

What We Heard Report 2023–2026 City Budget Public Engagement

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SHARE YOUR VOICE
SHAPE OUR CITY

Edmonton

Acknowledgments

The City of Edmonton acknowledges the traditional land on which we reside is in Treaty Six Territory. We would like to thank the diverse Indigenous Peoples whose ancestors' footsteps have marked this territory for centuries, such as nêhiyaw (Cree), Dené, Anishinaabe (Saulteaux), Nakota Isga (Nakota Sioux) and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) peoples. We also acknowledge this as the Métis' homeland and the home of one of the largest communities of Inuit south of the 60th parallel. It is a welcoming place for all peoples who come from around the world to share Edmonton as a home. Together we call upon all of our collective, honoured traditions and spirits to work in building a great city for today and future generations.

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the engagement activities. Your contributions are greatly appreciated and we hope you see your ideas, comments and input reflected in these pages.

Abiding by the Code of Ethics of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), the project team has aimed to reflect themes and summarize participant input from the community engagement activities in a manner that captures the essence of what was shared. Any errors or omissions made in this summary report are based solely on our interpretation and analysis of that input.

Note: This report includes participant quotes that have been pulled from Engaged Edmonton. Due to the nature of the virtual workshops, pop-ups, interviews and use of note-takers, there are limited direct quotes from our live conversations.

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Executive Summary

The City Budget Team invited Edmontonians of diverse backgrounds and circumstances to provide input into what the City should consider as we build a new four-year budget to take Edmonton from the start of 2023 to the end of 2026.

Throughout June and July 2022, participants shared their ideas with us about how we can make choices to create the city we want now and into the future in a variety of ways. We heard a wide range of ideas, suggestions and concerns about some of the tough choices and trade-offs in front of City Council as they make budgeting decisions for the 2023–26 budget cycle.

This What We Heard Report summarizes our approach to engagement, including how we listened, who we heard from and what we learned. What we heard from participants will be used to help **ADVISE** the budget creation process for 2023–26 and share with City Council what is important to participants as they work to adapt and finalize the budget in fall 2022.

To represent the diversity of Edmontonians, the engagement approach allowed for a wide range of budget conversations in many locations, some a light touch and others a deep dive into content, while all covering many topics and important issues that influence municipal budgeting decisions. A variety of engagement tactics were used to ensure as many voices as possible were heard. For the general public, these included Engaged Edmonton and pop-up engagement stations located across the city.

For community organizations and partners, we also hosted participatory online Make It Count Workshops and small group interviews.

The Project team applied a Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) lens to the public engagement process to help us better understand diverse perspectives, experiences and needs related to the 2023–26 City Budget project.

Through Engaged Edmonton and in-depth conversations, we asked Edmontonians to share their priorities for balancing the Operating and Capital Budgets. These discussions were focused on how different 'levers' could be applied to maintain existing service levels and balance the budget.

We received a lot of input, suggestions and ideas from participants. Summarized below are some of the key learnings and conclusions made by the City Budget Team in response to this engagement:

New voices = different perspectives – We designed this engagement initiative to ensure we heard from and spoke with those members of our city who are traditionally underrepresented or missed from engagement activities. Through community pop-ups, street surveys and in-depth conversations with community-based organizations, we were able to have conversations with many people we don't usually hear from and share information about budgets along with City services, programs and projects.

Social support is top of mind – Overwhelmingly, we heard that Edmonton is a city that cares about each other. Participants shared that while decreasing funding to a specific service or program may not impact them personally, they recognized how these changes might impact others. Edmontonians want to see a city that takes care of all its people by providing services that improve quality of life and support those who are most vulnerable.

Innovation matters – Edmonton-based organizations, community groups and partners are eager to see creativity and innovation in both programs and services. Those who participated noted they would like the City to apply an innovation lens to issues of budgetary constraints, looking for ways to improve efficiency, change how business is done and innovate before reducing the services that Edmontonians rely on.

Evidence-based decision making is wanted – We heard that participants are looking to the City to make tough, evidence-based decisions. Participants shared that they want the City to use data to make hard choices and are interested in understanding how the City makes the choices they do.

Many opinions exist that will need to be balanced – We also heard that participants care deeply about the services, programs and policies that directly impact their lives and that there is a wide diversity of programs and services that people use, rely on and care about. While it will not be possible to make choices for the 2023–26 Budget that everyone in Edmonton agrees with, some overarching areas of consensus exist. These include maintaining and improving services that impact our quality of life and make Edmonton a good place to live, considering those who have different needs and supporting those who are most vulnerable in our communities.



Public Engagement Overview

Project Background

The City of Edmonton is building a new four-year budget to take Edmonton from the start of 2023 to the end of 2026. The budget is the plan for how tax dollars and other funding will be allocated to provide the services Edmontonians count on, as well as to build and maintain roads, bridges, attractions, recreation centres and other important City facilities.

The City wants to build a budget that meets the needs of Edmontonians while balancing what's actually possible given current economic realities and pandemic recovery. This budget will have to balance providing excellent services to Edmontonians while delivering the transformational projects that will help us to achieve our vision for the kind of City we want to be in the future, all while keeping taxes manageable and supporting our most vulnerable populations.

Leading into City Council's consideration of the budget in fall 2022, the City Budget Team invited Edmontonians to share ideas and suggestions about how we can make choices to create the city we want now and into the future. The results of this engagement will be used to inform Administration's recommendations and Council's decision-making.

The budget is the City's plan for where it will get money (revenues) and how it will spend it (expenditures). There are limits to what cities can afford to provide and setting a budget is about making choices.



Public Engagement Approach

How and Who We Engaged

Our Commitment to Participants

Engagement on the 2023–26 City Budget was designed and delivered within the context of the City of Edmonton's [Public Engagement Framework](#). On this project, the City of Edmonton's commitment to participants is at the **ADVISE** level in our [public engagement framework](#), which means that we will listen, acknowledge and report concerns and aspirations about the 2023–26 Budget. We will explain to the decision-maker (City Council) how public input contributed to the recommendations put forward by City Administration.



Our Public Engagement Spectrum

Engagement Audiences

Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+)

The project team applied a Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) lens to the public engagement process for the 2023–2026 City Budget project. We recognize that by using GBA+ we better understand diverse perspectives, experiences and needs to create services that strive to serve everyone.

We contacted community-based organizations that support Edmontonians experiencing unique barriers and challenges. We wanted to hear from these organizations that often connect and support underrepresented voices to learn more about how budget considerations might impact them.

Using a GBA+ lens, groups identified for targeted outreach included:

- 2SLGBTQ+ community members
- Newcomers
- Non-english speaking Edmontonians
- Youth
- Seniors
- Racialized community members
- Women
- People with disabilities
- Edmontonians experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- People experiencing mental health and addiction challenges
- Other groups who may experience barriers to engaging online

Targeted outreach and engagement with these groups included a combination of virtual, phone and in-person events dependent on the needs of the audiences.

General Public

We took a digital first approach to engagement with the general public. Participation on Engaged Edmonton was the highest on the site to date, indicating that this approach made it easy for many Edmontonians to share their feedback. The online engagement opportunities were also shared with the representatives of the diverse groups that the City Budget Team identified using a GBA+ lens (previous).

Organizations and Community Groups

Stakeholder engagement was conducted virtually and included groups representing community-based organizations (e.g., non-profits, community leagues), the business community and the development/commercial property community. We also hosted workshops and small group conversations that provided an opportunity for people with specific knowledge and insight to provide input into the budget.

Engagement Activities

Online engagement

Using a digital-first approach, engagement with the general public was conducted online using Engaged Edmonton. Opportunities included a Make It Count Survey, Idea Board and Balance the Budget tool.

The Balance the Budget tool was an interactive budget simulation tool that enabled visitors to make trade-offs with a real City budget by increasing or decreasing spending, or maintaining and holding, all depending on their individual priorities.

Community Pop-Ups

Members of the City Budget Team met informally with representatives of Edmonton's diverse cultural communities in spring 2022 to learn ways to best engage with Edmontonians who do not regularly participate in engagement processes or are underrepresented in decision-making.

We hosted pop-ups at locations around the city to meet Edmontonians where they already were. This included events at major commercial and social hubs including the following locations:

- PrideFest (June 25, 2022)
- Hawrelak Park (June 29, 2022)
- Stanley Milner Library (July 6, 2022)
- Clareview LRT Station (July 7, 2022)
- Southgate LRT Station (July 7, 2022)
- Jackie Parker Park (July 14, 2022)
- Whyte Avenue (July 14, 2022)

We spoke to around 790 people at these small engagement discussion stations designed to provide information and education while also gathering various perspectives, ideas and suggestions from community members. Depending on the location, mechanisms to gather input and share information included:

- **Build Your Budget Board** – This game was a simplified way to have participants show the City Budget Team where and how to allocate spending. Participants placed blocks on the board according to their priorities.

- **Streeter Surveys** – We walked around select locations to connect with individuals who wanted to take part in a short conversation, where we asked key discussion questions aligned with the Engaged Edmonton Make It Count Survey.
- **Budget Wagon** – We handed out freezies and other treats from our "budget wagon," using the treats to build interest in sharing ideas for the City and Council to consider as they make budgeting decisions.
- **Information Materials** – We shared a variety of communication materials designed to educate about the City budgeting process and direct recipients to the Engaged Edmonton site to provide detailed feedback.

Make It Count Workshops

The City Budget Team also hosted three online Make It Count Workshops with participants representing organizations, community groups and partners around Edmonton on the following dates:

- Tuesday June 28, 2022 (1:30–3:00 p.m.)
- Wednesday July 6, 2022 (10:00–11:30 a.m.)
- Wednesday July 13, 2022 (7:00–8:30 p.m.)

The workshops were designed to be interactive, highly participatory online events, where participants came together to share past and current experiences, issues or concerns related to key discussion questions aligned with Engaged Edmonton. 131 organizations were invited to participate, with email reminders on three separate occasions. Representatives from over 30 groups (see Appendix B) registered to attend, including members of the business community, non-profit sector, and the arts and culture community.

Small Group Interviews

The City Budget Team also hosted online and phone meetings with organizations, community groups and partners representing those who are typically underrepresented in engagement processes to share information about the 2023–26 City Budget engagement and gather more in-depth knowledge on key discussion questions. These online and phone meetings included 15 conversations (see Appendix B) with diverse community organizations including arts and culture groups, non-profits, advocacy organizations and members of the business community.

Participation Rates

Engagement Tactics Supporting GBA+ Approach and Participation Rates

Activity	Timing	Participation
Make It Count Online Workshops	June 28, 2022 July 6, 2022 July 3, 2022	29 attendees of 55 registrations (representing ~30 organizations)
Small Group Interviews	June 17 - July 22, 2022	45 people (representing 13 organizations)
Community Pop-Ups	June 25 - July 14, 2022	~790 people
Streeter Surveys	July 6 - 7, 2022	35 people

Engaged Edmonton Tools and Participation Rates

Activity	Timing	Participation
Balance the Budget	June 23 - July 17, 2022	3,266 submissions (from 43,416 visitors)
Idea Submissions		3,988 (from 586 visitors)
Idea up Votes		3,596 votes
Idea Comments		156 comments
Tough Choices Survey		2,020 respondents

Public Engagement Results

What We Asked and Heard

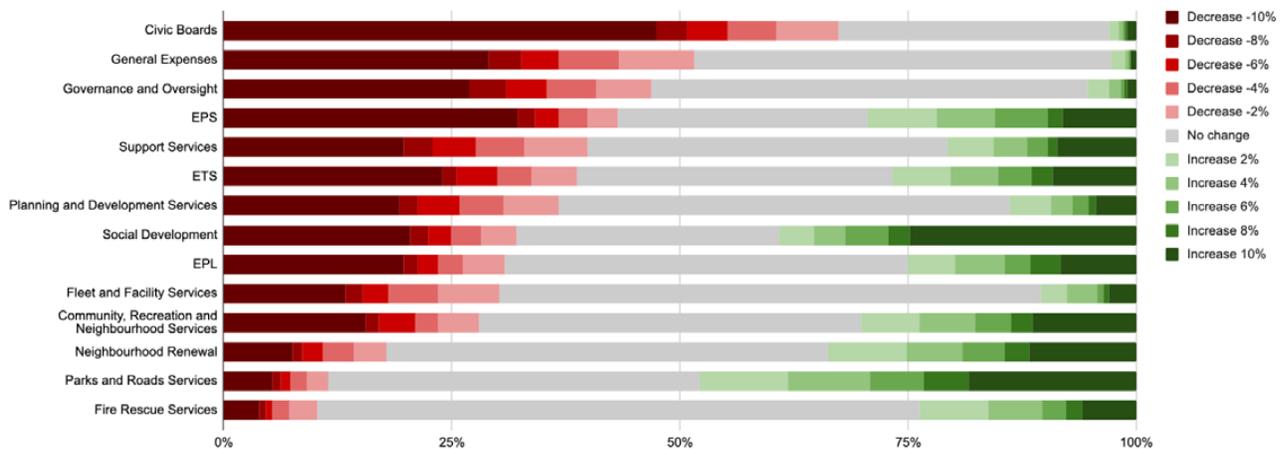
About Options and Trade-offs

As the City prepares for the next budget cycle we asked Edmontonians a number of questions to understand how community members, organizations and businesses would prioritize spending for both City services (operating budget) and construction and renewal projects (capital budget). We provided participants with a series of options to help balance the budget and asked them to share their level of comfort with that choice and detail around how that choice would impact them.

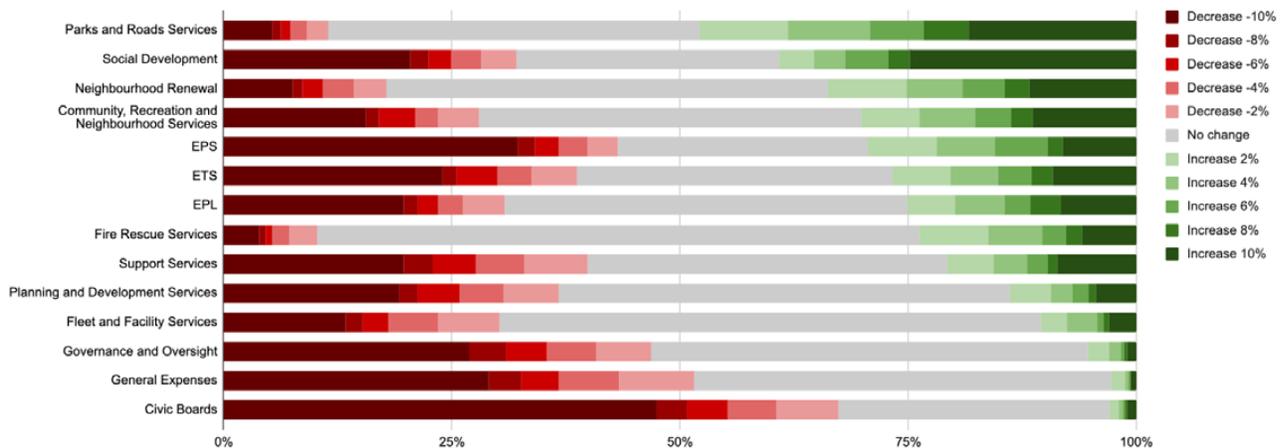
Balancing the Operating Budget

Integrated into the Engaged Edmonton page was the Balance the Budget tool. This interactive budget simulation enabled participants to make trade-offs with a real City budget by increasing or decreasing spending, or maintaining and holding, all depending on their individual priorities. Visitors could increase or decrease allocation to spending categories buckets up to 10%. The results of this tool are shown below.

Where respondents indicated they would like to **DECREASE** budget allocations



Where respondents indicated they would like to **INCREASE** budget allocations



Tough Choices for the Operating Budget

We invited Edmontonians to think about how the City balances the operating budget, noting that the City has some tough choices to make. Looking ahead to the 2023–26 City Budget, four options and trade-offs were shared with participants that the City has to consider in order to maintain current service levels and fulfil existing approved commitments to several major construction projects.

We asked people to share their level of comfort with the following options:

- End some services and programs provided by the City (e.g., leisure programs or business support services)
- Continue to offer the same City services, but not to the same level (e.g., reduced hours or service)
- Increase user fees for City services and programs (e.g., admissions for attractions and recreation centres, transit fares, development service permits and fees, fines etc.)
- Increase property taxes (i.e., the City may need to increase property taxes by: 7.1% in 2023; 5.2% in 2024; 4.2% in 2025 and; 3.8% in 2026)

The **operating budget** is the money the City uses every day to run the programs and services we rely on, like:

- Maintaining the roads and public transit that move people
- Police, bylaws and fire rescue services to keep people safe
- Attractions, leisure activities, parks and social programs that make Edmonton a great place to live, work and visit

What we heard in response to each of these options is summarized in the following sections. This data primarily comes from the streeter surveys, Engaged Edmonton Make It Count Survey, Balance the Budget tool, small group discussions and online workshops¹.

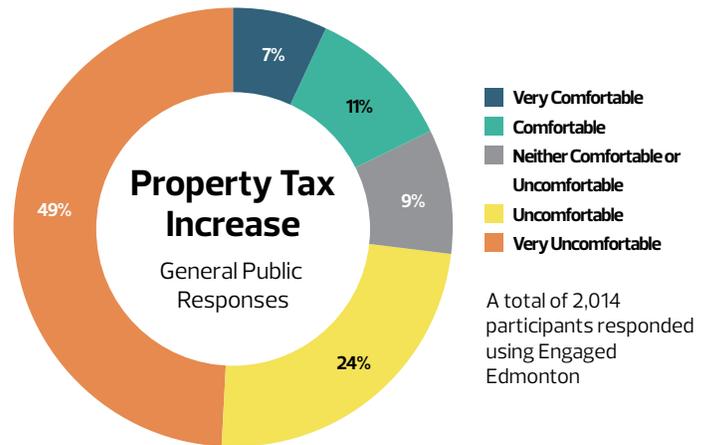


¹For a more detailed breakdown of participants' thoughts related to the operating budget, interested readers can visit Appendix C for insight into the potential impacts of these tough choices voiced by those who were comfortable, uncomfortable or neutral with each of the options outlined here.

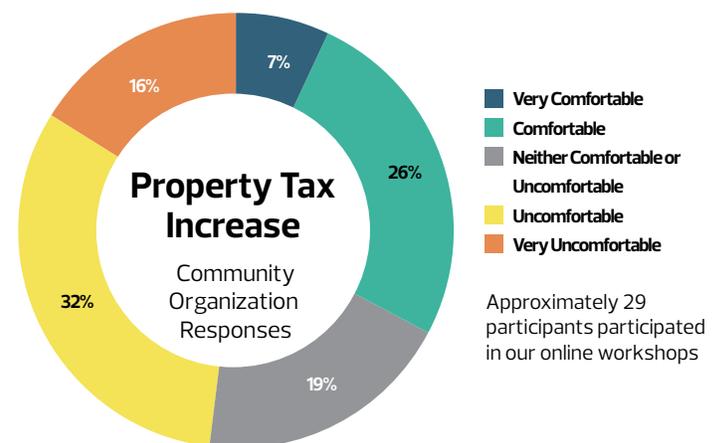


Increasing Property Tax

To maintain existing service levels and balance the budget, we heard that 18% of participants are comfortable or very comfortable with the option of increasing property taxes, and 73% of participants are very uncomfortable or uncomfortable with increasing property taxes.



We also hosted workshops with community organizations, community groups and partners across the city. 33% of these participants indicated that they are comfortable or very comfortable, and 48% of participants indicated that they are very uncomfortable or uncomfortable with increasing property taxes.



"Our family is already stretched thin due to mortgage rate increases, childcare costs, and increasing cost of living (inflation, energy and fuel costs, etc.), but we are lucky to have a home and our property tax contributions are a way for us to ensure the vibrancy of our community so that everyone can enjoy the services provided by the City."

While participants raised many topics regarding their comfort with and potential impacts stemming from property tax increases, the most common themes that emerged from our conversations about how increasing taxes would impact participants include:

- **Household Budgets** – Participants noted that their budgets are already stretched thin and cost of living increases are making it more and more difficult to balance their budgets and afford essential items (e.g., food, utilities, etc.).
- **Housing Affordability** – While some people noted that property tax increases would not heavily impact them, some participants noted that housing costs are already very high and increasing housing costs would push them to seek lower-cost housing options. Some noted they would consider moving outside the city to communities they deemed to be more affordable.
- **Discretionary Spending** – We heard that pulling this lever would cause significant impacts on personal spending, recreation and entertainment. People shared that it would dip into their household discretionary budget for extra things like vacations, gifts and entertainment.

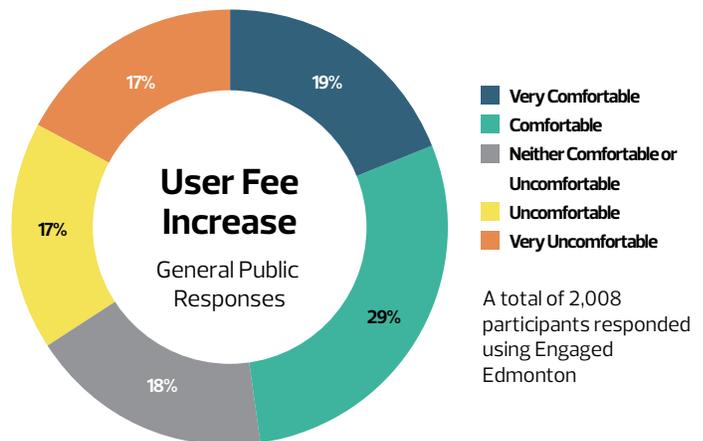
"It would impact my food budget which is already stretched"

"The increase in property taxes would price us out of our home in Edmonton, we would be moving to another community."

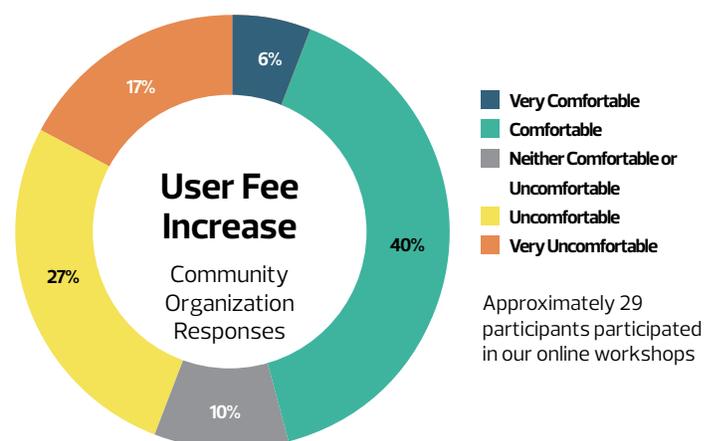
"I would move money from other areas of my families budget to pay for an increase in property taxes."

Increasing User Fees

To maintain existing service levels and balance the budget, we heard that 48% of participants are comfortable or very comfortable with the option of increasing user fees, and 34% of participants are very uncomfortable or uncomfortable with increasing user fees.



We also hosted workshops with community organizations, community groups and partners across the city. 46% of these participants indicated that they are comfortable or very comfortable, and 44% of participants indicated that they are very uncomfortable or uncomfortable with increasing user fees.



Overarching themes emerging from our conversations about how increasing user fees would impact participants include:

- **User fees should increase** – Participants noted that while they may not want to see user fee increases, that they saw increases as “fair” given the inflationary and budgetary challenges the City is facing. However, some stated that user fees should be kept reasonable and competitive with private market services.
- **User fee preferences** – We heard a range of preferences around user fees, with participants sharing that they prefer to pay user fees for services/programs they choose to use.
- **User fees should be equitable** – We heard from participants that the City should ensure that user fees are equitable meaning that they do not put undue burdens on those who are least able to afford increases (e.g., low-income people, seniors, families, etc.).
- **User fees should not increase** – Participants shared comments that user fees should not increase, particularly transit and recreation fees, as they have been increasing steadily and could pose barriers for Edmontonians as a result.

“I could choose when and how I want to spend my money. If I really want to access a city service, I can make that choice where I couldn't if property taxes increase. I do think transit fees should stay as low as possible as some people need that service and it encourages environmentally friendly behaviour”

“Again, I worry how this affects the lower income brackets, many of whom rely on public transit, and may end up shouldering increases that should be borne by those who can best afford them.”

“I am strongly opposed. The goal should be a reduction in user fees.”

We also received comments related specifically to transit revenue. Those who expressed opposition to reducing transit fees, indicated the following themes in their responses:

- **Poor value/return for investments** – Participants noted that transit revenues need to get closer to operating costs, or spending on transit will need to be reduced to ensure that it is more in line with revenues.
- **Discounted/subsidized transit fees** – Some participants expressed their opposition to discounting or further subsidization of transit fares. We also heard a tension in responses relating to subsidized transit fees, with some noting that they are in support.

Other participants expressed their support of making transit more accessible through reduced transit fees, subsidized transit fees and free transit fees. Key themes in these comments included:

- **Transit should be accessible to all** – Some participants felt that transit should be accessible to all and should be a service and not run as a business for revenue.
- **Make transit free** – We heard responses in support of making transit free. Participants noted that this would encourage ridership and help the service become more sustainable and accessible.
- **Support discounted/subsidized transit fees** – Participants shared support for discounted/subsidized transit fares/passes for low-income individuals, seniors and children/youth.

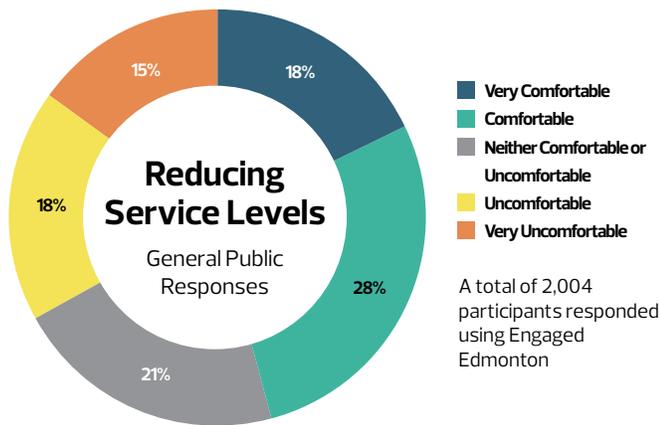
“Transit should be free to encourage more ridership and create a greener, more accessible city for all”

“transit is such a large cost, we need to increase the cost of using it or we need to find ways to get more value for its cost”

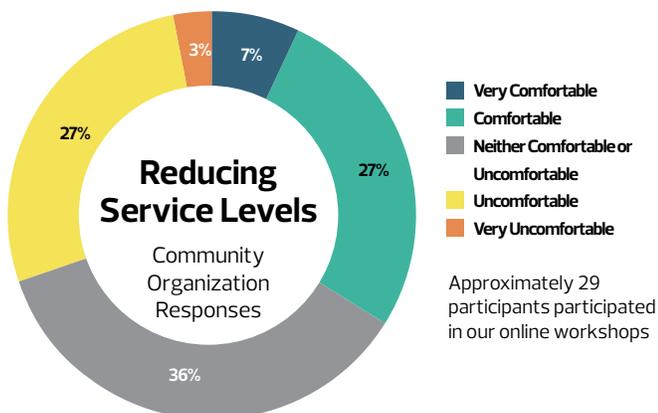
“I don't think user fees should be discounted as it does not benefit the majority of Edmontonians.”

Decreasing Service Levels

To maintain existing service levels and balance the budget, we heard that 46% of participants are comfortable or very comfortable with the option of decreasing service levels (e.g., reduced hours or service), and 33% of participants are very uncomfortable or uncomfortable with decreasing service levels.



We also hosted workshops with community organizations, community groups and partners across the City. 34% of these participants indicated that they are comfortable or very comfortable, and 30% of participants indicated that they are very uncomfortable or uncomfortable with decreasing service levels.

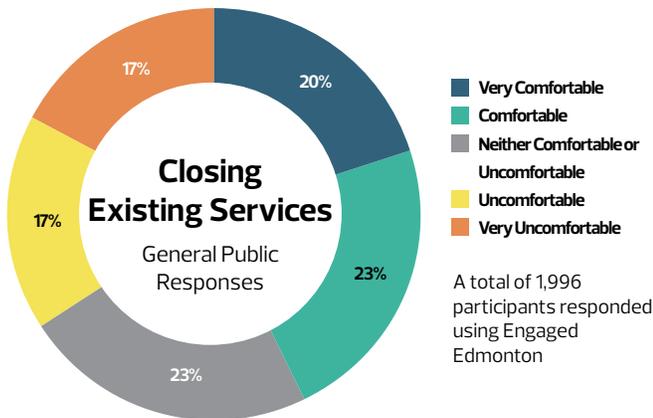


Overarching themes emerging from our conversations about the impacts of changing service levels on Edmontonians include:

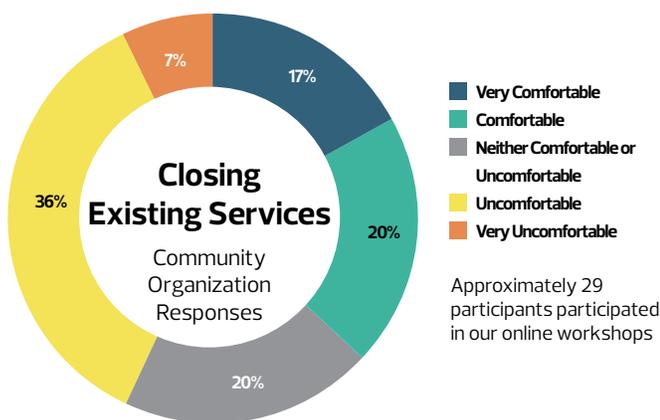
- **There's a way to make it work** – Participants shared that, while service reductions would impact them to some degree, they would make do as long as reductions were reasonable.
- **It really depends** – We also heard that the question was too broad and that the impacts stemming from potential service reductions would depend on the degree to which services are reduced.
- **Some services don't benefit me** – Some participants shared that they do not use some City services or that some services don't benefit them. We also heard from those who noted that they do not use these services due to some experiencing or perceiving them as poor quality.
- **Risk of significant impact to vulnerable community members** – We heard that some reductions in service levels might impact vulnerable groups and push people further into poverty.

Closing Existing Services and Programs

To maintain existing service levels and balance the budget, we heard that 43% of participants are comfortable or very comfortable with the option of closing existing services and programs (e.g., leisure programs or business support services), and 34% of participants are very uncomfortable or uncomfortable with closing services and programs.



We also hosted workshops with community organizations, community groups and partners across the city. 37% of these participants indicated that they are comfortable or very comfortable, and 43% of participants indicated that they are very uncomfortable or uncomfortable with closing services and programs.



During these conversations, we heard that impacts are service dependent and difficult to generalize without more information. People indicated that they would need more specific information on current programs and services and what City Administration and Council might be considering closing in order to make informed decisions on the potential impacts and trade-offs.

The following summarizes overarching themes regarding how participants feel service closures might impact others in the community:

- Community vibrancy, well-being and quality of life –** Participants shared concerns around how closures may impact vulnerable/marginalized community members, specifically community members who are considered low income and may depend on various programs and services offered by the City.
- Doing without and prioritizing needs –** Participants shared that the current economic climate is impacting Edmontonians across the city and that people and businesses cannot continue to support tax increases.

We also heard comments from people referencing that the City should be aware of its role and responsibilities in providing services in concert with other governments or service providers. We heard that the City could:

- Find third parties to take on programs and services –** Participants referenced that the City needs to assess whether or not they are the right service provider in some instances or if others could do the work more efficiently.

“Making sure we are out of lines of business that belong in the realm of other orders of government—social issues, housing, in particular.”

Tough Choices for the Capital Budget

Over the next four years, the City will be building over \$4 billion of already-approved construction (capital) projects. Many will transform our city, like expansions of our LRT network and the Yellowhead Trail; however, there is relatively little funding available for new capital projects. One option to build more new capital projects would be to take on more debt. We anticipate that our capital budget will need to focus on renewing our current infrastructure for the next four years and the City will need to make some tough choices about which infrastructure to keep and maintain, as well as explore a tax levy to fund these renewal projects.

We invited participants to think about how the City of Edmonton balances the capital budget. Three options and trade-offs were shared with participants that the City can consider in order to maintain current service levels and fulfil existing approved commitments to several major construction projects.

We asked people to share their level of comfort² with the following options:

- **Adding tax** – This would increase the debt-servicing costs in our operating budget (i.e., we would need to increase property taxes to pay for the cost of borrowing) and could potentially affect the City's credit rating, which allows us to borrow at very low rates only available to governments.
- **Dedicating a tax levy for infrastructure renewal** – Similar to the Neighbourhood Renewal Levy, the City would collect an additional tax levy from property owners to fund high-priority renewal work across the city.
- **Closing aging facilities with low attendance** – This would mean looking at closing or selling smaller, aging facilities that aren't used as much. The costs to repair or rebuild these aging structures are substantial.

What we heard in response to each of these options is summarized below. This data primarily comes from the streeter surveys, Engaged Edmonton's Make It Count Survey, Balance the Budget tool, small group discussions and online workshops.



The capital budget pays for all the things the City builds, from new structures to maintaining what we've already got, including:

- Roads
- Bridges
- LRT expansion
- Recreation centres
- Fire halls
- Police stations
- Libraries

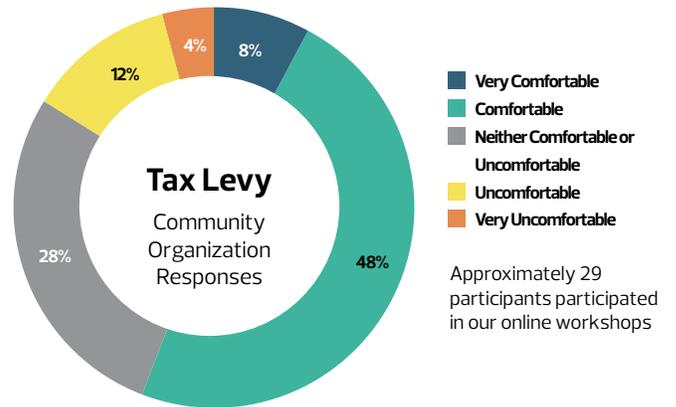
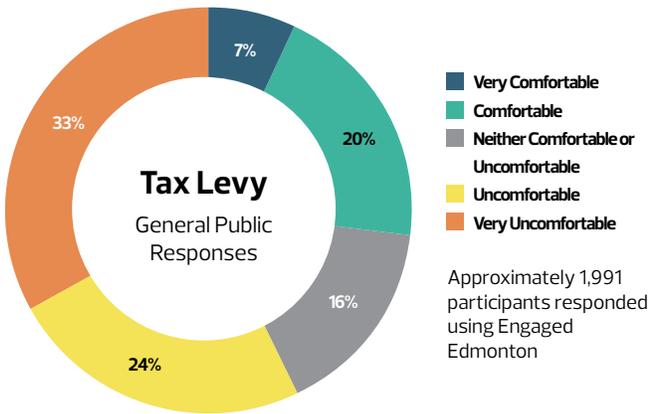
¹ It is worth noting that open-ended questions were asked for each of the potential choices ahead of City Council to maintain existing service levels and balance the operating budget. For the capital budget, open-ended comments were targeted to our in-depth conversations with organizations, community groups, and partners. As a result, only comments received about the operating budget are included in this section.

² General comfort levels were collected through online engagement and the potential impacts of pulling each of these levers on Edmontonians were gathered through our in-depth discussions with organizations, community groups and community partners during workshops and interviews.

Adding a Tax Levy for Renewal Infrastructure

To fund more new capital projects and balance the capital budget, we heard that 27% of participants are comfortable or very comfortable adding a tax levy to fund high-priority renewal work across the city, and 57% of participants are very uncomfortable or uncomfortable adding a tax levy to fund high-priority renewal work.

We also hosted workshops with community organizations, community groups and partners across the City. 56% of these participants indicated that they are comfortable or very comfortable, and 16% of participants indicated that they are very uncomfortable or uncomfortable with adding tax levy to fund high-priority renewal work.



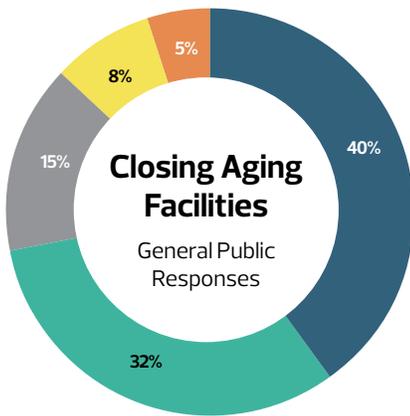
"I understand these kinds of tax levies might be beneficial and needed, but we should ensure that the City does what it can to mitigate those costs on those who can afford it least."

"Ensure there are thoughtful transition plans. If we are shutting down a service, how do we ensure that people are accessing other nearby services..."



Closing Aging Facilities

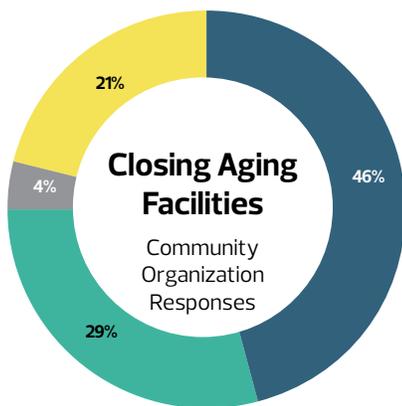
To fund more new capital projects and balance the capital budget, we heard that 72% of participants are comfortable or very comfortable with closing or selling smaller, aging facilities that aren't used as much, and 13% of participants are very uncomfortable or uncomfortable with closing or selling smaller, aging facilities that aren't used as much.



- Very Comfortable
- Comfortable
- Neither Comfortable or Uncomfortable
- Uncomfortable
- Very Uncomfortable

Approximately 1,999 participants responded using Engaged Edmonton

We also hosted workshops with community organizations, community groups and partners across the city. 75% of these participants indicated that they are comfortable or very comfortable, and 21% of participants indicated that they are uncomfortable with closing or selling smaller, aging facilities that aren't used as much.



- Very Comfortable
- Comfortable
- Neither Comfortable or Uncomfortable
- Uncomfortable

Approximately 29 participants participated in our online workshops

"Maintaining quality of life in Edmonton are all things that the City needs to consider BEFORE closing things."



Key Considerations for Building the Budget

This section explores the key themes and trends Edmontonians want the City of Edmonton to pay attention to when making budget decisions gathered from the pop-up events, streeter surveys, Engaged Edmonton Ideas Board, online workshops and small group discussions.

Supports for Vulnerable Community Members

A key trend that was identified by participants is the number of new, highly complex social needs and issues that have emerged out of the pandemic. Participants shared that a key consideration for building the budget should be a recognition that supports are needed for those most vulnerable in our communities. This includes a focus on:

- **Housing insufficiency** – Participants shared concerns about the number of people experiencing houselessness, particularly in the downtown core.
- **Addiction and substance abuse** – Participants shared a need for harm reduction approaches, better access to addiction counsellors, safe consumption sites and safe needle disposal in public spaces.
- **Community, recreation and support services** – Participants called on the City to create more, or improve existing social programs to help those experiencing poverty, unemployment and disabilities.
- **Mental health** – We also heard comments calling for increased funding of mental health services and supports for those experiencing mental health issues (including youth).

PLEASE NOTE: While these were key issues that emerged in participants' feedback many of these service areas fall outside the scope of the City of Edmonton's responsibilities.



"Downtown and many key businesses districts have serious concerns with drug poisoning crisis and disorder – Increase supports and responses to these crisis"

"Increase the number of inclusive playgrounds/areas for kids with disabilities."

"While federal and provincial levels need to step up their contribution to affordable housing and ending homelessness, they are not doing enough or fast enough, so lead the way and continually call them out. Every dollar spent here, could be worth \$10 down the road in costs from emergency services or other parts of the budget."

Overlapping Federal, Provincial and Municipal Responsibilities

We heard comments from participants sharing concern about the overlapping nature of federal, provincial and municipal responsibilities. Participants indicated that there is a need to clarify the scope of responsibilities between governments, particularly relating to:

- **Health care policies** – We heard calls to fund mental health and addiction programming, with some participants indicating that this should be municipally funded.
- **Education** – We also heard from participants there is a desire to see greater attention being paid to education. This included support for funding for secondary and post-secondary education, education around substance abuse and misuse, mental health, 2SLGBTQA+ communities, and other educational support and programming.
- **Housing** – Participants shared that there is a need to increase Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) payments and provide a variety of housing solutions for those in need.

“Don't decrease (and maybe even increase) core civic services like police, fire, roads, parks, and capital infrastructure investments that support economic growth. Do get out of lines of business that are not core to the City's mandate or are better handled by other orders of government. An easy example of the former would include the Zoo (NGO/private) and an example of the latter would include affordable housing and homelessness (provincial).”

Community Safety

Closely tied to these concerns were comments about what some perceived to be increasing crime and violence within the city and that there is an expressed need to focus on improving community safety as we recover from the pandemic.

Participants shared their opinions and views on how budget dollars could be spent to better fund police, or diverted towards other support services and programs within the community. It is important to note that there were many diverging experiences and opinions expressed by participants on this issue, which were summarized into the following key considerations:

- **Divert funding from the police** – Some participants called for the City to divert funding away from police services and to direct funds to community services and supports that were perceived to be better situated to address the root causes of crime.
- **Support or maintain the current level of police funding** – Other participants shared that they would like to see increased police presence in public spaces to ensure public safety, particularly around transit LRT platforms, on buses, downtown and other public areas.
- **Fund police training** – Other participants felt that funding should be directed to police services to support enhanced education/training of police personnel around mental health, overdosing, crisis interventions, harm reduction and addictions.

“I don't believe increasing the police budget will decrease crime, we need to fund programs that actually proactively address homelessness, mental health, and addiction instead of trying to send in police to disperse or punish them. The police also need more oversight and accountability.”

“We don't feel safe travelling into Edmonton recently. Especially the downtown core. Something needs to be done, and maybe increasing the budget for and supporting our police services would help.”

“A healthy city is a safe city. Fund the police and spend the money wisely so officers engage with the community in a positive way.”



Increased Burden on Edmontonians

Coming out of the pandemic, participants shared their concerns about escalating costs of living and the resulting pressure that is being placed on businesses, families and individuals to make ends meet. Key considerations for building the budget included:

- **Prioritizing core services** – We heard that the City should focus on the core, essential services needed to run the city and maintain the quality of life for Edmontonians. However, it is important to note that there is a range of perspectives on what “core services” constitutes.
- **Supporting individuals and families** – People shared their perspective that Council should consider the financial risks and burdens tax increases will place on individuals and families.
- **Supporting the local economy** – Participants also emphasized the need to protect jobs and support Edmonton’s local economy, which included calls for the City to support local businesses.

“When money is tight, don’t keep raising taxes – get back to delivering basic services that a municipality is responsible for – police, fire, recreation/parks, roads.”

Transit Service and Connectivity

A key theme that arose during engagement was a need to improve transit service, accessibility and connectivity throughout Edmonton. Participants also shared concerns around the safety of using City transit – these comments echoed those described in the earlier Community Safety section.

Where people shared their views that transit is an essential service, we also heard from those who are dissatisfied by high costs, perceived issues with safety and poor project planning/management (specific to LRT construction). Key considerations for building the budget included:

- **Money spent on the transit system** – Some participants called on the City to increase funding for transit, whereas others want the City to spend less on transit.
- **Consistency of transit routes** – We heard that transit could be improved through adding routes, frequency and reach.
- **Safety of transit** – Participants shared that they want the safety of LRT stations to be improved.
- **Transit fares** – We received a wide range of comments about transit fares, with comments calling for Arc (i.e., Smart Fare), credit/debit card payment options, and transit fare to be reduced or made free.
- **Parking near transit stops** – We heard that participants would like to see free parking at LRT stations.
- **Transit accessibility** – Participants commented on the physical accessibility of transit and the need to improve or maintain related services.

“Love what’s being done with the LRT – finish it.”

“Spend more on transit and increase security on transit so kids can take it safely and without fear.”

“Current fares are too high for the service provided. It is costlier and more inconvenient for two of us to travel downtown and return by transit than to take a private vehicle, and pay for downtown parking.”

Transparency, Efficiency and Innovation

We heard that participants want the City to be transparent with them about how tax dollars are being spent. We also heard participants say that they want assurance that the City is transparent in demonstrating efficiency and innovation in program and service delivery.

Participants suggested that the City could focus on:

- **Finding spending efficiencies** – Participants shared that the City should prioritize their spending on essential services and programs and eliminate wasteful spending. We heard from those who wanted the City to look beyond the trade-offs identified in this engagement to investigate other cost saving opportunities.
- **Streamlining City administration and operations** – People shared their view that the City should look to reduce administration costs.
- **Earning trust** – Some participants expressed a lack of trust around decisions being made by the City, with some referencing overspending or disagreement with spending priorities.
- **Identifying new revenue sources** – We also heard comments noting that the City should seek to find additional revenue sources and efficiencies to address budgetary needs.
- **City planning and policy** – Participants shared a wide range of suggestions about how innovation in city planning and policy could balance the budget. Participants expressed the need to centralize development, revitalizing the downtown core or creating mixed-use zones which are supportive of economic activity in a community.

“ With rising prices it is time to look for cost efficiencies in crew composition, procedural optimization and lifetime costing.”

“No trust in city administration or council to prioritize service efficiencies.”

“Focus on using and maintaining our existing infrastructure by reinvesting in our existing established communities to promote vibrant livable communities.”

Celebrate Edmonton

Another theme that emerged was that, coming out of the pandemic, Edmontonians want to connect with each other and support the arts and culture that make Edmonton unique. Key themes for consideration in building the budget include:

- **Culture building** – We heard that people value Edmonton's heritage, festivals and other city-wide events. There is a desire for continued support of the arts that create community and build bridges between different communities and groups.
- **Libraries** – We heard that libraries are important gathering places and resources for newcomers and other vulnerable Edmontonians, as well as providing hubs for sharing Edmonton's stories and hosting community events. Others felt that libraries are no longer relevant or provide many services outside the scope of their mandate and should downsize.
- **Parks and gathering places** – Participants shared ideas around how the City might enhance or improve green spaces and parks (e.g., build more splash parks, create more gathering spaces that are kid-friendly, create dog parks that are fenced in, etc.).
- **Community amenities** – We heard comments explicitly referring to the value of community amenities or the need to fund them.

Long Term Solutions

We heard that participants are concerned about the future and want the City to set long-term plans that take action to improve environmental sustainability and address impacts of climate change. The suggestions we heard include:

- **Protect green space** – Participants want the City to protect Edmonton's green space, preserving existing trees or planting additional vegetation.
- **Fund green initiatives** – We also heard from those who want the City to increase money to green initiatives and green energy projects.

"COVID and economic impacts have been devastating for the arts (losing artists to other sectors). If we lose culture makers to other sectors –Edmonton will be poorer for it –the glue that brings people together."

"EPL has some awesome programs, great employees, and dedication to the city. It's community builders, and I would love to see them grow!"

"I do believe that Libraries are important but the fact is they are no longer well used as technology increasingly gives us information at our fingertips."

"Parks are important."

"Protect green space, creeks, and ponds. They are as important as roads. Here in Brookside/Bearspaw we treasure our canal/brook and lake."



What Happens Next?

The intention of this public engagement initiative was to hear from a broad range of Edmontonians. The feedback collected to date and summarized in this What We Heard report will be provided to City Council for consideration as they make budgeting decisions in the fall of 2022. For more information about this process and to stay informed about next steps, please visit edmonton.ca/budget.

Want to dive into the details? Read On!

- Appendix A: How We Communicated
- Appendix B: Who We Talked To
- Appendix C: What You Said

Appendix A: How We Communicated



The City undertook extensive communications and marketing to build awareness amongst Edmontonians about public engagement on the budget, and to make it easy to participate in engagement online at engaged.edmonton.ca. This included:

- + A media launch
- + Advertising on digital billboards across the city
- + Ads in City facilities, including attractions, libraries, recreation centres and LRT stations, including a QR code to make it easy to access online engagement
- + Online advertising on Google, and a combination of posts and ads on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram

These efforts helped to make the budget project page the most viewed and engaged page on the City's Engaged Edmonton platform to date.

Hand-Outs and Communications Materials

The following documents (see on subsequent pages) were used to communicate information about the budgeting process to Edmontonians on the Engaged Edmonton platform and through detailed conversations in our community pop-ups and other in-person activities.

- + Top 10 Things You Need to Know
- + Where does the money come from?
- + Where does the money go?
- + Build Your Budget Board

Top 10 Things You Need to Know About the City Budget

#1 Budgets help build a better life for Edmontonians

The budget is the City's plan for where we will get money (revenues) and how we will spend it (expenditures). It maps out how tax dollars and other funding will be invested to provide the services Edmontonians count on as well as to build and maintain roads, bridges, recreation centres and other important City facilities.

#2 Budgets are built in four-year cycles

The next cycle runs from 2023-2026. The budget is reviewed and adjusted each year, as needed. The budgeting process is driven by achieving the goals and priorities as voiced by Council and Edmontonians through ConnectEdmonton, extensive public engagement on The City Plan and the Corporate Business Plan.

#3 There are four budgets

The budget has two main parts: the operating budget and the capital budget. There are also separate budgets for public utilities: Waste Services and the Blatchford Utility.

#4 We MUST balance the budget

The City can't budget for a deficit or use debt to pay for our operations. It's the law in Alberta.

#5 The average household pays under \$8/day

Based on the 2022 assessed housing values and operating budget, the average Edmonton household, with an assessed value of approximately \$402,000, pays under \$8 a day. Imagine life without roads, parks, police and fire services, libraries, summer pools and winter skating, snow clearing and repair crews. Now imagine your household could buy a pass, for under \$8 a day, that would give those things to everyone who lives with you. That pass would also help support recreation facilities and attractions, transit, the City's local partners in everything from sports to social work, and dozens of other things you rely on. That's the work that less than \$8 a day gets done!

#6 We have some of the lowest tax increases in Canada

Over the past 5 years, Edmonton's average tax increase has been 1.8%. This is lower than the average rate of inflation over that same time period, which is closer to 3%. In 2022, Edmonton's 1.9% tax increase was among the lowest in Canada, compared to 3.87% in Calgary and 3% in Ottawa.

#7 We're building a lot over the next four years

The next four-year budget has over \$4 billion in already-approved capital projects, including transformational projects that will expand our LRT network and Yellowhead Trail, as well as two new recreation centres and an expansion at the Valley Zoo.

#8 We also have a lot to maintain

The City has over 9.1 million assets, with a total replacement value of over \$31.6 billion. Our capital budget carries the cost to maintain:

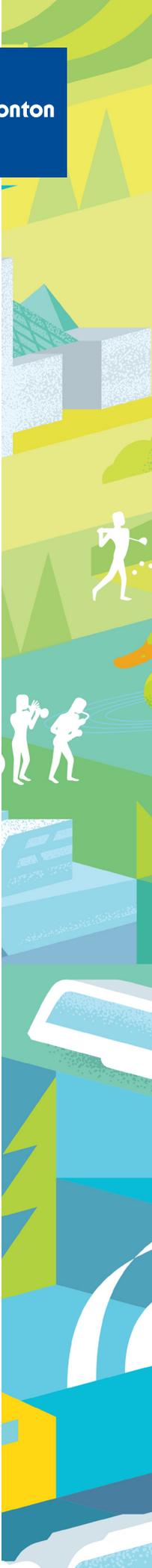
- 11,403 lane km of roads/alleys
- 5,881 km of sidewalks
- 688 km of trails
- 94 light rail vehicles
- 976 buildings

#9 We're always looking for efficiencies

The City has applied a continuous improvement process to find efficiencies in our budgets since 2014. We have made significant budget reductions in recent years to free up dollars for new priorities. If we want to make further budget reductions in 2023-2026, we will need to look at reducing service levels, cutting services, or increasing user fees and fines.

#10 The tax money you pay the City vs Province vs Federal Government

For a typical Edmonton household, for each dollar paid in taxes and fees to the government sector, approximately 65 cents is paid to the federal government, 26 cents to the Province, and just under 9 cents to the City.



CITY BUDGET 2023-2026

Where does the money come from?

Learn more

For more information about the 2023-2026 City Budget visit us online at edmonton.ca/budget

Engaged Edmonton

Share your thoughts online at engaged.edmonton.ca/budget



ADVISE

SHARE YOUR VOICE
SHAPE OUR CITY

Edmonton

Building Your Next Budget

The City of Edmonton is building your new four-year budget to take us from the start of 2023 to the end of 2026. It will go to Council for approval this fall, but first—we need to hear from you.

Setting a budget is about making choices.

The budget maps out how the City will get money (revenues) and how we will spend it (expenditures). There are different sources and ways the City receives money in order to pay for programs, services and construction.

There are four budgets

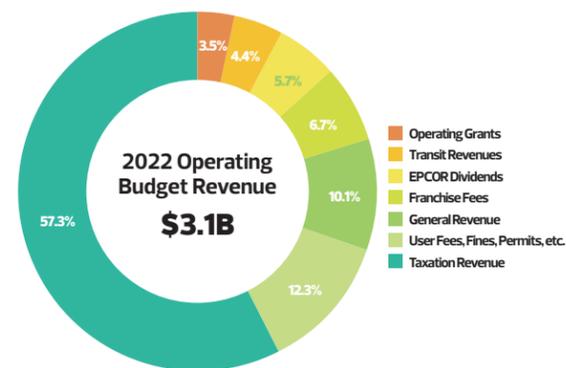
The budget has two main parts: the operating budget and the capital budget. There are also separate budgets for public utilities: Waste Services and the Blatchford Utility.

Operating Budget

The operating budget is about the money the City uses every day for programs and services. There are three main ways the City can raise money to pay for them:

- **Property taxes:** Account for over half of our operating revenues.
- **User fees:** These include recreation facility admissions, transit fares, parking fees, building fees, and other permits. They are designed to partially recover costs from people who directly use the service.
- **Franchise fees:** ATCO Gas and EPCOR provide gas, power, water and wastewater services to Edmontonians. The City charges these operators franchise fees for related costs and land access.

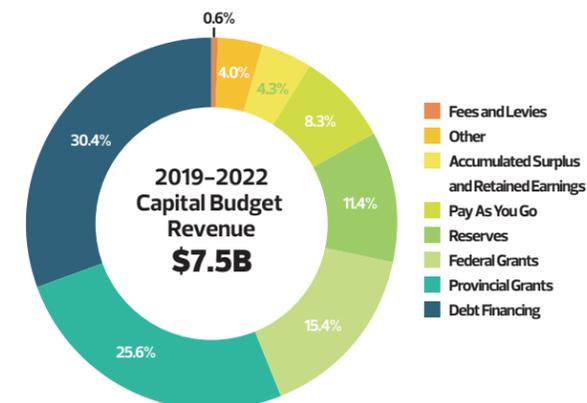
The amount of property taxes the City collects each year is based on the operating budget. Council approves this amount in the four-year budget, and confirms it every year at budget adjustment time.



Capital Budget

The capital budget pays for new structures and for maintaining the ones we already have. There are four main ways that the City raises money to pay for things like designing and building a new library or road, the rehabilitation of a recreation centre, or the maintenance of a bridge:

- **Grants:** 41% of the City's approved capital budget is funded with grants from the provincial and federal governments.
- **Tax-Supported Debt:** The City uses debt in order to take advantage of lower interest rates and move priority infrastructure projects forward.
- **Reserves:** Some of the City's reserves are money set aside to pay for capital projects on a cash basis over the short term.
- **Investment Income:** Much of this income is transferred to the capital budget to pay for new infrastructure.



CITY BUDGET 2023-2026

Where does the money go?

Learn more

For more information about the 2023-2026 City Budget visit us online at edmonton.ca/budget

Engaged Edmonton

Share your thoughts online at engaged.edmonton.ca/budget



ADVISE

Edmonton

SHARE YOUR VOICE
SHAPE OUR CITY

Building Your Next Budget

The City of Edmonton is building your new four-year budget to take us from the start of 2023 to the end of 2026. It will go to Council for approval this fall, but first—we need to hear from you.

The budget maps out how the City will get money (revenues) and how we will spend it (expenditures). There are limits to what the City can afford to provide and setting a budget is about making choices and trade-offs.

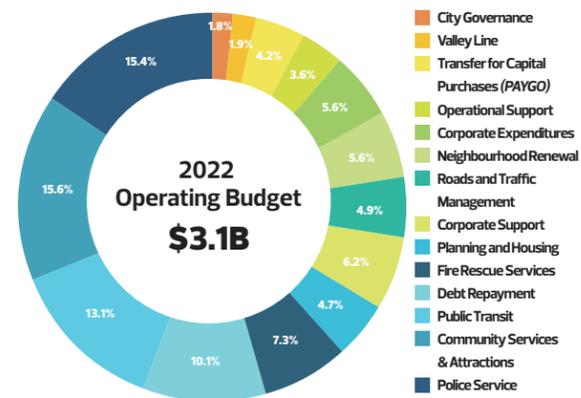
There are four budgets

The budget has two main parts: the operating budget and the capital budget. There are also separate budgets for public utilities: Waste Services and the Blatchford Utility.

Operating Budget

The operating budget is the money the City uses every day to run the programs and services we rely on, like:

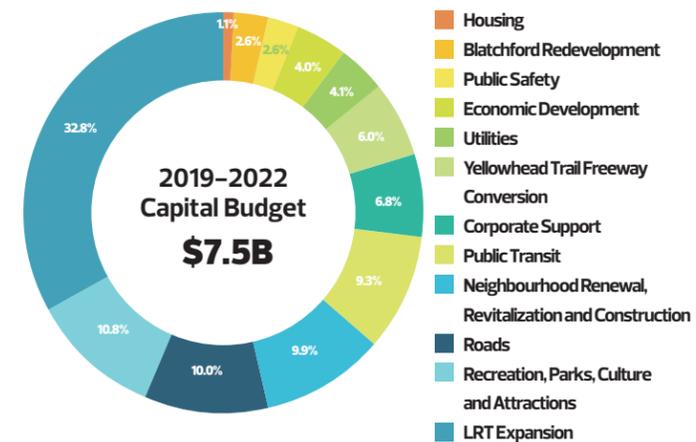
- Maintaining the roads and public transit that move people
- Police, bylaws and fire rescue services to keep people safe
- Attractions, leisure activities, parks and social programs that make Edmonton a great place to live, work and visit



Capital Budget

The capital budget pays for the things the City builds, from new structures to maintaining what we've already got, including:

- Roads
- Bridges
- LRT expansion
- Recreation centres
- Fire halls
- Police stations
- Libraries



Build Your Budget Board

It's your budget. Tell us how you'd make it count.

2022 Operating Budget
\$3.1B

Community, Recreation and Neighbourhood Services \$181,097,000	Social Development \$71,495,000	Edmonton Public Library \$56,074,000	Edmonton Transit Service \$404,254,000
Fire Rescue Services \$224,404,000	Fleet and Facilities Services \$57,978,000	General Expenses \$249,176,000	Governance and Oversight \$38,753,000
Neighbourhood Renewal \$166,626,000	Civic Boards \$111,635,000	Parks and Roads Services \$250,925,000	Planning and Development Services \$170,579,000
Edmonton Police Service \$475,374,000	Support Services \$216,765,000	Debt \$312,114,000	Transfer to Capital \$186,796,000



These budget items can not be changed.

SHARE YOUR VOICE
SHAPE OUR CITY

Edmonton



Appendix B: Who We Talked To



The project team applied a Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) lens to the public engagement process for the 2023-2026 City Budget project. We recognize that by using GBA+ we better understand diverse perspectives, experiences and needs to create services that strive to serve everyone.

We contacted community-based organizations that support Edmontonians experiencing unique barriers and challenges. We wanted to hear from these organizations that often connect and support underrepresented voices to learn more about how budget considerations might impact them.

Using a GBA+ lens, groups identified for targeted outreach included:

- + 2SLGBTQ+ community members
- + Newcomers
- + Non-English speaking Edmontonians
- + Youth
- + Seniors
- + Racialized community members
- + Women
- + People with disabilities
- + Edmontonians experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- + People experiencing mental health and addiction challenges
- + Other groups who may experience barriers to engaging online

The targeted outreach and engagement with these groups included a combination of virtual, phone and in-person events dependent on the needs of the audiences.

Further, 131 organizations were invited to participate in online workshops. Workshops were designed to be interactive, highly participatory online style events, where participants were invited to come together to share past and current experiences, issues or concerns related to key discussion questions. Representatives from the following groups registered to attend:

- + Edmonton Public Library
- + Norwood Child and Family Resource Centre

2023-2026 City Budget, Appendix B : Who We Talked To

- + Accessibility Advisory Committee
- + Autism Edmonton
- + Boys and Girls Club of Edmonton and Area
- + Edmonton Arts Council
- + University of Alberta Students' Union
- + Careers In Transition
- + Edmonton Chamber of Commerce
- + The Winspear Centre
- + Crossroads Business Improvement Area
- + Edmonton Sport Council
- + Edmonton Downtown Business Association
- + WIN House
- + Métis Urban Capital Housing
- + Edmonton Ski Club
- + Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op
- + YMCA Northern Alberta
- + Alberta Residential Landlords Association
- + Bike Edmonton
- + Chinese Benevolent Association
- + Women's Advocacy Voice of Edmonton Committee
- + Edmonton Mountain Bike Alliance
- + Voice of Albertans with Disabilities
- + South West Edmonton Seniors Association
- + Edmonton Student Alliance
- + Students' Association of MacEwan University
- + Hockey Edmonton

Additionally, the survey and Balance the Budget tool within Engaged Edmonton gathered feedback from respondents including a series of demographic questions:

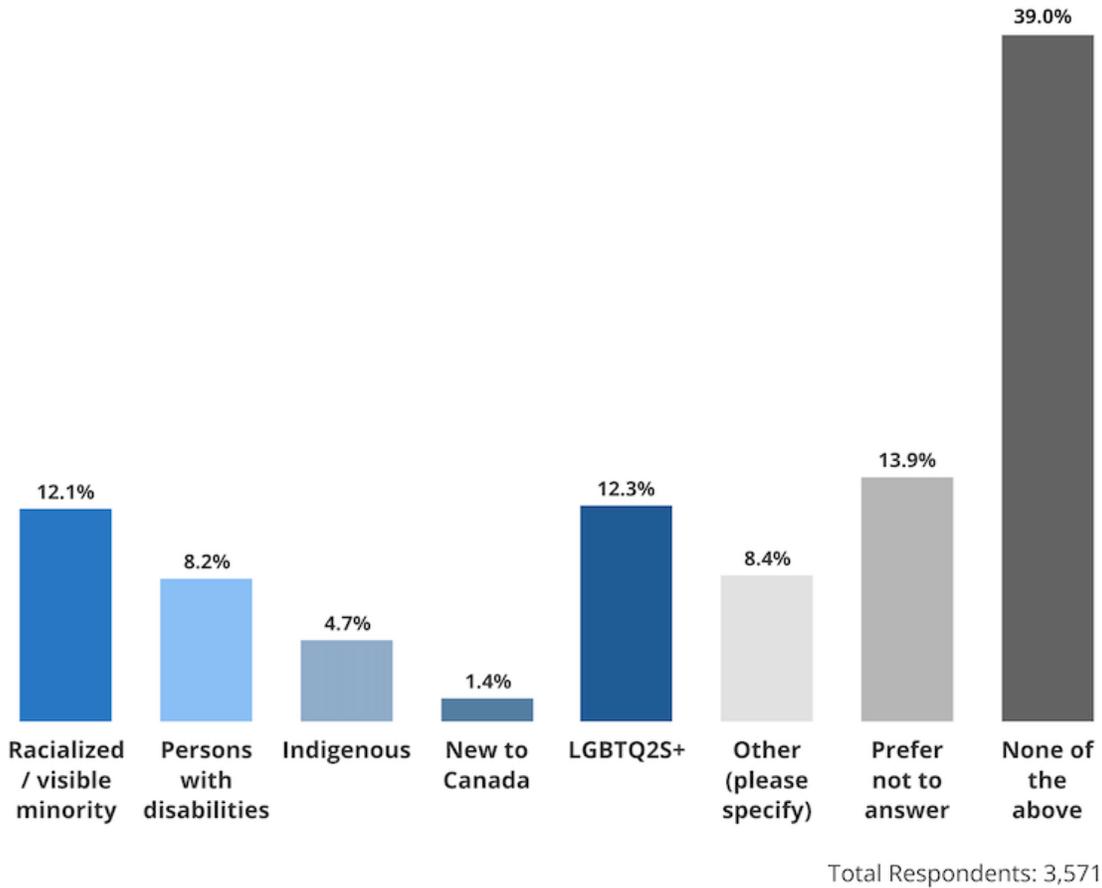
- + Residency or land ownership status
- + Belonging to an equity-seeking group
- + Gender identity
- + Age
- + Total household income
- + Postal code

This data is displayed below and shows who engaged in our **online** activities.

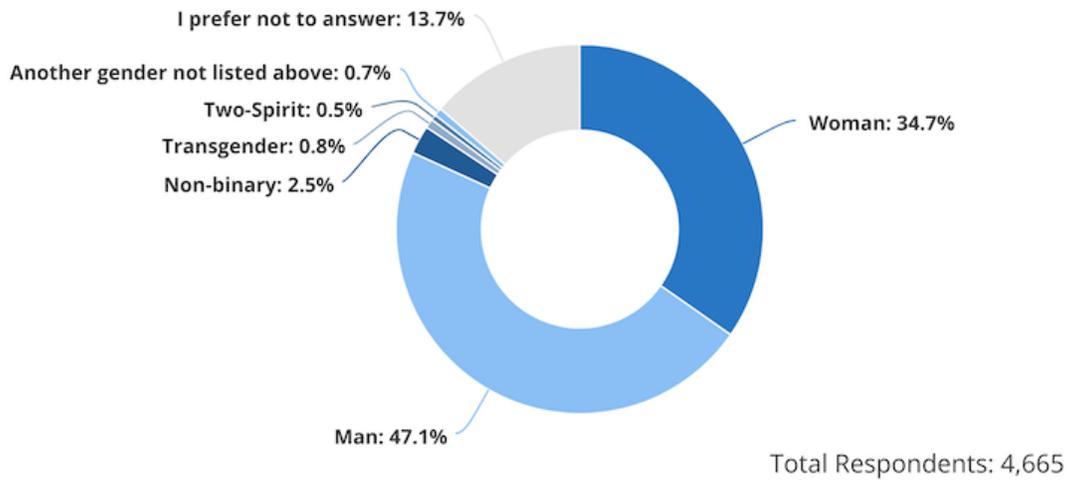
Are you a resident or landowner in the City of Edmonton?



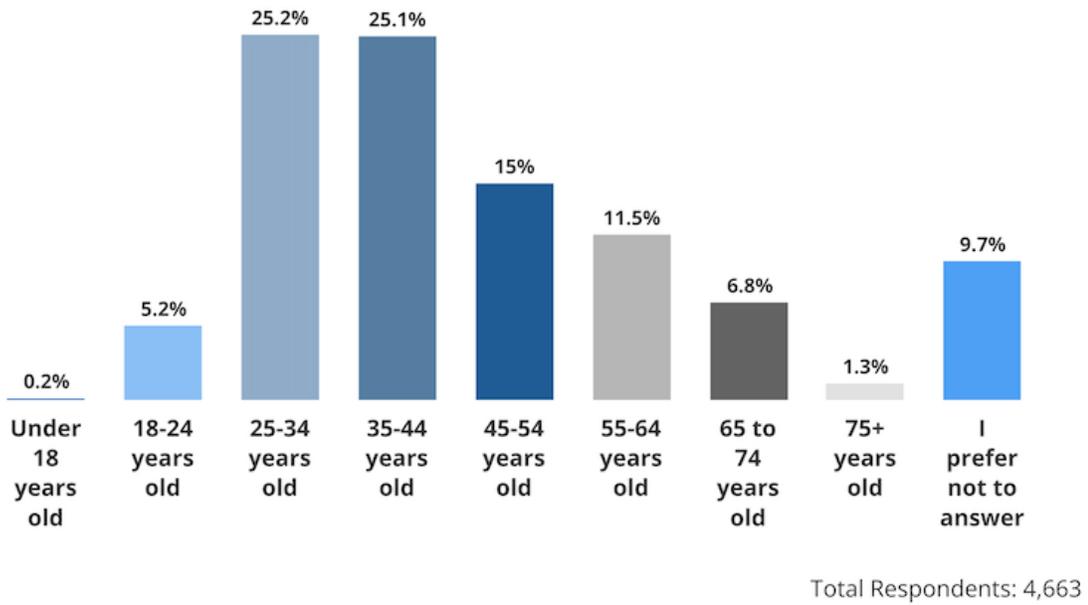
Are you a member of any of the following equity-seeking groups?



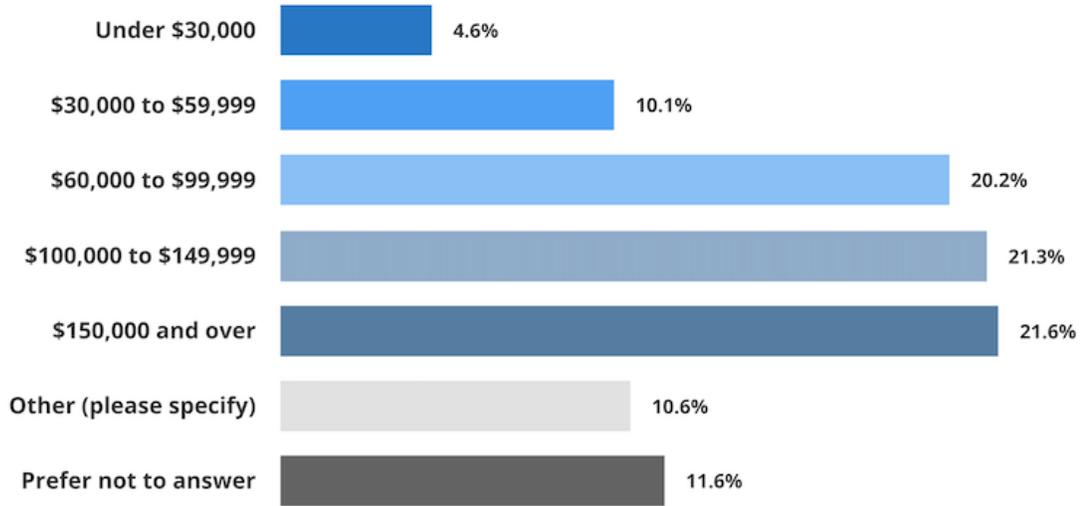
What is your gender identity?



Which best describes your age?



Which of the following categories best describes your total household income in 2019 before taxes?



Total Respondents: 4,689

Postal codes from Balance the Budget Tool

Postal code	Frequency
T6W	206
T5T	196
T6J	188
T6R	153
T6C	152
T6E	149
T6L	136
T6H	123
T5Y	121
T5K	116
T5R	109
T6M	102
T6X	100
T6K	89
T6A	88
T5X	87

2023-2026 City Budget, Appendix B : Who We Talked To

T5H	86
T5W	84
T5Z	81
T6T	77
T5A	75
T5M	70
T5E	68
T5N	68
T5L	68
T6B	65
T6G	63
T5P	61
T5B	51
T6V	50
T5G	46
T5J	37
T5C	35
T5S	27

Appendix C: What You Said – Engagement Data



Tough Choices for the Operating Budget

During this engagement, we invited Edmontonians to think about how the City of Edmonton balances the operating budget, noting that the City has some tough choices to make. Looking ahead to the 2023-2026 Budget, four options and trade-offs were shared with participants that the City is considering in order to maintain current service levels and fulfil existing approved commitments to several major construction projects.

We asked people to share their level of comfort with each choice and, for those who were interested in sharing more, how those choices would impact them. The options provided for consideration included:

- + End some services and programs provided by the City (e.g., leisure programs or business support services)
- + Continue to offer the same City services, but not to the same level (e.g., reduced hours or service)
- + Increase user fees for City services and programs (e.g., admissions for attractions and recreation centres, transit fares, development service permits and fees, fines etc.)
- + Increase property taxes (i.e., the City may need to increase property taxes by: 7.1% in 2023; 5.2% in 2024; 4.2% in 2025, and; 3.8% in 2026)

Below is a detailed breakdown of those we engaged in conversations regarding the potential impacts of each tough choice being deliberated for the 2023-2026 Budget. Participants' comments and thoughts are organized according to their comfort level (i.e., comfortable, uncomfortable or neutral), with each option presented to balance the operating budget. This data primarily comes from the streeter surveys, the Make It Count Survey hosted through Engaged Edmonton, small group discussions and online workshops.

Increase property taxes

Comfortable with increasing property taxes

- + **Not desirable but necessary** - Participants noted that while it may not be desirable, some acknowledged increasing property taxes as the only viable or best way to increase revenues to maintain or improve the services that they value and find necessary to maintain a vibrant city.
- + **Willing to pay slightly more** - Participants noted that an increase would have impacts, but individuals would be able/willing to pay reasonable/slight increases. Some noted that they could pay no more than 5.5%, others no more than 10%. Others noted that continued tax increases would eventually break their budgets.
- + **Willing to pay more for quality services and better community outcomes** - Participants noted that they would be willing to pay more in property taxes, but they would want to see improved services, infrastructure and community outcomes (e.g., lower crime rates, better maintained roads, expanded parks, neighbourhood renewal, transit options, libraries, etc.).
- + **High value services cost money** - Participants noted the need to increase property taxes to ensure valuable services are maintained (e.g., public transit, police, recreation centres and affordable housing) and that debt is paid down.
- + **Consider increasing taxes for certain property owners** - Participants noted that Edmonton has a growing list of properties owned and operated by real estate investment trusts and felt that these property owners should see increased tax burdens. We also heard that those with multiple homes or those renting out their homes at high costs should also be taxed more. Lastly, people felt that those living in suburban communities should be taxed more to cover the cost of services required to support them.
- + **Consider who and how much they are taxed** - Participants had varied perspectives on who should be taxed and how much they should be taxed. Participants noted that they would like to see large corporations or businesses taxed more as opposed to homeowners. Participants suggested looking at taxing larger/wealthier homes more, otherwise referred to as a mansion tax.
- + **Consider alternative tax systems** - Participants suggested support for increasing property taxes for those in higher wealth brackets or those who own multiple properties. Participants also expressed an interest in alternative tax structures, such as a density-based property tax model that would reflect the costs of developing infrastructure in new urban communities (e.g., police stations, hospitals, transit,

roads, sewers, etc.) or progressive tax models where taxes were assessed based on income levels. Some participants suggested the City look into a value-added tax based on the exchange of carbon in our economy. Some noted this would be achieved by working with the Province to implement a tax where the Province and the City can tax carbon units each time it changes hands. Revenues collected by both orders of government would increase revenues in general taxation. Another suggestion included a municipal tax system based on the type of residence rather than the value of a residence.

Neither comfortable or uncomfortable with increasing property taxes

- + **Understanding of the tough choice** - Participants noted that they understood the position that the City was in and they would be able to support a reasonable increase, despite being impacted by an increase.
- + **Support for increase to fund services/programs to improve the city** - Participants shared that they are okay with property tax increases if those funds are going to better our city for everyone, noting that it should be used for necessities and maintenance of the city first.
- + **Expect more or better services and/or better community outcomes** - Participants noted that they would be willing to pay more in property taxes, but they would want to see improved services, infrastructure and community outcomes (e.g., lower crime rates, better maintained roads, expanded parks, enhanced transit options, etc.). Participants noted the needs of the majority should be addressed over the minority.

Uncomfortable with increasing property taxes

- + **Our property taxes are too high and not competitive** - Participants noted that property taxes felt too high, making life unaffordable for many. Some felt that the City of Edmonton's taxes are much higher than other comparable municipalities, making the City less competitive in attracting new residents.
- + **Paying more but not seeing improvements** - Participants shared that property tax increases seem never-ending without a noticeable increase in the quality of City programs and facilities. Some participants noted that they felt the quality of City programs, services and facilities was decreasing.

- + **Lack of choice and unfair burden of costs** - Participants noted that a property tax increase would result in being forced to spend money in areas that did not match their personal priorities or values.
- + **Impacts to business and economy** - Some participants expressed concerns that increasing taxes would result in companies leaving the city, further reducing the tax base and impacting the overall economy. Some felt that decreasing property taxes will encourage more people to live, work and spend their money in Edmonton, increasing economic growth and development that will benefit the city.
- + **This would make life more unaffordable** - Participants noted concern that increasing property taxes will make life more unaffordable for many that are already dealing with significant cost-of-living increases.
- + **Would need to sell home and/or leave Edmonton** - Participants shared that increased property taxes would impact their budgets to such an extent that they would be forced to sell their homes and downsize. Other participants noted that it would increase their rent to a point where they would have to look elsewhere, with people noting that they would likely have to rent homes in neighborhoods with lower rents, which were generally perceived to be less safe.
- + **Determine who is best positioned to provide services/who is responsible** - Participants indicated the City is trying to be “all things to all people” and needs to focus its spending on areas within its jurisdiction (e.g., not mental health and homelessness). These participants noted their view that the City has gotten off track from what are the "normal" municipal areas of responsibility and should focus on core priorities instead of topics (e.g., climate change, homelessness) beyond the City's mandate.
- + **Cut spending, spend smarter and live within budget** - Participants suggested a need to reduce spending overall, spend smarter or live with less so that Edmonton can be affordable for the individuals and families that live here and want to build a future here. Some shared that they believed the City has spent irresponsibly over the years on unnecessary projects that people perceive are not in alignment with citizens' needs and priorities. Participants shared that they would not be willing to pay more in taxes until the City could show taxpayers they are "serious about fiscal responsibility, and aligning expenditures with tax payer [sic] priorities." Some expressed that the City needs to "develop a revenue strategy rather than a taxation strategy."
- + **Need to focus on essential/core services** - Participants noted that the City should focus on essential/core services (e.g., snow clearing, road maintenance, etc.) to reduce costs rather than new infrastructure or enhancing the level of services.

Increase user fees for City services and programs

Comfortable with increasing user fees

- + **Necessary to maintain services** - Some participants supported increases in user fees. These participants saw increases as fair or necessary to maintain current services. Others noted that they think that fees should be increased as the cost of everything is going up, and that user fees need to better reflect the true cost of services/program operations.
- + **Support "pay for use"** - Participants noted that they are willing to pay for services they use. Since not all individuals use all City services and programs, some participants felt those who benefit from these services should be responsible for paying for them.
- + **Current fees are low and can be increased** - Participants felt that user fees for some services and programs (e.g., Muttart Conservatory, Valley Zoo, John Janzen Nature Centre) are low and could be increased.
- + **Support slight/reasonable increases** - Some participants noted that they would support slight or reasonable increases.
- + **Services/programs should be revenue neutral** - Participants felt that City services and programs should be revenue neutral (i.e., that services and programs should pay for themselves).
- + **Support increases as long as quality of services improve** - Participants indicated that they would be okay with user fee increases if it went towards improving the services (e.g., improving safety on transit, reducing wait times for permitting processes, etc.).
- + **Gives me more choice** - Participants expressed support for increases in user fees as they felt it gave them more choice around what services they could opt in to based on their individual budgets, as opposed to mandatory costs like property taxes which participants felt did not give individuals much choice.

Participants comfortable with increasing user fees also shared the following feedback about how user fee increases may impact service/program usage, personal choice, budgets and general affordability:

- + **May impact usage** - Participants noted that increases in user fees might affect how they use services in the future. Some noted that they might have to use services less frequently or would no longer use the services. Others indicated that they might

seek alternative services when possible to manage costs. While participants indicated they may use services less with increased user fees, we also heard that people currently couldn't afford to attend these services/programs and further increases would only further price them out of accessing City services. Some participants felt that any user fee increases would make services more unaffordable and out of reach as many are struggling with increased living costs due to wage stagnation, inflation, etc.

- + **I will budget accordingly** - Participants indicated that while increases may have an impact on them, they could budget accordingly. Some participants shared that user fee increases may decrease their use of some services, but that they would prioritize within their budget how they would like to spend on discretionary services.
- + **Increased fees would cost people more and could become a burden** - Participants shared that increased user fees would increase costs in general, resulting in less money for them. Participants noted that increased fees could become a burden depending on the degree to which they increase.

Participants also shared thoughts on those who might be most impacted by increased fees and other considerations. These included:

- + **Vulnerable/marginalized/low-income community members** - Participants felt that vulnerable populations, specifically low-income populations, would be significantly impacted by user fee increases.
- + **Children, youth and families** - Participants noted that children, youth and families may be impacted by increased user fees. Participants noted that they may not be able to take their children to activities in the community as much, with participants noting that it may entirely eliminate their participation. Some noted that they would like to see fees kept low for families with children.
- + **Ensure access for those who face barriers to entry** - Participants expressed support for equitable user fee models that would ensure access for those facing barriers, specifically low-income residents, seniors, families, children and youth, individuals with disabilities, etc. Participants noted that the City needs to prioritize making sure that there are ways that these fees can be reduced or eliminated for people for whom they would be a barrier to entry, specifically for those using transit. This would be achieved through robust and easy-to-access programs for reduced fees. Some noted that they would like to see an increased eligibility/definition used for low-income households/individuals with a different user fee scale to keep facilities accessible, as many people are currently priced out.

Neither comfortable or uncomfortable with increasing user fees

Participants support for and other considerations around user fee increases include:

- + **Support pay for use/keeping it fair** - Participants expressed support for pay for use models, which they perceived to be “more fair than expecting everyone to subsidize through their taxes so users get cheaper rates. Users should be expected to carry more of the cost.”
- + **Gives me more choice** - Participants noted that they would be okay with user fee increases, even if it has some impacts to their ability to participate in certain services, because it gives them the choice to determine if and how they allocate their spending (something that taxes don't permit for).

While some participants indicated they were neither comfortable or uncomfortable increasing user fees, some expressed that that they would not support user fee increases for the following reasons:

- + **Increase in user fees would lead to a reduction in service usage** - Participants noted that if user fees were to increase, many people would have to make tough choices and use services less in order to live within their means. Participants also shared that they would likely opt for private services instead of City services.
- + **Reduced quality of life** - Participants felt that increasing fees to recreation centres could create a barrier for healthy living. While attractions could be considered discretionary, culture is an important piece of balanced living.
- + **Create further access barriers (affordability and accessibility)** - Participants noted that increasing user fees would make an already expensive service that much more difficult for people to access, especially with the current rising cost of living. Some noted that the City needs to ensure that services remain affordable. Impacts to vulnerable populations, specifically low-income populations, would be significantly impacted by user fee increases.

Uncomfortable with increasing user fees

For those opposed to user fee increases, we heard the following reasons:

- + **Unfair and unaffordable** - Some participants saw these increases as unfair and unaffordable given current fiscal pressures such as inflation, wage stagnation, etc. Participants shared that increases in user fees would make them worse off, with

participants noting that they are already experiencing significant financial stresses. People expressed frustration with the City considering these options.

- + **User fees are already very high/already pay thorough taxes** - Participants expressed that user fees are already very high in the city, with the fees increasing steadily over the years. Participants shared frustrations with the potential for increased user fees given that they felt they had already paid for these services through increased property taxes.
- + **Costs of services increasing, but quality decreasing** - Participants noted that user fees continue to increase, but the quality of services is decreasing. Some shared that they felt current service levels were very poor, citing unsafe transit and recreational centres, poor transit routes, etc. Participants felt that these service issues would need to be addressed/improved before they would pay more to access these services. If user fees were to increase without these service improvements, participants shared that they would no longer use the services and would find alternatives in the community.
- + **Reduced quality of life and standard of living** - Participants noted that increased user fees would lead to a reduction in their quality of life (e.g., decreased mental, social and physical well-being, or general standard of living). Some felt that Edmonton may become a less vibrant and desirable city to live in as increased user fees could result in lower levels of safety, increased crime, etc. Some noted that they would look to move outside of the city.
- + **Impact budget decisions** - Participants felt that increases in user fees would impact their personal and family budgets. This could result in having less disposable income to spend elsewhere in the city and a need to make more difficult decisions on how to allocate their money.
- + **Increase barriers to access services** - Participants shared that they would no longer be able to access services that they currently use, or would have more limited access. Some shared that they are already unable to use these services due to high user fee costs, and that further user fee increases would cement their inability to access these services.

Participants also shared their concerns that, while an increase in user fees may not impact them, it could impact others, including:

- + **Vulnerable/marginalized/low-income community members** - Participants noted that while they may not be impacted by user fee increases, they were worried about others in their community who would not be able to afford these increases (e.g., those with low incomes, seniors, families with children, etc.). Some participants

noted that flat user fee increase puts an increased financial burden on those who can afford it the least.

- + **Children, youth and families** - Some participants shared that they would no longer be able to afford to take their children to recreation centres or events in the community. Some felt that increases in transit fees would also impact children and youths' ability to attend school and access community programs and services after school.
- + **Seniors** - Some participants, many of whom identified as being seniors, shared that they had a fixed income and that they would not be able to bear the costs of increased user fees. As such, some noted that they would no longer be able to access services.

Reduce existing City services

Comfortable with decreasing service levels

- + **Support of reducing hours** - Participants felt that adjustments to service hours/services could help to produce cost savings for the City and that people would support reductions as long as services are still accessible and needs are being met. There was a range of responses as to where people would personally explore service reductions, but participants shared that any changes should be done in a way to ensure optimal access for most people. Reducing service hours so facilities are strategically open during their greatest hours of use (demand) was important. Participants wanted to ensure that hours are reflecting those who are working during the week and would like to see longer evening and weekend hours.
- + **Live within our means** - Participants shared that while service reductions would impact them or be undesirable, they recognized a need to cut back to balance the budget and are willing to reduce service levels to balance costs.
- + **Reductions in non-essential areas are okay** - Participants noted that reductions in "non-essential" areas would be supported, although perspectives on what was considered as "non-essential" varied. Some participants saw non-essential services as being services/programs outside the scope of municipal governments work (e.g., homelessness).

Participants also shared the following items the City should be considering when determining if and how to reduce services:

- + **Focus on essential/core services** - Participants noted that they would like to see the City focus on essential services and not see reductions in essential/core services. There was no standard definition for essential/core services. While most participants often referred to police, emergency services and road maintenance as essential/core services, some participants included parks and infrastructure investments that support economic growth in their definitions.
- + **Provide value for the majority** - Participants felt that the City should be focused on providing value to the majority of Edmontonians and reduce service levels in areas that are less critical to them.
- + **Seek out efficiencies and innovation** - Some participants noted that the City should spend more time seeking efficiencies to address shortfalls in the planning and development process. Participants noted they would like to see the City cut “red tape” before service reductions. Others noted that evaluations or usage studies should be done to help make evidence-based decisions on what services could be reduced or cut, or what services/programs are being duplicated at other levels of government or in the private sector. People noted that the City should consider how to generate more revenue (e.g. selling land and assets that are not core to the City's needs or business).
- + **Determine who is best positioned to provide services/who is responsible** - Participants felt that the City needs to determine if it should be the one providing services. Participants noted that sometimes the service should be the responsibility of other levels of government, or that the private sector could provide the service more efficiently.
- + **Use of tech/online services** - Participants noted that the City can look to make service reductions by providing more services online. Participants felt that most things can be done virtually or over the phone, meaning reducing in-person hours/services is an option. Some noted that many services are already online and in-person services are redundant. People noted that in order to do this, the City may need to invest in its online infrastructure.

Neither comfortable or uncomfortable with decreasing service levels

- + **Depends on the service** - Participants noted that impacts stemming from potential service reductions would be dependent on the service and the degree to which it

would be reduced. Participants wanted more information on potential reductions that are being considered.

- + **Reduce hours within reason-** Participants noted that they may be willing to see reduction in hours for services if reductions were done in a "reasonable way." Participants noted that it would be important to reduce service hours so facilities are strategically open during their greatest hours of use/demand. Some wanted to ensure that hours reflect those who are working during the week and would like to see longer evening and weekend hours.

Participants shared the following feedback about how participants feel service-level reductions might impact them and others in the community:

- + **Vulnerable/marginalized/low-income community members** - Participants noted that while shifting services online may result in cost savings, it could reduce access to vulnerable community members who need them most. In-person offerings should be focused on services that these community members rely on.
- + **Lower quality of life and economic growth** - Participants felt the changes would make Edmonton a less liveable city and that it could have further impacts on its growth and development in the long term.
- + **Impacts to accessibility and affordability** - Participants shared that further reductions in service levels would impact their ability to access and use services. Participants referenced higher fees and the impacts this would have on top of reduced access. Some participants shared that they currently cannot afford these services.

Participants shared the following information about what the City should be thinking about when determining if and how to reduce services:

- + **Planning, efficiencies and innovation** - Participants felt services should be reviewed by how any proposed changes will affect those using or needing the service. Some felt that efficiencies should be sought from technology and salary levels (in line with the private sector) and that this should be evaluated on an ongoing basis. Further, many shared that they felt decisions need to be supported by usage data to ensure if, how and to what degree service levels should be reduced. Some participants felt that the City needs to do more work to identify where it is doing things it doesn't need to do and stop doing them.
- + **Use technology/most services online already** - Participants noted that the City can look to make service reductions by leveraging available technology to provide

services online. Participants felt that most things can be done virtually or over the phone, so reducing in-person hours/services is an option.

- + **We can do less** - These participants noted that many City programs and services are not a municipal mandate. They shared their view that the City has delved into too many side projects and humanitarian projects.

Uncomfortable with decreasing service levels

Participants who were opposed to service level reductions, shared the following reasons why:

- + **Services have already been significantly reduced** - Participants noted that they have already seen reductions in services being provided, with many services being provided at below acceptable quality. Some noted that further reducing service levels would make it even more difficult for people to access them, or would severely diminish already poor-quality services. Other participants shared that they do not use or have stopped using City services because of perceived poor quality. It was noted that the city needs more services, and that services are already underfunded and have not kept up with city growth. Participants shared that reducing services would be a poor option as the city continues to grow.

Participants shared the following information about how they feel service closures might impact them and others in the community:

- + **Impact on my quality of life and well-being** - Some participants shared that a reduction or closure of services would not serve Edmontonians well, with some noting that these options would impact their quality of life and overall well-being.
- + **Significant impacts to accessibility and affordability** - Some participants felt that if the City closed services, the services wouldn't be there when they are needed. Further, some felt that this would result in less access to services and longer wait times to access those services. Participants noted that they work odd hours and appreciate the centres' current operating hours. Some felt that facility hours are already limited and that further reductions would result in people with full-time jobs having difficulty accessing them.
- + **This will impact some more than others** - Participants acknowledged while they may be less impacted by service reductions, they were concerned about others being negatively impacted. They noted that those who rely heavily on City services

would most feel the impacts. More general comments shared by participants noted that vulnerable populations, specifically low-income populations, would be significantly impacted by service level reductions. Participants noted that reducing spending on social programs is unfair to people with lower monthly incomes.

- + **Employment and the economy** - Participants expressed concerns that closures or reduced service hours could lead to more precarious, part-time work, layoffs and increased unemployment for those employed in these facilities. Consequently, some noted that this could result in fewer Edmontonians being able to pay for higher user fees and property taxes, and lead to a reduced quality of life for some.

Participants shared the following information about what the City should be thinking about when determining if and how to reduce services:

- + **Focus on core/essential services** - Participants shared that they would like to see the City focus on core/essential services and not see reductions in essential/core services. There was no common definition for essential/core services; it most often referred to police, emergency services and road maintenance. Some participants discussed things like parks and infrastructure investments that support economic growth in their definitions of core/essential services.
- + **Focus on value for the majority** - Participants noted a need for the City to consider what might be "nice to have" and what is a "must have" during tough budget cycles, with people noting they are supportive of reducing services in order to balance the budget. Some participants shared that the City should be focused on providing value to the majority of Edmontonians and reduce service levels in areas that are less critical to the majority of citizens. Some shared that a reasonable service level obviously needs to be maintained; however, demand will dictate those service levels.
- + **Determine who is best positioned to provide services/who is responsible** - Participants felt that the City should be focused on maintaining the infrastructure it has and not on other governments' areas of responsibility like social housing. Some felt that the City should determine who might be best situated to provide certain services (e.g., private sector, other levels of government, etc.).
- + **Planning, efficiencies and innovation** - Participants want the City to seek efficiencies to address shortfalls in the planning and development process, and service delivery. Some shared that they would like to see improved business practices before service reductions, which could be pursued by seeking out and reducing cut "red tape." Participants noted that evaluations or usage studies should

be done to help make evidence-based decisions on what services could be reduced or cut, or what services/programs are being duplicated at levels of government or in the private sector. Some felt that the City could leverage innovation to do more with less before looking at service reductions, or look to reduce projects that were perceived to be inefficient (e.g., the LRT). "With advances in technology and with some creativity, delivery of service should be able to be optimized at existing or higher levels without resorting to reductions in service levels."

- + **Use technology/online services** - Participants noted that the City could look to make service reductions by leveraging available technology to provide services online. Participants felt that most things could be done virtually or over the phone, so reducing in-person hours/services is an option.

End services and programs

Comfortable with closing existing services and programs

The following reasons were shared in response to those who indicated that they generally support closing services along with reasons why:

- + **Effective way to save money** - Participants noted that they support closures or felt it would help to save money or reduce raising tax obligations. Some felt that ending services is necessary to balance the budget.
- + **Don't use/rarely use services** - Participants indicated that they wouldn't be impacted by closures because they rarely use City services.
- + **Taxes, affordability and choice** - Participants noted they would support/prefer closing programs and services if it resulted in seeing their taxes go down. This was also true for people who said they enjoyed accessing City programs and services. People noted that they are preoccupied with meeting their core needs (e.g., housing, food, etc.) and see certain programs and services as a "luxury" (i.e., nice to have) rather than a "necessity" (i.e., must have). Participants felt that closing existing services and programs would allow them to reduce their tax obligations, while increasing their ability to choose how to spend their disposable income on services and programs that would benefit them most.
- + **Doing without, prioritizing needs** - Participants noted that the City is facing some tough choices. Some acknowledged that while it would be tough to lose services and programs, that it is necessary to balance the budget and create a sustainable level

of services. Participants noted that perhaps closed programs and services could be reestablished at a time when the City has more resources.

- + **Will adjust and find alternatives** - If closures occur, participants indicated that they would be able to adjust their use of these programs/services or that they would find alternatives, including using services in other communities and from the private sector.
- + **What's in the best interest for all Edmontonians** - Participants noted that the City should focus on ensuring decisions surrounding closures support the best interests of the majority of Edmontonians. Some participants felt that the interests of small minority groups often seem to have the loudest voice.
- + **Find better usage and efficiencies** - Participants felt there is a need for the City to find efficiencies. This includes being able to assess and evaluate service usage to make evidence-based and data-informed decisions about potential service closures.
- + **Balancing municipal, provincial and federal responsibilities** - Participants shared that the City should be aware of where their role and responsibilities in providing services are in agreement with other orders of government. There was recognition that some services should be left to other levels of government (e.g., housing, social programs).
- + **Close services that aren't viable** - Some participants noted that services should be self-sustaining and expressed support for closing programs/services that are underused, expensive to operate, or realize few community benefits for the collective investments being made.
- + **Find third parties to take on programs and services** - Participants noted that the City could try to find other organizations (e.g., private businesses or non-profits) to provide different services and programs. Participants shared a desire for the City to assess whether or not they are the right service provider in some instances, or if there are others who could do the work more efficiently.

The following information was shared about how participants felt service closures might impact others in the community:

- + **Impacts to community vibrancy, well-being and quality of life** - Participants shared concerns that closures would impact community vibrancy, well-being and overall quality of life.
- + **Consider impacts to vulnerable/marginalized/low-income community members** - Participants shared concern regarding how closures may impact vulnerable/marginalized community members, specifically community members

who are considered low income and may depend on various programs and services offered by the City. Some participants referenced concerns about closures negatively impacting children and youth who rely on leisure services to engage in their community, especially those from low-income/vulnerable families.

Neither comfortable or uncomfortable with closing existing services and programs

The following information was shared about how participants felt service closures might impact others in the community:

- + **Community vibrancy, well-being and quality of life** - Participants felt that closing existing services and programs would impact community vibrancy, well-being and overall quality of life. Some felt that this would make Edmonton a less desirable place to live.
- + **Vulnerable/marginalized/low-income community members** - Participants noted concern around how closures may impact vulnerable/marginalized community members, specifically community members who are considered low income and may depend on various programs and services offered by the City. Participants also noted concerns about closures impacting families, children and youth.
- + **Reduced choice and availability of services** - Participants noted that closing services would limit the types of services they could attend, while also potentially increasing wait times when trying to access services.

Preferences related to closing of programs and services

Programs and services	Where people would prefer NOT to see closures	Where people would prefer to see closures
Recreation Centres and Leisure Programs	Participants noted they would be uncomfortable getting rid of recreational programs and services. They advised that the City should not cancel leisure access programs and services. People felt that services are already poor and need to be improved, not reduced or closed. Some noted that leisure and recreation programs should remain open as many people use and rely on them, especially families.	Participants prefer seeing closures in recreation centres, leisure programs, social services, transit and bike lanes. Participants indicated that they would more readily accept reductions/closures in social programs (e.g., homelessness initiatives) and recreation centres/leisure programs. Some noted they would like to see reductions/closures in LRT investments, bike lanes, Vision Zero and climate change initiatives.
Business Programs and Services	Participants indicated their support for business programs and services to be maintained. Some voiced a desire to see	Participants prefer seeing closures in business services. Participants indicated they would rather see reductions/closures

	<p>business support continue to help rebuild and grow the local economy. Cuts in these areas could lead to businesses leaving the community to set up shop elsewhere. Participants noted that this is a fine line.</p>	<p>in business support services and programs. People shared that they felt that the City should not be ensuring that businesses succeed. They expressed that businesses should be left to succeed on their own. Participants advised that, rather than supporting businesses through services and programs, the City should make efforts to support businesses by reducing red tape, making it easier to get licences, etc.</p> <p>Participants noted that they wouldn't like to see closures anywhere, but felt that if closures were to occur they should target/be limited to closures in business support services and programs.</p>
<p>Libraries and Attractions</p>	<p>Some participants shared that they prefer not to see closures in libraries and attractions. Some wanted to see libraries and attractions (e.g., Aviation Museum) remain open.</p>	<p>No specifics identified.</p>

We also heard the following about making tough choices and trade-offs from participants. A general theme for participants responses were that we can do without, prioritize need and make evidence-based decisions:

- + **Adjusting usage if closures occur** - Participants shared that they would use other services or just not have services.
- + **Focus on benefits for all Edmontonians** - Participants noted that the City should focus on ensuring decisions surrounding closures support the best interests of the majority of Edmontonians. Some participants shared that they felt the interests of small interest groups often had the loudest voice.
- + **Prioritize needs and focus on essentials** - These comments indicated that it is important for the City to consider what might be "nice to have" and what is a "must have" during tough budget cycles. This included mentions of there being unnecessary programs/services currently operating. Participants expressed that losing services might not be great or desirable, but there is a need to determine where to make cuts, with a strong preference to safeguard essential services.
- + **Usage and efficiencies** - Participants felt that assessing and evaluating service usage to make evidence-based and data-informed decisions about what service closures would be the most beneficial to the community is important. Participants

noted that it might be important to close underutilized services and understand if the City needs to increase fees.

- + **Balancing municipal, provincial and federal responsibilities** - Participants noted that the City of Edmonton should be aware of what their role and responsibilities are in concert with other governments. There was recognition that in the City some services should be left to other levels of government (e.g., housing, social programs).
- + **Close services that aren't viable** - Participants noted that closing programs/services that are not financially viable without taxpayer support (e.g., underused, expensive to operate and have little value to the community) will benefit taxpayers. Participants felt that the City should look at closing older, underused facilities when making these decisions.
- + **Find third parties to take on programs and services** - Participants felt that the City could try to find other organizations (e.g., private businesses or non-profits) to provide different services and programs. Participants mentioned that the City should assess whether or not they are the right service provider in some instances, or if there are others who could do the work more efficiently.

Uncomfortable with closing existing services and programs

The following information was shared about how participants felt service closures might impact themselves and others in the community:

- + **Necessary for community vibrancy, well-being and quality of life** - Participants felt that programs and services offered by the City are an integral part of maintaining community vibrancy, well-being and a good quality/standard of living. Participants noted shared concerns that closing these programs and services could result in worsening community outcomes (e.g., less social connections, worsening mental and physical well-being, increased crime, etc.). Some noted that closures in these programs and services could result in them moving away from the city, while others felt that their quality of life (and others) would be impacted. Some felt that Edmonton has already lost many programs/services (some of these being at a provincial and federal level) and that any further cuts or closures would make it difficult for Edmontonians who rely on these services.
- + **More barriers/reduced access to services** - Participants noted that closures would result in greater barriers for Edmontonians in accessing services that they need and use.

- + **Will depend on who is using the services** - When considering who closures may impact most, participants felt it would be specific to the people who are using or rely on the programs/services that might be closed, while other participants noted that they may or do know individuals and families who would be impacted by closures.
- + **Vulnerable/marginalized/low-income community members** - Participants shared concerns around how closures may impact vulnerable/marginalized community members, specifically community members who are considered low income and may depend on various programs and services offered by the City. Others referenced concerns regarding closures negatively impacting children and youth who rely on leisure services to engage in their community and supporting after-school programming, especially children and youth from low-income/vulnerable families. Participants noted concerns about closures impacting families.
- + **Employment** - Participants shared that closures could impact individuals' employment and livelihood, including City employees losing their jobs.

We also heard the following about making tough choices and trade-offs from participants. General themes for these responses are that we can do without, should prioritize needs and make evidence-based decisions:

- + **Adjusting usage and finding alternative programs and services if closures occur** - Participants noted they would adjust their use of these programs/services or find alternative services and programs, but some noted these alternatives might cost more.
- + **Prioritize needs and benefits** - Participants felt there is a need to focus on and ensure that decisions regarding closures support the best interests of the majority of Edmontonians.
- + **Usage and efficiencies** - Participants shared that the City should look at the usage of facilities when making decisions about closures. Participants felt that if the service is being underutilized and the costs outweigh the benefits, the service could be closed. Others noted that it is not okay just to close programs to balance the budget. We also heard a desire for the City to find efficiencies. For example, can services be done online? If so, in-person services could be reduced.
- + **Find third parties to take on/support programs and services** - Participants felt that the City could try to find other organizations (e.g., private businesses or non-profits) to provide different services and programs, or to work with these third parties to try to reduce costs.

Tough Choices for the Capital Budget

Over the next four years, the City will be building over \$4 billion of already-approved construction (capital) projects. Many will transform our city, like expansions of our LRT network and the Yellowhead Trail. However, there is relatively little funding available for new capital projects. One option to build more new capital projects would be to take on more debt. We anticipate that our capital budget will need to focus on renewing our current infrastructure for the next four years. The City will need to make some tough choices about which infrastructure to keep and maintain, as well as explore a tax levy to fund these renewal projects.

During this engagement, we invited Edmontonians to think about how the City of Edmonton balances the capital budget. Three options and trade-offs were shared with participants that the City has to consider in order to maintain current service levels and fulfil existing approved commitments to several major construction projects.

We asked people to share their level of comfort with each choice and, for those who were interested in sharing more, how those choices would impact them. The options provided for consideration included:

- + **Adding tax-supported debt to fund new capital projects** - This would increase the debt-servicing costs in our operating budget (i.e., we would need to increase property taxes to pay for the cost of borrowing) and could potentially affect the City's credit rating, which allows us to borrow at very low rates only available to governments.
- + **Dedicating a tax levy for infrastructure renewal** - Similar to the Neighbourhood Renewal Levy, the City would collect an additional tax levy from property owners to fund high-priority renewal work across the city
- + **Closing aging facilities with low attendance** - This would mean looking at closing or selling smaller, aging facilities that aren't used as much. The costs to repair or rebuild these aging structures are substantial.

What we heard in response to each of these options is summarized below. This data primarily comes from the street surveys, the Make It Count Survey through Engaged Edmonton, small group discussions and online workshops. General comfort levels were collected through online engagement, and the potential impacts of pulling each of these levers on Edmontonians was gathered through our in-depth discussions with core stakeholders and community partners during workshops and interviews.

Adding Tax-Supported Debt for New Projects

During our in-depth conversations with community partners and core stakeholders, the following themes emerged about how pulling this lever would potentially impact Edmontonians.

Those who indicated that they would support adding tax-supported debt, shared the following:

- + **Leverage debt with caution** - Participants shared concerns about inflation. They also shared that it makes sense to leverage debt if and when it makes sense (e.g., if the City can lock in good interest rates), otherwise the City should use caution when leveraging debt.
- + **Renew existing assets first** - Participants noted that the City should place an emphasis on renewing existing assets rather than building new ones.
- + **Cost-benefit analysis** - Participants expressed that any debt that the City takes on should be supported by the benefits it could present. Those who supported adding tax-supported debt assumed that the benefit of doing so exceeds the cost of borrowing.
- + **Prioritize transit** - Participants also shared that it is important for the City to ensure transit lines and networks make sense for those who rely on them to get to their jobs. They advised that access to jobs is an important part of poverty reduction.

Those who indicated that they would not support adding tax-supported debt, shared the following reasons:

- + **Seek efficiencies first** - These participants shared a desire for the City to look for other ways to increase efficiencies before leveraging additional debt. They suggested avenues such as moving towards a competitive bid process, putting projects to tender and generally improving efficiencies in how the work is completed (including qualifying who does the work).
- + **Conduct research on needs/impacts** - Participants expressed a desire for the City to think critically about the need for new projects prior to approving them or leveraging debt to fund them. Specific suggestions included a need to ensure the data that decisions for new capital projects (e.g. transportation studies) are based

on is current and determine whether the resulting impacts are aligned with City priorities.

- + **Apply equity lens to decisions** - Participants noted that new capital projects can create inequities between neighbourhoods. Some shared that the City needs to think critically about how we create a city we actually want to live in.
- + **High inflation environment** - Participants shared concerns about the level of debt people are taking on across the city. These participants shared a need for the City to consider what is nice to have versus what is essential, indicating their hesitation to take on more debt in a high inflation environment.
- + **Focus on repurposing existing spaces** - Participants shared that the City should consider how to use empty spaces to provide the services we need (e.g., retrofitting existing buildings to address emerging community needs) before building new facilities.
- + **Depends on the project** - Participants shared that it is hard to answer this question without details about the individual projects that the debt would fund. These participants shared that funding of new projects should focus on areas where there is investment in and immediate revenue back to the City that aligns with City priorities.

Adding a Tax Levy for Renewal Infrastructure

During our in-depth conversations with community partners and core stakeholders, we heard from the business community a desire for the City to look at ways to become more efficient and “work smarter not harder,” and be innovative and develop creative solutions to budgetary constraints. We also heard the following themes from community partners about how pulling this lever would potentially impact Edmontonians.

Those who indicated that they would support collecting a tax levy for renewal infrastructure, shared the following reasons:

- + **Best option** - We heard that, when compared to the other levers under consideration for balancing the capital budget, adding a tax levy for renewal infrastructure is more appealing than adding debt.
- + **Local impact** - Participants shared that applying a tax levy makes sense when the project only affects one community or if there is a high amount of public support for the project.
- + **Community impacts** - We also heard that it is important to ensure communities are safe and maintained to a base level, noting that fire hazards, sidewalks, roads

etc. should be maintained, ensuring that these efforts improve accessibility without “gentrifying” the neighbourhood or displacing residents.

- + **Corporate partnerships** - We heard that applying a tax levy would make sense in new build areas with funding from corporations or developers (e.g., requiring community art).

Those who indicated that they would not support collecting a tax levy for renewal infrastructure, shared the following reasons:

- + **Reduce existing spending** - Participants shared a desire for the City to rein in spending on projects and look for efficiencies before looking at a tax levy. They advised that the City should look at individual projects and prioritize the areas that will generate more taxes and revenue over time.
- + **Greater community benefits** - Participants shared that they would not support collecting a tax levy for projects that are “larger” than the community (e.g., new rec centre) and the benefits are felt by others outside those paying the levy.
- + **Equity** - Participants shared that these decisions need to be made through an equity lens (e.g consider “What neighbourhood is this tax going to? Who can afford it and who cannot?”). These participants suggested that the City explore using a progressive sliding scale for a tax levy. We also heard that adding a tax levy is similar in impact to a property tax increase and will impact tenants who will see higher rent increases.

Closing Aging Facilities

During our in-depth conversations with community partners and core stakeholders, we heard that decisions to close or sell aging facilities should undergo a cost-benefit analysis. Participants echoed that it was challenging to respond to this question without details about individual facilities, noting that the City would need to evaluate how they plan to replace services to those who rely on the programs/facilities being closed (e.g., ensure transit available to another facility that provides those services). We also heard the following themes from community partners about how pulling this lever would potentially impact Edmontonians.

Those who indicated that they would support closing or selling smaller, aging facilities, shared the following:

- + **Underused facilities** - Participants who supported this option to reduce costs shared that their support is contingent upon the City conducting a cost-benefit

analysis and ensuring that those buildings aren't being heavily utilized. Participants also indicated that this analysis should include consideration of the broad community impact and how closed services will be replaced or filled in other areas.

Those participants who indicated that they would not support closing or selling smaller, aging facilities, shared the following reasons:

- + **Maintaining culture** - Participants also noted that some of these facilities provide important gathering spaces and contribute to the maintenance and creation of our city culture ("what makes Edmonton Edmonton").
- + **Highly-used facilities** - Community partners and core stakeholders who participants in this engagement shared that they would not support closing aging facilities that are highly used or service a high-catchment area. We also heard that they would not support closing facilities in locations where people would otherwise not have access to the services provided by existing facilities.

