



**Date:** Wednesday, November 15, 2023

**From:** Samantha Buchanan, Treasurer

**Subject:** 2024 Budget Survey Results

**Report** COR2023-049

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

## **Recommendation**

That report COR2023-049 and 2024 Budget Survey Results be received for information.

## **Background**

On July 19, 2023 staff presented Committee of the Whole with staff report [COR-2023-29 titled 2024 Proposed Budget Guideline and Schedule](#), with this report was a copy of the 2024 Budget Survey. Effective August 15, 2023, this survey was available online through Engage GB and in paper form at all Township facilities (i.e., administrative building, Shallow Lake Community Center, Kemble Arena, and Derby Community Center). All paper submissions received were entered into EngageGB and are reflected in the Project Detailed Report (Appendix A to this report) The budget survey was advertised as open through a media release, on the Township website, social media, and on the electronic signed.

On August 24, 2023, the Township hosted Engage GB: Connect and Collaborate, where there were five topics that we were seeking resident's voices and experiences. One of the five topics was the 2024 Budget. Although not directly included in the EngageGB project detailed report the comments from this day have been included in staff analysis below, staff found that many of the comments received on this day mirrored those that were provided through the budget survey.

## **Analysis**

The goal of the 2024 budget survey was to seek feedback on the Township's current services being provided, identify where respondents feel increase/decreases to the current services may be warranted, or identify any new services residents wished to see the Township provide.



## Who we heard from:

The budget survey had 179 visitors with 84 residents participated in the 2024 Budget Survey and there were an estimated 100 residents in attendance at the Engage GB: Connect and Collaborate event, staff did not track the number of residents who specifically attending the Budget session. Majority (93%) of survey participates are full-time residents of the Township, with respondents identifying the Shallow Lake, Kemble, Big Bay, and Springmount areas as the option which best described where they live within the Township. 41% of survey participates fell within the 35-55 age range and the 55+ age range, the remaining 18% of survey participates fell within the 18-34 age range. Approximately 63% of survey participates have living in the Township for over 10 years with approximately 8% of participates having only lived in the Township for less than 2 years.

Staff note that the 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. A number of types 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 different 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:

Comments below are reflective of both survey responses and the Engage GB: Connect and Collaborate event.

- **Infrastructure and Maintenance:** This theme encompasses concerns about road conditions, snow removal, infrastructure maintenance, and safety. It is a top priority for many.
- **Recreation and Community Services:** Respondents emphasized the significance of recreational facilities, parks, and community centers for residents of all age groups.
- **Economic Development:** Economic growth and attracting businesses are identified as crucial for the community's prosperity. This includes the need for incentives to encourage a variety of shops and businesses.
- **Environmental Concerns:** Respondents express the importance of addressing climate change, environmental sustainability, stormwater management, and water and sewer services.



- **Safety and Public Services:** Public safety services, such as fire and police, are essential for a safe and peaceful community.
- **Waste Management:** Improved waste management, including recycling, compost collection, and proper garbage disposal facilities, is a concern for many.
- **Community Services and Facilities:** Availability and quality of community services and facilities, including recreation programs, community centers, and indoor sports facilities, are of concern.
- **Public Engagement and Communication:** Respondents value more public engagement, consultation, and transparent communication regarding township decisions and actions.
- **Internet Access and Infrastructure:** There's a call for better high-speed internet access and more competition among ISPs to improve connectivity.
- **Collaboration with Owen Sound:** Better collaboration between the Township and the City of Owen Sound is suggested to ensure affordable and quality services, job creation, and population growth.
- **Streamlining Non-Resident Fees:** Respondents suggest eliminating non-resident fees and contributing directly to Owen Sound.
- **Staff Competency and Recruitment:** Concerns are raised about staff competency, staff shortages, and the need for qualified personnel through recruitment and retention.

In response to questions 5 of the survey, “How would you describe the overall value of services you receive for the tax dollar you pay?”, majority of comments were focused on the following themes.

- **Complaints About Service Quality:** Many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of services they receive. Specific issues included poor road maintenance, inadequate snow plowing, and garbage collection problems.
- **Infrastructure and Maintenance Concerns:** A recurring theme was concerns about road maintenance and infrastructure. People highlighted issues like potholes, wash boarding, and the overall condition of roads. They also mentioned the need for drainage and culvert work.



- **Wishes for Enhanced Services:** Several individuals hoped for improvements in services, such as the introduction of storm and sewage sewer systems. They also expressed a desire for more organized recreational activities and access to amenities.
- **Taxation and Cost of Living:** Some respondents appreciated lower taxes in their area but also acknowledged that this resulted in fewer services for residents, including organized recreational activities for various age groups.
- **Environmental Concerns:** There were references to environmental concerns, such as the impact of septic systems and the need for conservation efforts in the community.
- **Communication and Collaboration:** A few respondents mentioned the need for better communication, collaborative solutions, and more public involvement in decision-making processes.
- **Positive Feedback:** There were respondents who expressed contentment with the services they receive, particularly regarding recreational facilities, garbage and recycling pickup, and the availability of council and committee meetings online.
- **Suggested Service Improvements:** A few individuals suggested improvements, such as having a more accessible transportation system for vulnerable residents and stronger actions to address climate change issues.
- **Pricing and Water Charges:** Concerns were raised about high-water charges and the cost of garbage collection, including the purchase of bag tags.

The budget survey asked respondents how they felt any surplus should be spent, 58% of respondents felt that any surplus should be spent on sustainability and affordability of the Township finances (e.g., reducing debt, next year tax levy or put into reserves for future projects/endeavors), 25% of respondents felt that a one-time initiative to help keep the Township's infrastructure in a good state of repair was how any surplus should be spent. Historically the Township has placed these surplus funds in reserves to be spent on future projects (both of an operating and capital nature).

### **Top service areas:**

The budget survey respondents identified roadway snow removal and ice control, street maintenance and recreation and community centers at the top three service areas for the Township. Respondent's comments related to there rating of such included:



- **Infrastructure and Roads:**

- Many respondents expressed concerns about road conditions, snow removal, and road safety, emphasizing the need for improved winter maintenance and well-maintained roads.
- Infrastructure maintenance was a top priority for a safer and more accessible community.

- **Recreation and Community Services:**

- Respondents highlighted the significance of recreational facilities, parks, and community centers for residents of all age groups.
- There were calls for upgrading and maintaining existing facilities, promoting a variety of activities, and improving the accessibility of outdoor spaces.

- **Economic Development:**

- Economic development and attracting businesses were identified as crucial for the growth and prosperity of the community.
- Some respondents mentioned the need for incentives to encourage a greater variety of shops and businesses.

- **Environmental Concerns:**

- Climate change and environmental sustainability were raised as important issues, with calls for addressing stormwater management and the provision of water and sewer services.
- Some respondents stressed the importance of recycling, waste management, and preventing illegal dumping to preserve the natural beauty and ecosystems of Georgian Bluffs.

- **Safety and Public Services:**

- Respondents emphasized the importance of public safety services, such as fire and police, to ensure a safe and peaceful community.
- The need for better winter maintenance and affordable garbage services was also highlighted.



## Bottom service areas

When asked what the bottom three service areas for the Township to focus tax dollars on were, respondents identified public transit, subdivision expansion and planning, animal control and biodigester. The theme of comments provided when asked to explain their ratings were:

- **Public Transit:**
  - Many respondents consider public transit to be less feasible in a rural community and prioritize other services over it.
  - Some believe that public transit should be addressed at the county level to be more affordable and effective.
- **Biodigester:**
  - There is a consensus among respondents that the biodigester project is considered a waste of money and has not lived up to expectations.
- **Animal Control:**
  - Some respondents express the opinion that animal control is not a top priority for the municipality, and that pet owners should take responsibility for their animals.
- **Climate Change Initiatives:**
  - Climate change initiatives receive mixed feedback, with some expressing skepticism about the impact and cost-effectiveness of these efforts.
- **Police Services:**
  - A few respondents question the efficiency and effectiveness of police services.
- **Cemeteries:**
  - Cemeteries are generally viewed as straightforward to manage, and there are varying opinions on their significance.
- **Public Libraries:**
  - Public libraries are seen as important by some, while others believe that they are being replaced by internet resources.
- **Subdivision Expansion and Planning:**
  - Some respondents emphasize the importance of avoiding excessive subdivision expansion to preserve the natural beauty of the area.
- **Economic Development:**
  - A few respondents' express concerns about urban sprawl and increased development, emphasizing the need to maintain the area's natural resources.
- **General Fiscal Responsibility:**
  - A few respondents' express concerns about allocating tax dollars effectively and wisely.



## Satisfaction of Services Provided

Related to satisfaction around various services provided by the Township respondents provided the additional comments they wished to community to Council and staff:

- **Community Services and Facilities:** Respondents are concerned about the availability and quality of community services and facilities, including recreation programs, community centers, and indoor sports facilities.
- **Infrastructure and Road Maintenance:** Road maintenance and safety, including snow removal and road condition, are important concerns, as well as the need for sidewalks in various areas.
- **Waste Management:** Respondents are interested in improved waste management, including recycling, compost collection, and proper garbage disposal facilities.
- **Economic Growth and Development:** The desire for long-term growth, increased economic development, and attracting new residents to the area is expressed.
- **Public Engagement and Communication:** Respondents value more public engagement, consultation, and transparent communication regarding township decisions and actions.
- **Internet Access and Infrastructure:** There is a call for better high-speed internet access and more competition among ISPs to improve connectivity.
- **Environmental Initiatives:** Some respondents emphasize the importance of green initiatives, such as compost collection and public transportation, to reduce carbon emissions.
- **Safety and Pedestrian Concerns:** Concerns about safety, speed control, and pedestrian safety are raised, including the need for safer road conditions.
- **Staff Competency and Recruitment:** Respondents express concerns about staff competency, staff shortages, and the need for qualified personnel through recruitment and retention.
- **Community Unity and Events:** There's a desire for more events that bring the community together, as well as networking opportunities.

## Additional Comments/Suggested Township Services to Provide

The survey also asked for feedback on any additional comments or suggestions for additional services respondents wished to express, these included:



- **Collaboration with Owen Sound:** Respondents suggest better collaboration between the township and the city of Owen Sound to ensure affordable and quality services. They emphasize the need for teamwork in creating jobs and promoting population growth.
- **Eliminate Non-Resident Fees:** There's a call to eliminate non-resident fees and instead contribute directly to Owen Sound.
- **Improvement of Cedar Hill Park:** Suggestions are made to substantially improve Cedar Hill Park to create a more attractive swimming area and enhanced diving facilities.
- **Opposition to Tax Funding for Potawatomi Water Line:** Some respondents express opposition to tax funding being used for a water line project that benefits a small number of exclusive properties in the Potawatomi neighborhood.
- **Concerns About Township Staff:** Concerns are raised about the professionalism and rudeness of certain township staff members. The importance of pride in one's work and professionalism is emphasized.
- **Gratitude and Thanks:** Several respondents express gratitude for the opportunity to provide their thoughts and ideas and thank the township for considering taxpayer input.
- **Oxenden Water Charges:** Respondents highlight the need to revisit water charges in Oxenden.
- **Parks and Boat Launches Maintenance:** Some respondents suggest maintaining parks and boat launches and improving the boat ramp at Cedar Hill to accommodate larger boats.
- **Natural Area Assessment:** A call is made to assess natural areas within the township's boundaries as nature-based assets.
- **Road Maintenance and Recreation Facilities:** Respondents emphasize the importance of maintaining roads, addressing minor road issues promptly, and keeping up with recreation facilities.

## In Summary

Overall, there were many comments from respondents who value the opportunity to provide their comments. Many respondents put a high importance on ensuring we have sufficient funding set aside for our roads, bridges, and facilities centres. With a tax dollar focus on roadway snow removal and ice control, street maintenance, and recreational and community centres; and on the other side participants expressed an opposition to





tax dollars being spent on public transit (some participants expressed this may be better suited to be undertaken at the County level opposed to the lower tier), subdivision expansion and planning, animal control and the biodigester.

## **Next Steps**

As noted above, the 2024 Budget Process is now underway with this report concluding the pre-budget community engagement. Members of the community will have further opportunity to share perspectives and views in person and online as the budget moves forward, sharing comments on proposals being advanced.

The Base Budget, also presented this evening, does not include any options for service enhancements, new projects or new bodies of work; it simply reflects the status quo.

Council are being provided the Base Budget (Report COR2023-048) and the Community Engagement Feedback (COR20203-049) to provide background information to support and aid in budget deliberations, and in providing further direction to staff in shaping the 2024 budget. As such, no specific direction stems from this report as it is provided as informational to inform the upcoming budget discussion.

On December 4<sup>th</sup>, members of the staff team will join Council to review potential projects and budget priorities for 2024 and beyond. Staff will be presenting, at a high level, a number of potential projects based on the existing strategic plan, operational opportunities and challenges, master plans and other plans as approved by Council and directions given by Council in respect to budget pressures in 2024.

Council will have opportunity to review these, add to these, amend these, and prioritise them based on Council and community priorities, informed by this engagement work and the base budget. Council will also have opportunity to further add projects for consideration and make suggestions on where they feel community and Council priorities are not being addressed.

Based on the discussions on December 4<sup>th</sup>, staff will prepare a 2024 Proposed Budget.

## **Financial Impact**

There are no financial implications of this receiving this report.

## **Strategic Priorities**

Improve Communication, Collaboration and Transparency.



## **Conclusion**

Staff would like to thank all residents who took the time to attend the Engage GB: Connect and Collaborate event and completed the 2024 Budget Survey. Staff ask that Council review these comments and provide feedback to staff at the December 4, 2023, Special Council Meeting – Budget Strategic Session.

Respectfully Submitted: Samantha Buchanan, Treasurer



## Report Approval Details

Document Title:	COR2023-049 2024 Budget Survey Results.docx
Attachments:	- 1_Project_Detailed_Report_2024_Budget_07_July_2023_To_31_October_2023.pdf - Draft Engagement Results Template - 2024 Budget.pptx
Final Approval Date:	Nov 9, 2023

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

Niall Lobley, Director of Community Services