



2022 Budget Consultation Survey Results

December 1, 2021

2022 Budget Consultation Survey Results

Introduction

Each year, the City is required under the Community Charter to hold public consultation on the upcoming budget and 5-year financial plan. In previous years, we have generally held public meetings and encouraged letter submissions. Last year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we held an online survey and provided a budget infographic for review. Some respondents commented that more information was needed; some requested a full breakdown of the budget. This year, we provided a thorough budget consultation document, which was given to Council for review prior to its public release. A simple survey was developed that asked respondents about each section of the budget consultation document.

The survey was available from November 8 to 23, 2021, and could be accessed online at the Engage Terrace website, which is engage.terrace.ca. Print copies were also available at City Hall, the Terrace Public Library, and the Happy Gang Centre.

The City advertised the survey on the main terrace.ca website as well as the Engage Terrace website, on our Facebook and Twitter pages, through ads on Bounce and Pure Country radio stations, and in an ad in the Terrace Standard.

Responses and Website Traffic

The survey received 34 responses, including 33 online and 1 in print.

The survey page on Engage Terrace received 166 total visits:

- 73 – direct traffic
- 66 – social media
- 9 – The Talk of Terrace newsletter
- 2 – search engine
- 16 – referrals

Of these, 33 filled out a survey.

Of the 166 total visitors, 46 of these registered on Engage Terrace, meaning that some people registered but then did not fill out the survey. These new registrants will still receive Engage Terrace updates through the monthly newsletter, as long as they consented to receive emails, so we are still reaching a larger number of residents.

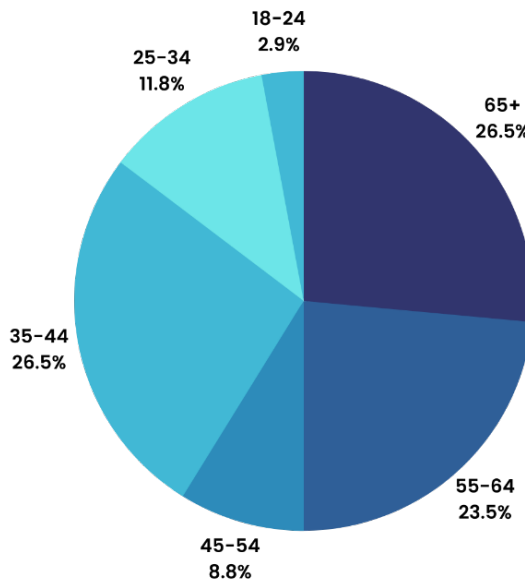
Demographics

People are asked for their year of birth when they sign up on the Engage Terrace website, since this will allow us to not have to ask this question again for any repeat users of Engage Terrace. This was a required question for all participants online, and the paper copy respondent also provided a response.

The largest group was the 65+ age range which made up 26% of respondents; exactly half of all respondents are 55+. A takeaway here is that older populations are not shying away from technology.

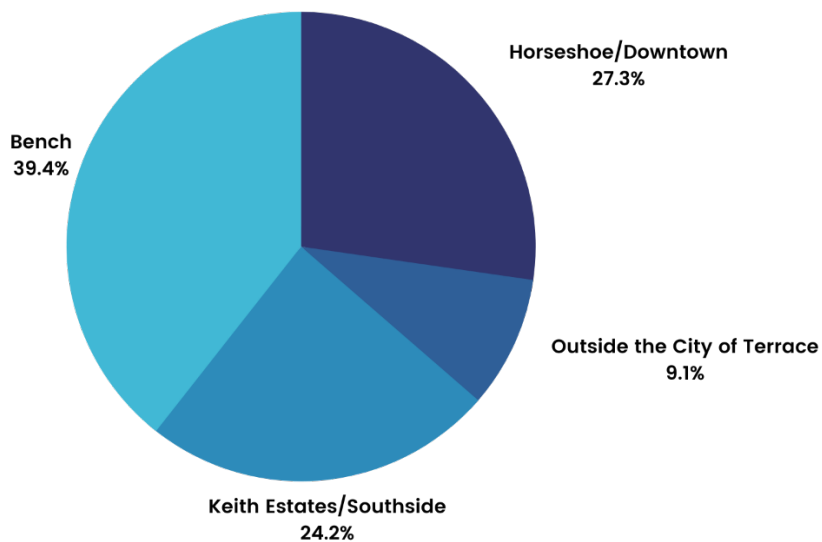
Age of Respondents

Based on year of birth



The neighbourhoods of respondents were fairly evenly distributed.

Where Respondents Live



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Budget Document Questions

General Operating Fund – Common Themes

- There were 11 comments about attracting industry and increasing the taxes received from industrial tax classes.
- This section also included a few miscellaneous comments similar to others covered in future sections.

Example Responses

“It would be great to see more revenue coming from light and major industrial activities. Terrace used to have a thriving industrial base which assisted in city expenditures and growth opportunities. What can we do to attract more industry to the city?”

“Having more revenue from light industrial sources like the inland port project would help diversify our tax revenue sources.”

“Sad to see little industry here being that we seem to be the home base of most of the projects equipment rentals/sales.”

“Given the volatility of the housing market in Terrace in the past, I would be more comfortable if our revenue dependence on property tax would be lower than ~75%.”

Proposed Budget Changes – Common Themes

- 7 responses said they were ok with the changes; they seemed reasonable.
- 9 people commented on the RCMP costs and had suggestions on reallocating these funds, which is outside of City control.
- 3 commented on staff training and conferences, suggesting these numbers are too high.

Example Responses

“The bigger issue is, in my mind, the fact that everything seems to be costing more. Our family's grocery budget has increased dramatically in recent years, as has the cost of fuel and other essentials. I worry that upcoming tax increases, combined with other cost increases, will cause financial strains/hardships as my salary has not increased in the same way.”

“There are many items under the operating budget under the RCMP. Considering Terrace must contribute 70% of the salary of each RCMP officer, it adds an additional cost that may not necessarily be needed. Before hiring another officer, it would be useful to make an assessment of the actual community needs of Terrace. There are long standing drug and overdose issues in Terrace that stem from the industrial complex of LNG. This has yet to be addressed and hiring another RCMP officer further perpetuates a broken system of healing individuals affected by drugs. The assessment would likely be less costly than another RCMP officer and would provide more direction to Terrace's Council members for enabling community programs that actually work rather than ineffectively perpetuating a system that does not work. Terrace has been working to increase the number of RCMP officers in the community but crime rates have also risen substantially. It is hard to argue these specific cost lines when that strategy is potentially, no longer viable.”

“Wouldn't RCMP dollars be better spent on social services, and other issue solving things that would reduce workload (addiction treatment etc) on RCMP rather than just increasing their work force. Let's try to solve the underlying problems rather than just increasing punishment forces.”

“Staffing related items seems quite high, the training and certification could be added to that category, and free up that extra amount. Travel and training really shouldn't be happening.”

“In general the city is under capitalized and likely under staffed. Looks to me like funds should be directed at an increase in staff to support more growth opportunities.”

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Proposed Expenditures: Fire Department – Common Themes

- 11 indicated they were happy with these costs; 2 indicated costs were too low.
- Those in opposition were concerned/unclear about what kinds of calls the Fire Department responds to.

Example Responses

“Fire protection costs don’t seem to make economic sense; how many fires are there? I feel like 99% of the time the firefighters are functioning as paramedics for an understaffed/ underfunded Provincial service. Maybe there should be push-back for BC Ambulance to provide a better service so municipalities don’t have to cover these costs.”

“Our Fire Department does a wonderful job and I have never heard any complaints about the services they provide. I don't begrudge this budget allocation in the slightest.”

“Spending here appears to be appropriate if not a little low.”

“I agree with this expenditure. I hope that some of these line items are earmarked for forest fire management and preparedness as well.”

Proposed Expenditures: RCMP – Common Themes

- Many people wanted less spent on RCMP or a reallocation of funds; however, this is mostly out of City control.
- Many suggestions for reallocating funding to improve mental health services and similar.

Example Responses

“The police in Terrace are probably overloaded with the staffing level they have. The crime problems in the area are getting worse.”

“The RCMP costs are far too high for the service we have been receiving. Restrict their operations to smaller geographic policing area for better service allocation.”

“If Terrace is actually claiming a local emergency for homelessness, then there needs to be a dedicated budget item for these services. This can't be through the RCMP because it does not work.”

“I would like to see our RCMP expenditures be decreased substantial (> \$1 million) and diverted to more community support programs instead of policing. RCMP is not well equipped to respond to mental health crisis calls and to assist community members.”

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Proposed Expenditures: Finance Department – Common Themes

- Most people who commented felt this budget is fine as-is; those who opposed said to look for optimizations to reduce redundancies.

Example Responses

“I’m sure operating expenditures are monitored to ensure proficiency.”

“We need to reduce redundancies and find better processes to get more by doing less unnecessary functions. Ask your employees where they would save or reduce redundancies.”

“The only thing that really jumped out at me was the insurance. It seems low for the amount of property and equipment the city has... but that was just my initial thought. Also, glad to see that there is budget to transfer to Reserve.”

Proposed Expenditures: Administration Department – Common Themes

- Most people who commented felt this budget is fine as-is; those who opposed said to look for optimizations to reduce redundancies.

Example Responses

“The proposed operating expenditures for the administration department as outlined on page 11 appear to be reasonable and justified.”

“Economic Development perhaps > \$100,000”

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Proposed Expenditures: Public Works Department – Common Themes

- Many commenters agreed this budget looked good.
- 3 commenters requested improvements to snow removal.
- Several miscellaneous suggestions were also included.

Example Responses

“I support expenditures - this is, to me, the main function of a city council; to support, enhance, and maintain city infrastructure. Again, I'm appalled that RCMP have a higher budget than public works. There is an opportunity for us to be real community leaders here. I support more dollars going to public works.”

“An expected increase of operating funds is understandable. Our road/water/sewer infrastructure is only getting older.”

“Engineering costs seem low provided the cost benefit to being able to design our own plans, designs.”

“Sidewalks and bike lanes should be plowed faster.”

“This seems to be the area where most complaints (online) are directed - road maintenance/improvements etc. I'm thankful for the work done by the Public Works department but worry that as infrastructure ages this area of the budget will become larger and larger, requiring either tax hikes or cuts in spending.”

“I'd like to see ongoing and timely electrification of the city fleet of vehicles.”

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Proposed Expenditures: Leisure Services Department – Common Themes

- Several comments on new Social Development Program, expressing hope for the success of the program
- Some comments on high costs of building and running Sportsplex and TDAC.

Example Responses

“Maybe we should invest in recreation facilities with less operational costs like squash courts, basketball courts, climbing gyms, and trails. Why do we need to heat/cool large quantities of water year-round for people to recreate?”

“I would be happy with decreasing the Arena budget item and have e.g., less ice time available.”

“I’m pleased to see money being spent on the Social Development Program.”

“The development of a Social Development Program supported by a Social Development Coordinator is a great start in addressing the socioeconomic challenges rising rapidly in Terrace. Furthermore to my response to a few questions back regarding the concerns of the downtown core, I hope this position helps to address and work towards correcting these issues and concerns.”

“Very, very happy to see the hiring of Linda in the role of Social Development Program Coordinator and thankful that the funding grant was received. Once again, hard to think of what could/should be cut in this area.”

“Small fee increase might be in order.”

“Voters have never had a choice in these ie skateboard park, second sheet of ice.”

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Proposed Expenditures: Development Services Department – Common Themes

- 6 approved of this budget
- 6 indicate too much money is spent here, with some expressing their lack of trust in this department and question its credibility (believe decisions are on the whim of staff)

Example Responses

“I think it's money well spent.”

“Too much spent on development and planning”

“This group of expenditures has NO credibility with most taxpayers, it seems more likely that the whims of administration and the efforts of lobbyists direct future development.”

“It may be necessary to increase fees slightly perhaps by the same amount as the property tax increase.”

“Animal services should be increased to get rid of the feral cats and to control dogs.”

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Proposed Sewer Operating Funds – Common Themes

- Most of those who responded indicated their approval.

Example Responses

“Essential spending. I [think] the money is well allocated.”

“For both these funds I can understand the need, which I would imagine is similar to the fact that there needs to be a tax increase. However, as I'm sure is recognized, all the increases do add up. With the average tax increase plus the sewer/water increases we're looking at over \$100 per year. Eventually these increases, when combined with other increased expenses, become hard for families to deal with.”

“Should be more. Terrace should have full tertiary and be protected from 500 year flood.”

“5 percent is too much”

Proposed Water Operating Funds – Common Themes

- Most of those who responded indicated their approval.
- A few suggestions to consider water metering
- A few comments on water quality (fluoride; hard water)

Example Responses

“money appears to be well allocated.”

“Implementation of metering is the other option, but a higher installation/ monitoring cost would be years in recovery.”

“People are very cavalier with water usage in Terrace and district. I think it's time to recover the costs of providing clean water”

“Why is the water in Terrace so hard to the point where you have to descale a kettle at least once a week? Why is Terrace transferring money to a reserve when its water quality could really use improvement?”

“Take the [fluoride] out of the water.”

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Proposed Capital Plan – Common Themes

- Several comments on grants, including some in favour and some opposed.
- Concerns over costs of capital projects, despite grant funding for some.

Example Responses

“I am impressed with the amount of cost sharing and grants obtained by the City of Terrace as outlined on page 14 and 15”

“Thank you for pursuing the grant opportunities. As I've mentioned, these expenses make sense but figuring out how to pay for these upgrades etc. is challenging.”

“Is the grant system really working? We are still needing do much. The province and feds rob the North of so much”

“We are not in a position to [fund] the Grand Truck Pathway Extension or complete the bike shelters. This again, is Development Services creating this “utopia” which has gotten us into this hole in the first place. If these two projects were postponed that would be a cost savings of \$655,870.”

“Pohle Ave needs to be paved due to the heavy traffic during the workweek. Chronic dust and water pooling for over a decade now.”

“Yay round-about! Better work on getting grants for the slope stability Leading up to it.”

Reserves and Debt – Common Themes

- Several expressed their approval of grants and reserves in place.
- Some suggested items we should add/remove a reserve for.
- Some expressed concerns over debt for Leisure Services facilities.

Example Responses

“I appreciate the information. It makes the financial issues for the City of Terrace more clear.”

“We shouldn't have a reserve for parking space. Terrace already has a massive surplus of parking throughout the downtown, which is both an eye sore, and a waste of money and space.”

“I would like the to add funding to the reserves for ‘Affordable Housing’ and at least double our investment into that budget item.”

“Sportsplex continues to eat funds”

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Property Taxes – Common Themes

- An overwhelming majority found the information on property taxes helpful for understanding their property tax bills, how Terrace compares to other municipalities, and similar.
- A few respondents also used this space to provide final comments on the survey, echoing many sentiments previously discussed in other sections.

Example Responses

“Yes, it is well presented and explained. However, it does not diminish my frustration with the provincial government for using municipalities as tax collectors for matters over which council has nothing to say and no discretion at all.”

“I did find this useful and informative in understanding my property tax bill. The comparisons to surrounding communities and communities of similar size is also nice to see and know.”

“Yes it shows the inequity due to Terraces location. Major industrial sites don’t reside here but tap our resources and employ our citizens. Not fair or sustainable.”

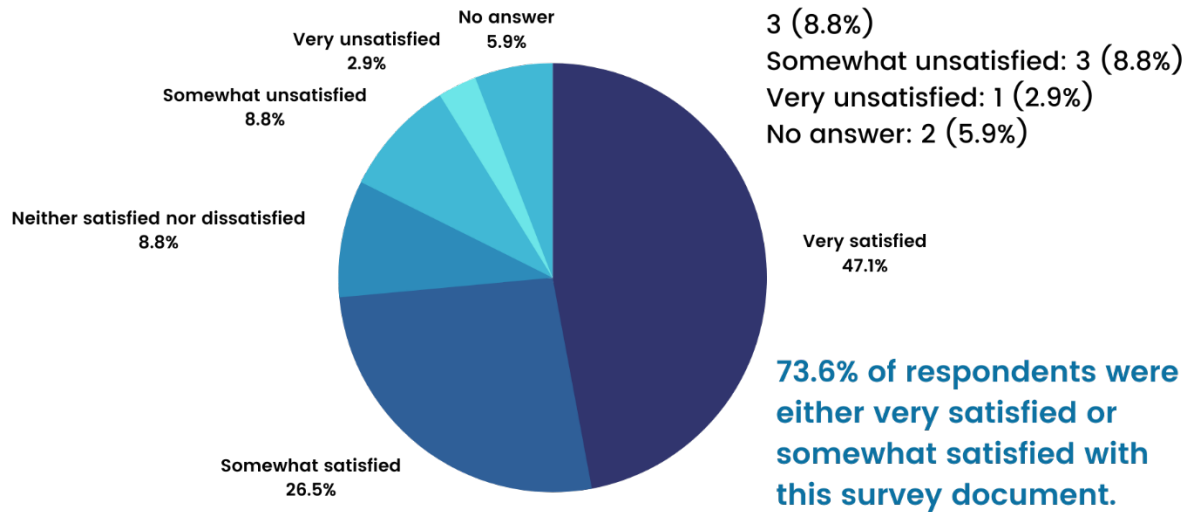
“In general, sharing underlying data for all these items in an easy to use/access manner would be very much appreciated.”

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Overall Survey Satisfaction

73% of respondents were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the 2022 Budget Consultation document.

Satisfaction with the Survey



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How can we improve this document and survey for next year?

- 5 respondents expressed their approval of the format and found the document and survey valuable.
- 4 respondents expressed that there was too much information and made suggestions to reduce that next time.
- 5 had suggestions for areas where more information could be provided to answer specific questions.
- 3 expressed concerns over readability, especially on a small screen like a smartphone.

Example Responses

“I feel that the format is comprehensive and I appreciate being able to give feedback and review in detail the property taxes we pay and where the money goes.”

“This is a great survey, thanks very much for providing the survey in this manner.”

“It serves no useful service other to justify City spending. It also allows the City Council to claim they consulted with city tax payers. Spend the time and money on something useful or better yet don't spend it at all.”

“Provide two documents. One is very detailed for those that want to wade through it and have the financial knowledge to do so. Another should provide more concise information that is specific and easy to follow.”

“Too much information can often lead to confusion.”

“Ask more specific questions instead of them being generalized and open ended.”

“Easier to read (visuals) on mobile screens”

“Maybe adding full size and clickable images for the pages of the document could be helpful for people that don't have easy access to a pdf reader.”

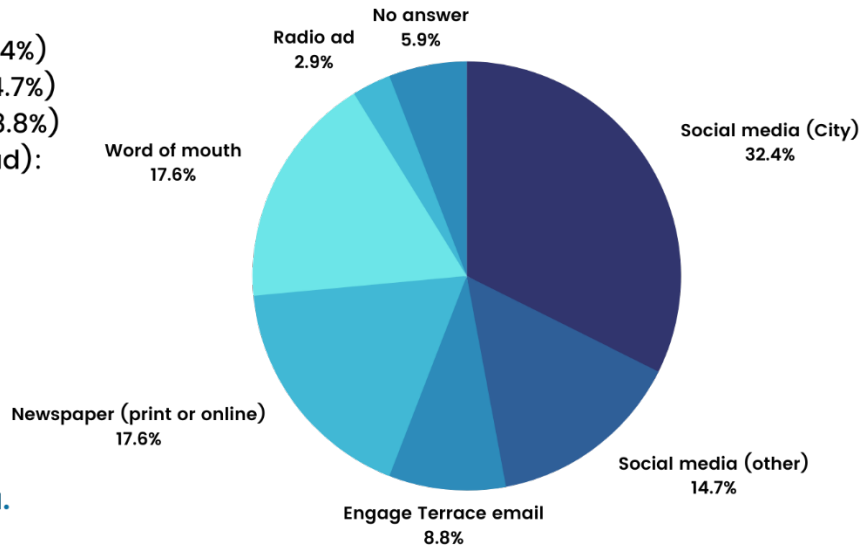
How Did You Hear About This Budget Consultation?

Almost half of respondents heard about the survey through social media; about 20% found out through the newspaper, and another 20% found out through word of mouth.

How did you hear about this budget consultation?

Social media (City): 11 (32.4%)
Social media (other): 5 (14.7%)
Engage Terrace email: 3 (8.8%)
Newspaper (print, online, ad): 6 (17.6%)
Word of mouth: 6 (17.6%)
Radio ad: 1 (2.9%)
TV: none
No answer: 2 (5.9%)

47% of respondents heard about the survey on social media.



Conclusions

The 2022 Budget Consultation Survey received a wide variety of responses from the 34 community members who filled it out. Most indicated that the consultation document provided a good overview of the plans as well as a thoughtful explanation of different components of the budget. Council may consider the 2022 Budget Consultation Survey results before Council approves the final 2022 budget and 5-year financial plan.

Next Steps

Throughout the survey, many respondents asked additional questions that had not been addressed within the document. Staff would like to address some of these questions before the final budget meetings in January in a blog on Engage Terrace and on social media; staff seek Council's suggestions on any areas they would like to be cleared up via these channels.

Examples of questions could include the following:

- Once funds are allocated, can they be moved to be spent on another purpose?
- How does the water volume relate to the operating costs? Have water meters for SFR been considered?
- What is the difference between Finance and Administration costs? Which positions are covered?
- What emergency co-operation/mutual support agreement do we have with the Regional District? Does it have an impact on the budget?

In addition, all feedback on the budget document and survey will be collected, reviewed, and taken into consideration for next year's budget process.