majority of respondents stated that it was easier to find projects (52%).

Does the new budget layout make finding projects easier?

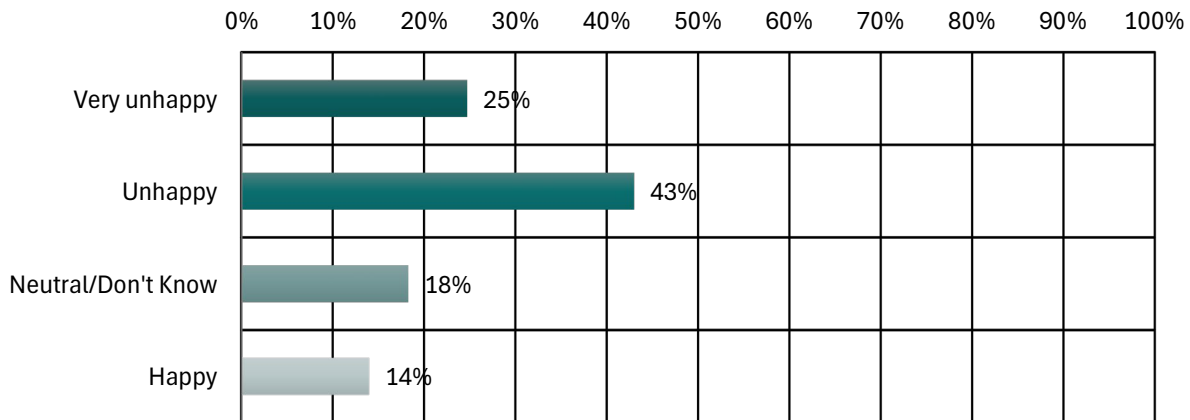


Feedback provided to Administration both in the survey and in email communication relating to the change in the layout of the budget document has been positive, therefore will continue to be reflected in future budget documents.

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 2025 Proposed 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 (25%) or unhappy (43%). Zero respondents reported being very happy.

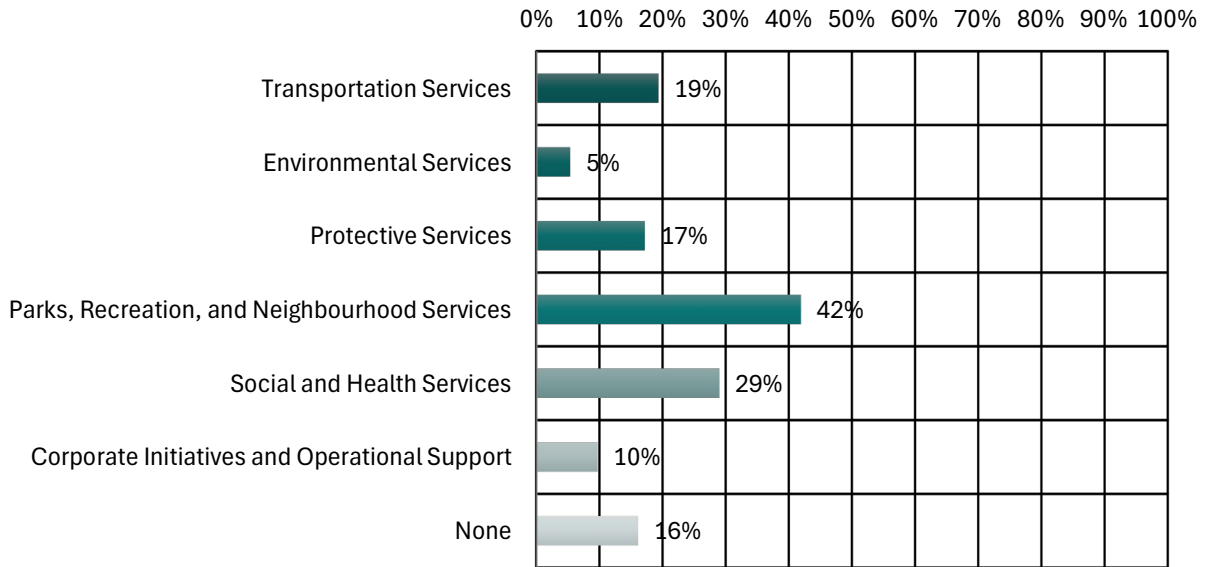
How happy are you with the 2025 Proposed Capital Budget?



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. 42% of respondents answered that Parks, Recreation and Neighbourhood Services required a

significant change in capital funding. The next highest chosen service area was Social and Health Services. 16% 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?

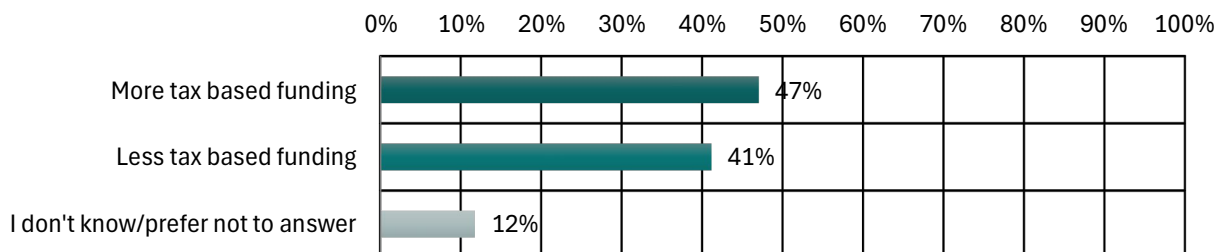


If a respondent chose a service area to significantly change, a follow up question was presented, asking what change they would like to see to that service area. It should be noted that due to space considerations, paper surveys had this follow up question as a single question as they had extra space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

Transportation Services

18 people (19% of all survey respondents) reported wanting to see significant change to Transportation Services. Of those 18 respondents, the majority wanted to see more tax-based funding spent.

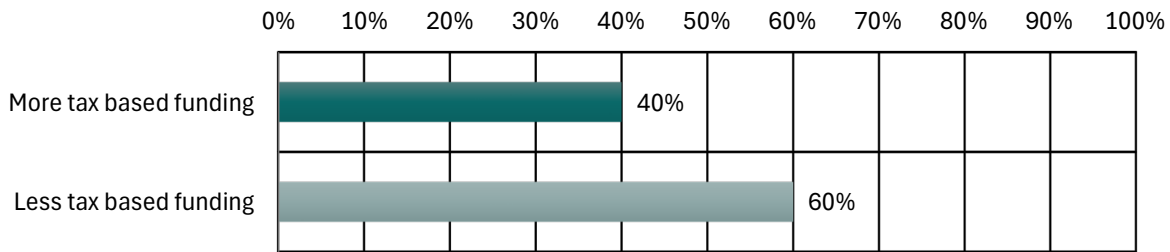
What significant change would you like to see to Transportation Services?



Environmental Services

Five people (5% of all survey respondents) said they would like to see a significant change to Environmental Services. 3 reported wanting a decrease and 2 reported wanting an increase.

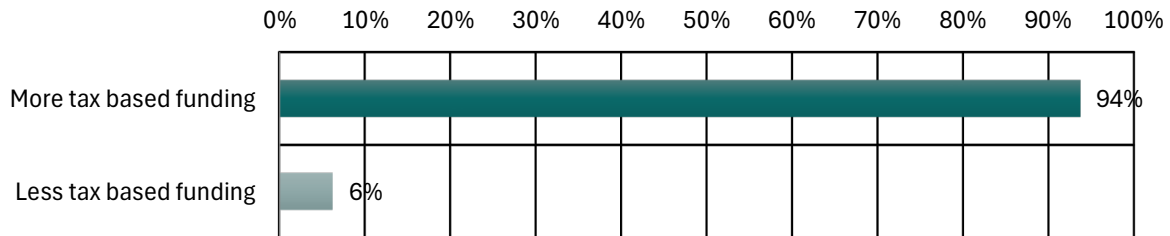
What significant change would you like to see to Environmental Services?



Protective Services

16 people (17% of all survey respondents) said they would like to see a significant change to Protective Services. The majority of these respondents reported wanting to see more tax-based funding.

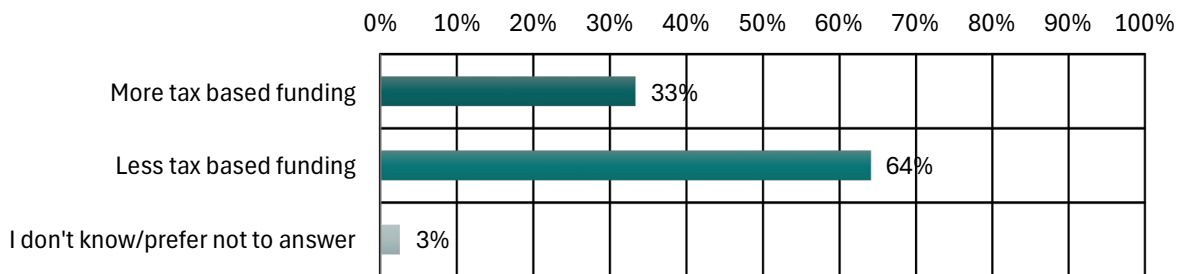
What significant change would you like to see to Protective Services?



Parks, Recreation, and Neighbourhood Services

39 people (42% of all survey respondents) said they would like to see a significant change to Parks, Recreation, and Neighbourhood Services. This service area had the highest response. The majority of these respondents wanted to see less tax-based funding for these projects.

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

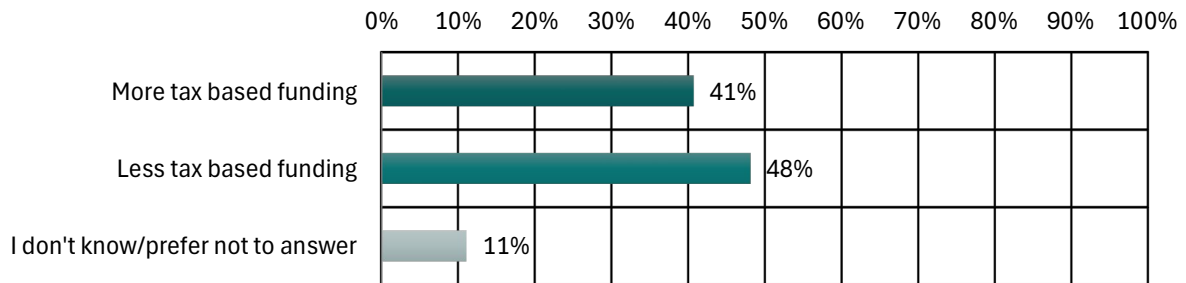


It is of note that 56% of respondents that wanted to see less tax-based funding in this area also mentioned the Turf facility in the comments as the project they would like to see reduced or cancelled. 38.5% of the respondents who wanted to see an increase in spending in this service area mentioned wanting to cancel the Turf facility in their comments.

Social and Health Services

27 people (29% 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?

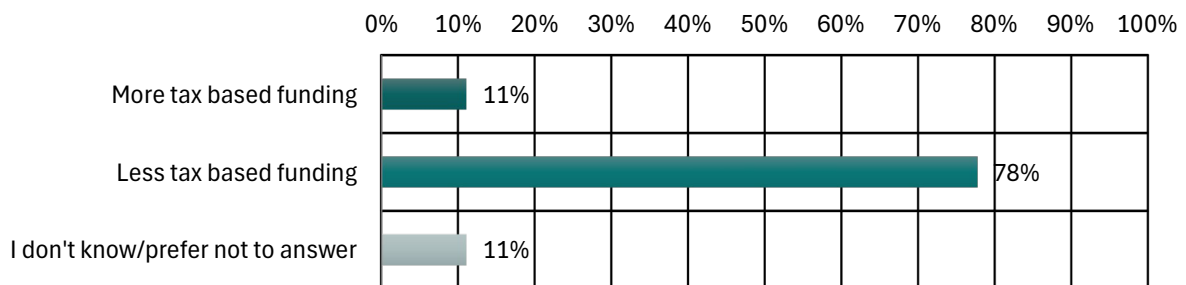


18.5% of respondents who wanted to see less tax-based capital funding in this service area mentioned being opposed to the Temporary Village project in their comment.

Corporate Initiatives and Operational Support

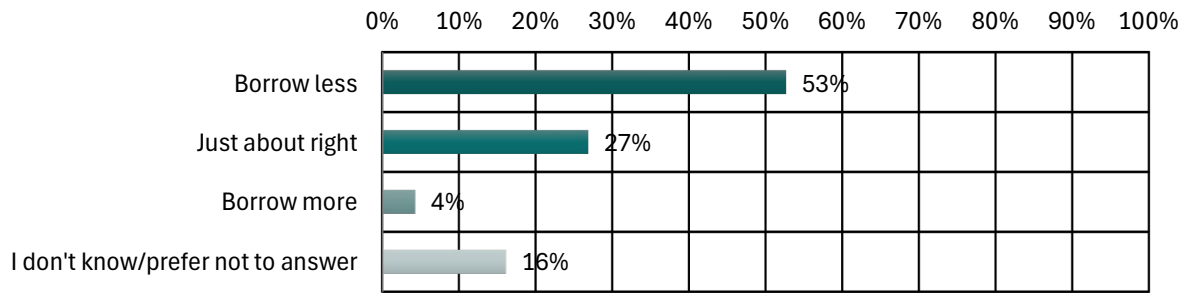
Nine people (10% of all survey respondents) said they would like to see a significant change to Corporate Initiatives and Operational Support. The majority of these respondents wanted to see less tax-based capital funding here.

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 wanted the City to borrow less, and only 4% wanted to borrow more.

Are you comfortable with the current level of annual borrowing?



Comments

There was an opportunity to provide a free text comment at the end of the survey. 75 comments were left (80.6% of respondents). Major themes to these comments include:

- 34.7% of comments mentioned the Indoor Turf Facility being too expensive and not wanting the project to proceed.
- 14.7% of comments mentioned not wanting the Temporary Village to proceed.
- 14.7% of comments noted that the City should be focused on maintaining needs and not building new.
- 12% of comments mentioned that the budget is too high and would like to see less increases.
- 5.3% of comments provided further suggestions for the budget document layout.
- 5.3% of comments mentioned being happy with the changes to the budget document.
- 5.3% of comments noted that Active Transportation should be more of a priority.
- 5.3% of comments noted that mental health and homelessness should be more of a priority.
- One respondent mentioned that debentures should be reflected separately as a funding source.

Conclusion

The results of the 2025 Proposed Capital Budget survey identified that the response to the changes in the Capital Budget Document have been largely positive and the modifications help to increase transparency and understanding of the City's budget process.

The survey also highlighted the public's opinion that some major projects should be paused, cancelled, or scaled back to decrease spending.

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.