



**Date:** Wednesday, October 23, 2024

**From:** Samantha Buchanan, Treasurer

**Subject:** 2025 Budget Survey Results

**Report** COR2024-39

This document and its attachments are public and available in an accessible format upon request.

## **Recommendation**

That Committee of the Whole receives the 2025 Budget Survey results for information.

## **Background**

On July 3, 2024 staff presented Council with staff report [COR2024-23 titled 2025 Proposed Budget Timeline and Guiding Principles](#), within that report was the requirement that throughout July staff would prepare a 2025 Budget Survey to be completed before the September 30<sup>th</sup> deadline. For the survey, the goal was to seek feedback on the Township's current services being provided, identify potential increases/decreases to the current services, identify any new services for the Township to provide, and the opinion on tax levy changes. The survey was available on the Township website (Engage GB) and in paper form at all Township facilities.

Due to the timing of when local media released their news release following the September 27, 2024, Special Council Budget meeting, staff had extended the budget survey deadline to October 9, 2024.

## **Analysis**

### **Who we heard from:**

The 2025 budget survey had 525 visitors on the EngageGB site with 161 participants providing comments to the survey (153 participated through Engage GB and eight through paper submissions). Majority (95.7%) of survey participants are full-time residents of the Township, with respondents identifying Shallow Lake, Brooke, Kemble, Kilsyth, Balmy Beach, and other areas as the option which best described where they live within the Township, with less representation from other communities throughout the Township. 45.6% of survey participants fell within the 35-55 age range, 45% in the 55+ age range, and the remaining 9.4% of survey participants fell within the 18-34 age range. Approximately 56.50% of survey participants have living in the Township for over



10 years with approximately 8.1% of participants having only lived in the Township for less than 2 years.

Staff note that this engagement relied on voluntary engagement; the results of the engagement are not statistically relevant and may not reflect the demographics of the Township or wider area. Various forms of engagement were used, surveys, in person opportunities, availability for phone discussions and submissions of written thoughts. However, each of these forms will differ on its accessibility for distinct groups. As such, while staff hope that the engagement is comprehensive and helpful information, it does not necessarily reflect all views and perspectives of the communities in the Township, nor does the strength of views share necessarily reflect with equity all voices in the community.

### **What we heard:**

- Sense of Community and Living Environment – participants consistently expressed a powerful sense of community pride and an appreciation for the peaceful and scenic rural environment. This theme was the most frequently mentioned positive aspect of living in Georgian Bluffs, highlighting the value people place on the local atmosphere and quality of life.
- Community Engagement and Communications Efforts – the Township’s efforts to engage with residents through surveys, consultations, and transparent communication were well-received. Respondents appreciated the opportunity to voice their opinions and the sense that their feedback was valued.
- Parks and Green Spaces – positive mentions of well-maintained parks, recreational facilities, and green spaces were common. Survey participants were pleased with the quality and availability of outdoor areas, particularly arenas and sports facilities, which contribute to the community’s recreational offerings.
- Garbage Collection Efficiency – many participants mentioned that garbage collection services were generally dependable and consistent in their areas. Although there were concerns about specific issues like frequency or bag tag policies, the overall performance of garbage pickup was viewed positively.
- Snow Removal and Winter Road Maintenance – while snow removal received mixed reviews overall, it was highlighted as a well-executed service in specific areas. Those who experienced good snow plowing service expressed satisfaction with the Township’s efforts to keep roads clear during the winter.
- Value for Taxes in Comparison to Neighbouring Areas – some respondents felt that they received reasonable value for their taxes, especially when compared to neighbouring municipalities like Owen Sound. This theme was less frequently



mentioned but still notable for those who appreciated the balance between tax rates and service levels.

When asked “How would you describe the overall value of services you receive for the tax dollar you pay?” 82.60% of respondents described it as fair or better, with comments themes as described below for their reasoning.

- Road and Bridge Maintenance – Frequently mentioned issues with poor road conditions, inadequate snow removal, and slow repairs.
- Garbage and Recycling Services – Common complaints about the cost of garbage tags, infrequent recycling pick-ups, and inconsistencies in service.
- High Tax Rates Relative to Services – Frustration about rising taxes without corresponding improvements in services or amenities.
- Water and Sewer Services – Concerns about expensive water services and the lack of municipal water or sewer infrastructure.
- Lack of Recreational Facilities and Community Engagement – Desire for more local recreational opportunities and community events.
- Pedestrian and Traffic Safety – Issues related to the absence of sidewalks, lighting, and traffic control measures.
- Mixed Feelings about Service Quality – A split between those generally satisfied with service levels and those who feel services are inadequate.
- Calls for Environmental and Sustainability Initiatives – Suggestions for improved waste management practices and eco-friendly initiatives.

Participants were asked their opinion on tax changes and the impact to services that they would prefer to see. 55.0% sited that they would prefer to maintain current taxes and existing services, with 12.5% sited they would rather decrease taxes and cut existing services. When asked comments on their selection respondents sited:

- Oppositions to tax increase – strong preference against raising taxes due to economic pressures and a perceived lack of value for current services.
- Support for enhancing services with conditions – willingness to pay more only if there are tangible improvements in essential services.
- Desire to maintain current tax levels while improving efficiency – calls to improve services without raising taxes by streamlining processes.



- Focus on specific services – requests for targeted improvements, particularly in road maintenance, waste management, and recreational facilities.
- Concerns about affordability for residents on fixed income – worries about the impact of tax increase on seniors and low-income households.
- Skepticism about value for money – doubts about whether tax hikes would lead to meaningful enhancements in services.
- Alternative revenue and sustainability strategies – suggestions for increasing revenue through creating solutions like development and user fees.

### **Current Service Levels**

Participants were asked if they felt if some services should be enhanced, maintained, or reduced, the listed services are not reflective of all the services that the Township provides. For all services, the majority of participants sited that they would like to maintain the current level of services that they are received, roads had 64 respondents who indicated that they wish to see the current level of service be enhanced.

Participants citing the below reasons as what influenced their selections:

- Improve existing services before adding new ones – strong emphasis on focusing on current services, like road and waste management, before considering new projects.
- Concerns about taxes and fiscal management – frustration about high taxes and calls for clearer communication on how funds are used.
- Enhanced waste management services – desire for better garbage collection and increased recycling frequency.
- Police and emergency services – issues with slow police response times and calls for improved local law enforcement.
- Infrastructure and road safety improvements – road safety concerns and the need for better maintenance.
- Communication and engagement with residents – requests for improved communication and regular updates from the Township.
- Focus on local heritage and community identity – interest in preserving and promoting the Township’s cultural heritage.
- Concerns about specific projects – opposition to perceived unnecessary projects like the dog park.



- Support for amalgamation – increase in merging with nearby communities to streamline services.
- Desire for environmental and sustainability initiatives – calls for a focus on green initiatives.

### **Additional Services**

Participants were asked if there were any additional services they would like to see the Township provide to residents, suggested services consisted of:

- Infrastructure improvements – calls for more sidewalks, bike lanes, and better road maintenance.
- Waste management enhancements – frequent mentions of adding compost collection, increasing recycling frequency, and improvement garbage services.
- Recreational facilities and community spaces – requests for dog parks, community centers, and better use of arenas for public events.
- Environmental and green initiatives – desire for expanded sewage systems and sustainable waste management options.
- Telecommunications and internet service improvements – need for better cell reception and high-speed internet in rural areas.
- Public safety and law enforcement – calls for better traffic control and by-law enforcement.
- Reduced tax increases and fiscal responsibility – preference for maintaining current tax rates but also improving existing services.
- Expanded public transportation – suggestions to introduce shuttle services or other forms of public transit.
- Natural gas and utility expansion – requests to extend natural gas lines and fiber optics to underserved areas.
- Community engagement and events – interest in more inclusive community events and gatherings.

### **State of Current Infrastructure**

Participants were asked how they would assess the current overall condition of Township bridges, roads, parks, and community centers. For bridges, parks and



community centers majority of responses assessed the current condition as good. For roads there was a comparable split between respondents who answered as fair and good. Comments received that influenced participants assessment rating were:

- Road maintenance and infrastructure – predominant concerns about road quality, potholes, and temporary fixes.
- Community facilities and recreation – request for better recreational facilities, community centers and parks.
- Spending and fiscal responsibility – desire for reduced spending and better management of funds.
- Community safety and traffic monitoring – need for better policing of traffic and road safety.
- Youth and adult engagement opportunities – lack of adult-focused activities and events.
- Communication and resident feedback – appreciation for engagement opportunities and the need for better communication.
- Environmental and waste management initiatives – request for composting services and better park maintenance.
- Recognition and positive feedback – thanks for the work done by the Township and acknowledgment of well-maintained facilities.
- Opposition to new initiatives – criticism of new projects in favour of focusing on essential services.

### **Overall Comments and Survey Feedback**

- Social issues and homelessness – recognition of homelessness as an issue and calls for more affordable housing.
- Infrastructure and safety concerns – emphasis on road safety, speed limit enforcements, and infrastructure improvements.
- Telecommunications and technology improvements – need for better cell service and adoption of modern technology.
- Recreational facilities and community spaces – mixed feels about the dog park and desire for more family-friendly spaces.



- Fiscal responsibility and transparency – calls to avoid tax increases, focus on efficient spending, and providing budget transparency.
- Calls for regular feedback and engagement – suggestions for more frequent community surveys and resident input.
- Amalgamation and local governance – interest in amalgamating with neighbouring communities for better services.
- Environmental and usage concerns – calls to maintaining public spaces responsibly and promote sustainability initiatives.

### **Next Steps**

The 2025 budget process is now underway with this report concluding the pre-budget community engagement. Members of the community will have further opportunities to share perspectives and views in person and online as the budget moves forward.

The base budget presented to Council on September 27, 2024, was not reflective of any comments received during the budget survey. Council at any time during the budget process may direct staff to investigate any comments/themes received during the engagement and bring back further information to Council for inclusion in the 2025 budget.

Council's next budget date is set for November 12, 2024, beginning at 9:00 am. Staff welcome community comments and have scheduled a 2025 Budget Open House on December 3, 2024, to provide an opportunity for members of the public to ask questions to staff.

### **Financial Impact**

There are no financial implications of receiving this report.

### **Strategic Priorities**

Improve Communication, Collaboration and Transparency.

### **Conclusion**

Staff would like to thank all survey participants who took the time to complete the 2025 Budget Survey. Staff ask that Council review these comments and provide feedback to staff in advance of or at the November 12, 2024, Special Council Meeting.

Respectfully Submitted: Samantha Buchanan, Treasurer



### Report Approval Details

Document Title:	2025 Budget Survey Results.docx
Attachments:	- Survey_Responses_Report.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Oct 16, 2024

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

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