

# Proposed 2025 Operating Budget Survey Results

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## Executive Summary

Beginning January 17, 2024, the Finance Division conducted a survey for the Proposed 2025 Operating Budget. The survey was open to the public and distributed electronically through the City's Get Involved engagement site and on paper. 79 responses were received.

In this short survey, respondents were asked about the new format of the operating budget, their high-level opinions of the 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 Operating 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 preference to decrease municipal spending.

The survey questions will be used in subsequent years to gauge how changes to the budget documents and process impact public awareness of the budget process. 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 January 2025, the Finance Division of the Corporate Services Department distributed a survey for the Proposed 2025 Operating Budget using the City of Thunder Bay's Get Involved public engagement platform. Paper surveys were also made available contained in the Community Handbook at the public Question & Answer event, as well as at the Thunder Bay Public Library Branches and City Hall. The survey was published on January 17, 2025, and closed just before midnight on February 4, 2025.

The survey was announced with the Proposed 2025 Operating Budget at a media event, along with a media release. It was also advertised on the Get Involved platform and the City of Thunder Bay Facebook and Instagram pages 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). It was also made available in paper format at City Hall, all branches of the Thunder Bay Public Libraries, and at the informal Question & Answer event held on January 22, 2025.

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 79 responses from the public – 75 electronic and 4 paper surveys. As the sample is quite small, the results cannot be extrapolated to the entire population of the City of

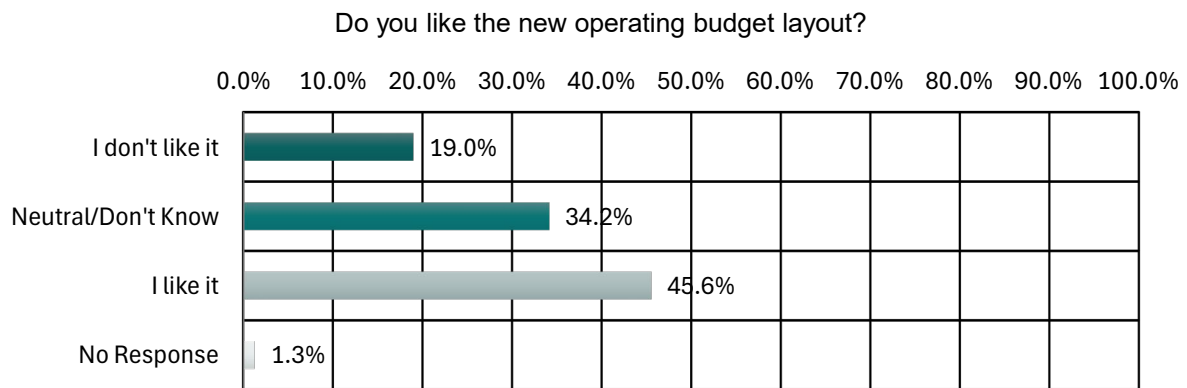
Thunder Bay without a large margin of error and must be referred to as the opinions of the respondents of this survey.

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.

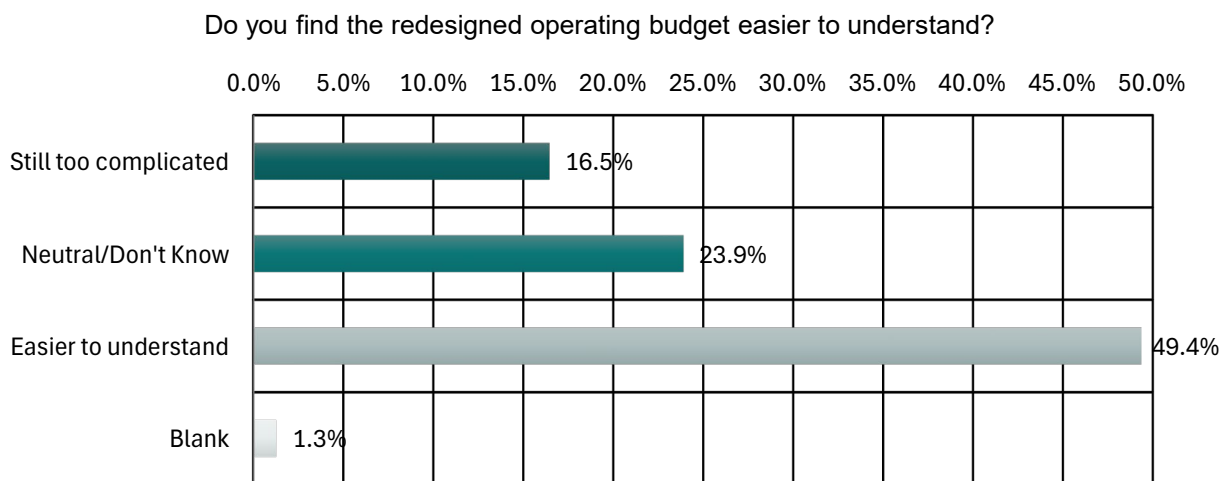
## Results

### 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 (46%). One respondent left this question blank.



When asked if they found the new layout easier to understand, 49.4% of respondents answered positively, that it was easier to understand, with 23.9% neutral/don't know, and 16.5% stating it is still too complicated. One respondent left this question blank.



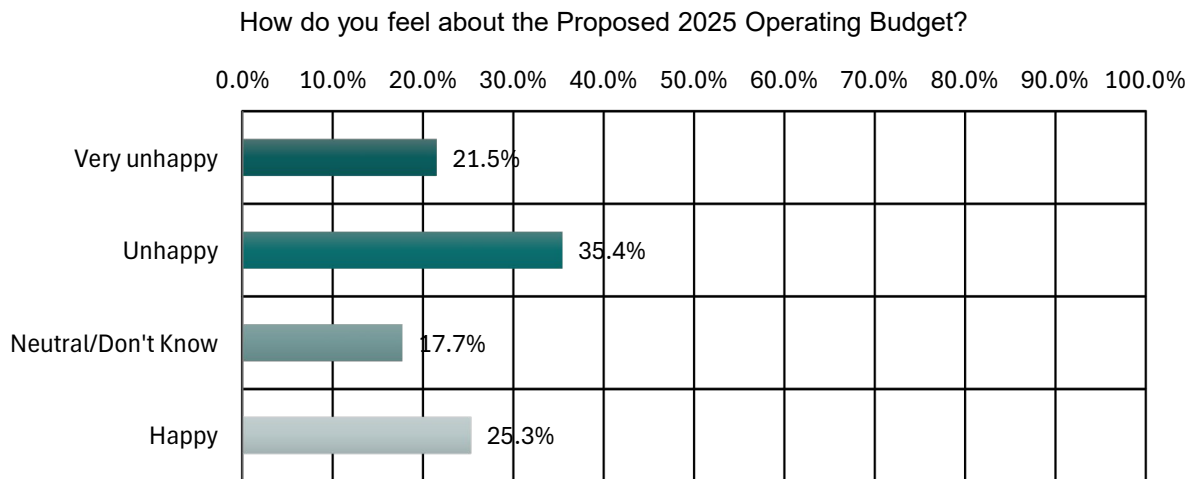
A short answer question asked if there were other changes that would help make the budget process and documents easier to understand. 21 respondents provided feedback or suggestions.

- 28.5% requested further summaries and definitions (6 people).
- 19% said it was a good change and did not have suggestions (4 people).
- 19% had operational suggestions, including the request to decrease taxes (4 people).
- 9.5% said the document is still too long (2 people).
- 9.5% provided suggestions for the Questions & Answer event (2 people).
- 9.5% requested the document be presented in plainer language (2 people).

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, with some additional definitions and summaries included.

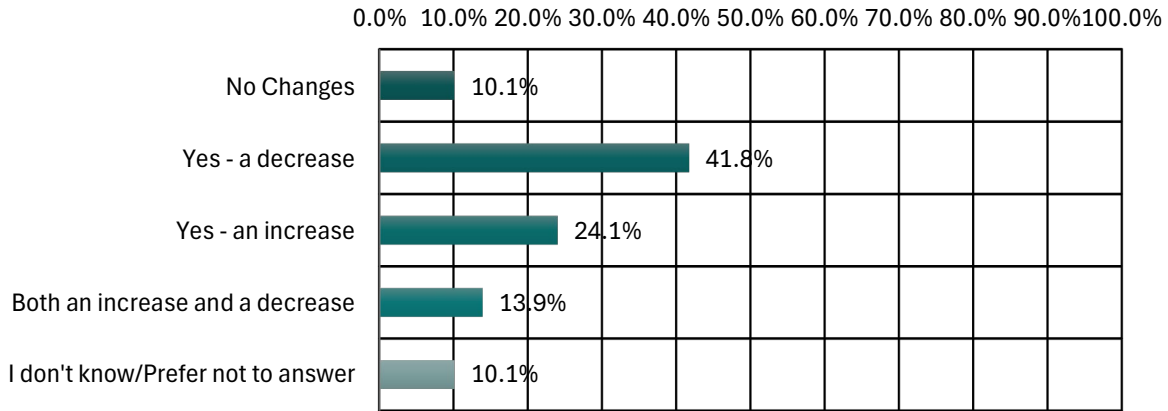
## Questions Regarding Budget Content

Respondents were asked how happy they were with the overall proposed 2025 Operational Budget on a five-point scale. The majority of respondents reported being either very unhappy (21.5%) or unhappy (35.4%). Zero respondents reported being very happy. The responses in this question are more positive than from the Capital Budget Survey; 25.3% responded that they were happy with the Operating Budget where only 14% responded positively about the Capital Budget.



Respondents were asked if there was a service area that they felt required a significant change in funding. 10.1% of respondents reported not wanting any significant changes, while 10.1% preferred not to answer. 24.1% wanted to see an increase to services, while 41.8% wanted to see a decrease. 13.9% wanted to see both an increase to some sections, and a decrease to others.

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

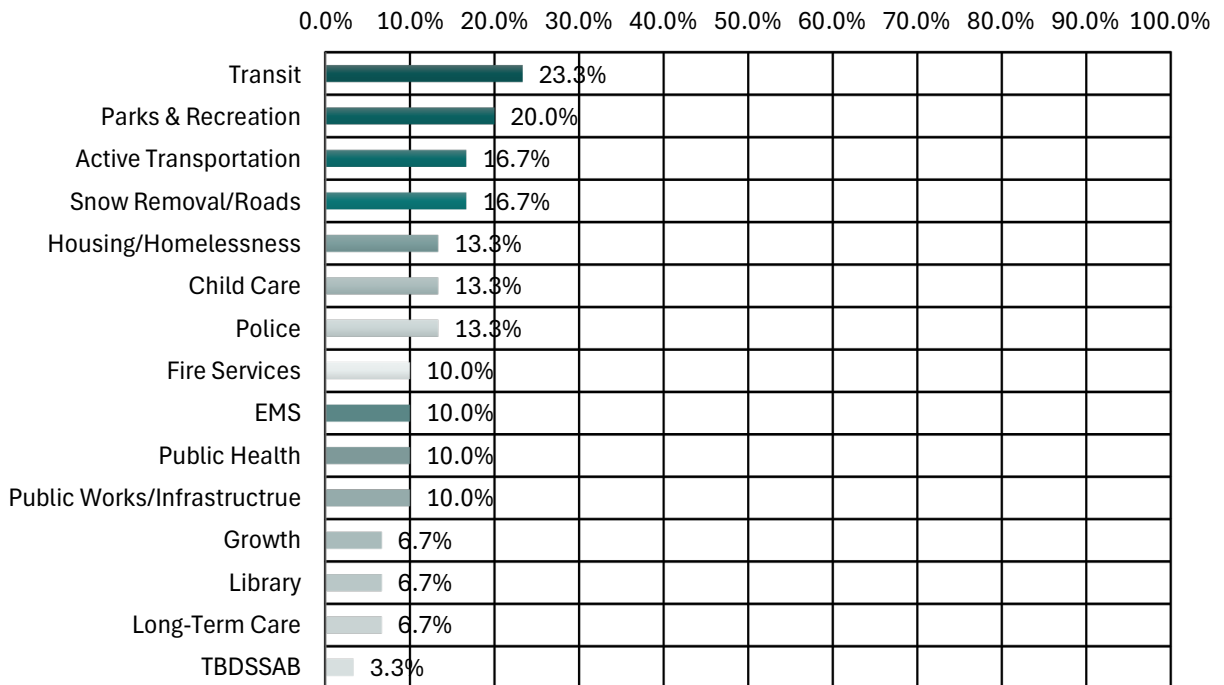


If a respondent chose a significant change, a follow up short answer question was presented, asking what change they would like to see. It should be noted that due to space considerations, paper surveys had a combined question as they had extra space to write notes if they wished.

*Increases*

30 people (38% of all survey respondents) reported wanting to see significant increase to sections of the operating budget. The most frequently reported increases were Transit with 23.3% of people who answered this question, and Parks & Recreation with 20%.

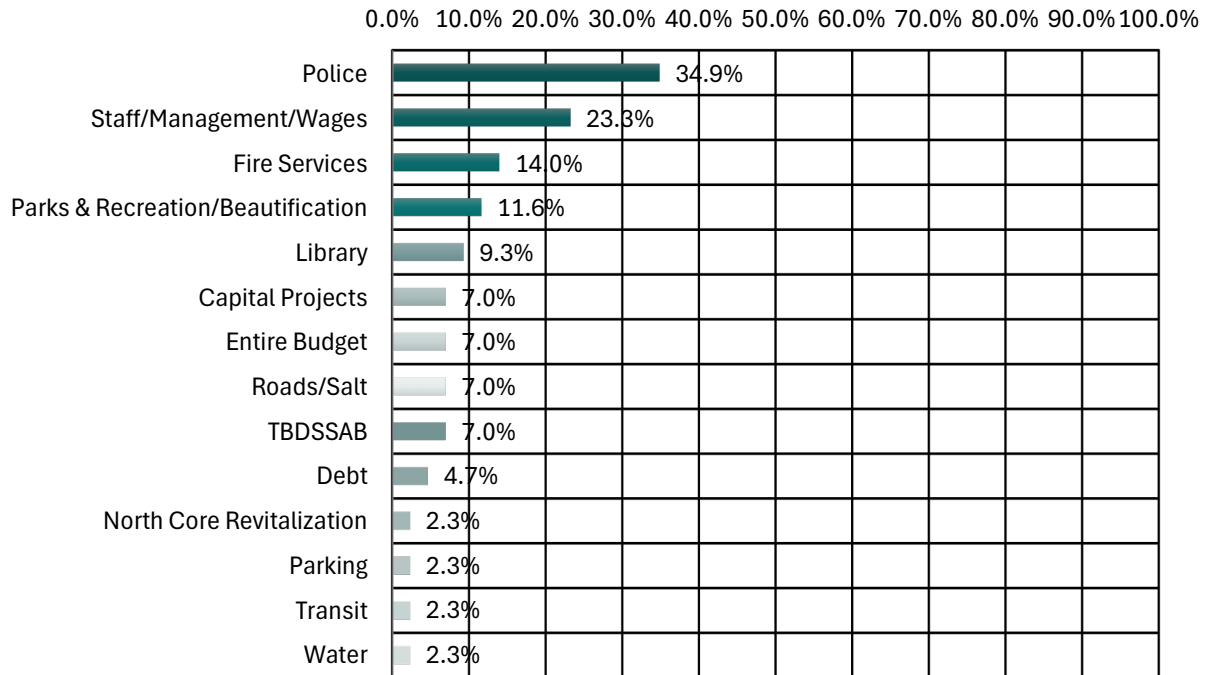
What do you think needs significant increase in funding?



*Decrease*

43 people (54.4% of all survey respondents) said they would like to see a significant decrease to sections of the operating budget. The most frequently reported decreases respondents wished to see were Police with 34.9% of people who answered this question, and Staff/Management/Wages with 23.3%.

What do you think needs significant increase in funding?



## Comments

The second last question asked respondents if there was anything they felt was missing in the 2025 Operating Budget. 27 comments were left (34.2% of respondents). 33% of these comments fit more in the general comment question, so will be included in those themes.

- 33% of the respondents who answered this question think there should be more reductions in the operating budget (6 people).
- 16.7% think there is a lack of action for climate change, reconciliation and equity (3 people).
- 16.7% think the budget is missing support for people experiencing homelessness and poverty (3 people)
- One person thinks that the budget is lacking support for active transportation/bike lanes
- One person believes there should be more support for public recreation facilities
- One person reported wanting a summary of revenue sources included
- One person requested clear information about the tax rates for residents compared to businesses.

There was also an opportunity to provide a free text comment at the end of the survey. 47 comments were left (59.5% of respondents). Major themes to these comments include:

- 12.8% of comments mentioned the Indoor Turf Facility being too expensive and not wanting the project to proceed (6 people). 4% of comments were excited for the turf facility.
- 12.8% of comments mentioned that the cost of living is unaffordable and increases to the tax levy will be difficult on fixed income (6 people).
- 10.6% of comments noted that the City should be focused on permanent housing and housing for people living in encampments (5 people).
- 10.6% of comments wanted to see reductions in the budget overall (5 people).
- 8.5% of comments noted that they believe there are too many staff that work for the City (4 people).
- 8.5% of comments had a suggestion for the survey or consultation (4 people).
- 6.4% of comments mentioned being happy with the changes to the budget document (3 people).
- 4.3% of comments noted that they would like to see general increases in the operating budget, so services are well supported (2 people).
- 4.3% of comments noted that the Public and Catholic School Boards should be amalgamated for efficiencies (2 people).
- 4.3% of comments requested additional service statistics to be added to the budget document (2 people).
- One respondent mentioned that they would like to see the Waterfront Trail developed.
- One respondent discussed parking hours and free parking in the parkades.

## Conclusion

The results of the Proposed 2025 Operating Budget survey identified that the response to the changes in the 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 respondents' opinion that some services should be asked to decrease spending. To the people who responded, transit, homelessness and police spending are the highlighted areas of the operating budget, as well as the overall cost of living.

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