

# City of Belleville

Report No: AC-2023-06

Meeting Date: August 28, 2023



**To:** Mayor and Members of Council

**Department:** Finance

**Staff Contact:** Kyle Bertrand, Accounting Coordinator

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**Subject: 2024 Preliminary Capital Budget Survey Results**

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## Recommendation:

"THAT Council approve the recommendations of the Finance Committee as outlined in the Accounting Coordinator's Report No. AC-2023-06, and that the 2024 Capital Budget Guidelines be approved."

## Strategic Plan Alignment:

Infrastructure: Develop asset management strategies and programs to resolve delivery shortfalls and protect our investment in existing infrastructure

Infrastructure: Plan for and invest in new or expanded infrastructure to establish sufficient capacity to provide for growth of our community.

## Background:

The City's Budget & Financial Controls Policy outlines the responsibilities of the Finance Committee and Council relating to budget, which includes:

- Establishing and approving guidelines in advance of detailed budget preparation;
- Approving proposed level of public communication and engagement; and
- Review and debate budget submissions.

As part of the July 10, 2023 Regular Council meeting, the 2024 Capital Budget timeline and Public Engagement Communication Plan was approved as recommended by the Finance Committee. The plan included two surveys to be distributed to the public as follows:

- Survey #1 - to obtain feedback regarding capital spending priorities and overall approach to capital budget development. Results will be presented to the Finance Committee and Council to assist with the establishment of budgetary guidelines.

- Survey #2 - to obtain directed feedback on the preliminary draft capital budget by incorporating categorical results and funding plans. The survey results will be included at the Capital Budget meetings for Council's consideration.

Survey #1 went live on July 14th, followed by a media release and social media blasts inviting our residents to provide their feedback. Staff have considered the survey results to draft the 2024 Capital Budget guidelines, which were presented to the Finance Committee on August 17th. The Committee has recommended that Council approve the following guidelines:

1. Efforts should be made to apply all available Grant funds, where applicable, to the core infrastructure assets.
2. Staff bring forth a draft 2024 capital budget totaling between \$65 to \$70 million.
3. In the case of funding constraints, staff collectively defer capital projects in accordance with their corresponding prioritization and risk score, and that where these scores are equal, priority be given to core infrastructure assets.
4. Staff continue to bring forth strategies to bridge the infrastructure gap as noted in the 2022 Asset Management Plan, including the replenishment and growth of its asset management reserve funds.

### **Financial/Analysis:**

The survey was available for roughly four weeks and concluded August 10th with a total of 422 responses received. The “Phase 1: Public Engagement Report” and question results are attached, with some high-level observations noted below.

#### Demographic

While we did receive a good variety of responses, a majority of respondents were either homeowners or tenants living within the Belleville Urban boundary. Homeowners and tenants accounted for roughly 65% and 25% of responses, respectively, while the number of responses received from the Belleville Urban population made up nearly 80% of the total responses. There was however a better balance of responses received in terms of age group and household income.

#### Service Levels

When asked about the services provided by the City in relation to the taxes paid, there were a wide variety of responses received. The majority of respondents (35%) are comfortable with the current levels of service and taxation, while over 27% would be willing to pay higher taxes if it meant services increased. On the flip side, 18% would like to pay less taxes and are willing to have services decreased.

There were also 81 responses under the “Other” opinion, which included a section to provide comment. A variety of comments were received, ranging from broad comments about tax rates and service levels down to specific departments or initiatives being mentioned. The full list of those comments is attached.

#### User Fees

Participants were asked whether they would be in favor of user fees increases, and if so, which specific fees they would support increases to. While nearly 15% of the responses did not support

increases to any of the user fees, respondents were fairly supportive of increasing most fees, with the exception of Bag Tags. Apart from Bag Tags and Transit Fares, which received just slightly less support, potential increases to other user fees, including Dog Tags, Pools, and Recreation Programs, were supported by over 30% of respondents. Arenas and Sports Fields were the most supported areas, receiving support from over 40% and 50% of respondents, respectively.

### Asset Prioritization

When asked to prioritize the City's capital spending by department, respondents ranked the core infrastructure assets, defined as Roads, Water and Wastewater, as their top priorities. Water assets scored the highest by over a full point, at 9.32 out of 10, while Transportation and Wastewater assets were the only other areas to score above 8 points, at 8.13 and 8.24, respectively.

Trailing the core infrastructure just slightly and scoring about 7 points each were the Stormwater assets and City Facilities, with Fire and Police assets just behind, around the 6 point mark. The remaining categories, Fleet & Equipment, Information Technology, Library and Parking, received significantly lower scores, all finishing with 2 to 4 points.

Respondents further solidified their prioritization of assets when asked about which asset categories should be considered for further deferral to future years. The highest ranking asset, or the asset category respondents would most like to see differed, was the Parks and Recreation assets at 44%. Not far behind were the Fleet & Equipment and City Facility categories, both around the 30% mark, with the remaining categories falling below 15%. Core infrastructure assets were the lowest scoring categories indicating a reluctance to defer those projects.

This survey also provided staff an opportunity to engage the public on how we internally prioritize our capital projects. The survey included the following table and asked residents to rank the Criteria in the order of importance to them.

Based on the results, it appears our current point allocations are well aligned with how respondent felt. Public Safety and Service Levels ranked first and second, with Strategic Initiatives and Financial Impact nearly tied for third. Staff will continue to monitor the internal versus external priorities and ensure any deviations are addressed in our financial policies.

### AMP Alignment

Community feedback is not the first time that core infrastructure assets have been mentioned as higher priority assets. The City's 2022 Asset Management Plan (AMP) identified that the City's annual investment in growth-related and replacement of capital infrastructure should be \$78.1 million. The City's average annual investment shortfall is estimated to be \$21.4 million and is primarily being driven by the core infrastructure assets; Transportation, Water and Wastewater.

Those primary drivers are well aligned with the public feedback that was received, indicating that respondents are supportive of investments in these key asset categories. Coincidentally, these asset categories carry some of the highest risk for the City and ensuring they stay in good condition needs to be a focus of Council.

Staff are recommending to help address this infrastructure gap by bringing forth a 2024 draft capital budget between \$65 to \$70 million, a modest increase from the \$59 million approved for 2023. Furthermore, an increase in the contribution to capital reserve funds will be brought forward for Council's consideration as part of the 2024 operating budget to help replenish the City's asset management reserve fund. This will assist in alleviating spikes in future capital budgets and narrowing the overall infrastructure funding gap.

The City has recently began the process to update the Corporate AMP, with expectations of a June 2024 deliverable date. The updated AMP will continue to provide guidance on the asset categories requiring further investment.

**Conclusion:**

THAT Council approve the 2024 Capital Budget Guidelines recommended by the Finance Committee, and as outlined in the Accounting Coordinator's Report No. AC-2023-06.

**Attachments:**

[2024 Capital Budget Survey Results #1](#)

**Approved by:**

Brandon Ferguson, Director of Finance, Treasurer  
Brienne MacNevin, Treasury - Deputy Treasurer  
Matt MacDonald, Director Corporate Services  
Rod Bovay, Chief Administrative Officer

**Status:**

Approved - 22 Aug 2023  
Approved - 22 Aug 2023  
Approved - 22 Aug 2023  
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# 2024 Capital Budget

## Phase 1: Public Engagement Report

# Background & Objectives

## Background

A municipality's annual budget is an important policy document that dictates how the City will collect and allocate resources to best improve and maintain City services and infrastructure for the community.

The City of Belleville's budget is broken down into two components: capital and operating. While residents have always been welcome to take part in the budget process by providing their feedback to their council representatives, there has been a significant effort in recent years to encourage more thorough public engagement in the process.

In 2023, Finance engaged communications to craft educational messaging about the budget process. This involved building out a webpage and content with information around what each budget entails, and the approval process. With planning for the 2024 budget now underway, the goal is to focus more on further education and direct engagement.

Staff have decided to take a two-phase approach for the 2024 budget process, starting with the capital budget. The first phase of the process was a short, high-level Preliminary Capital Budget Survey to gauge residents capital spending priorities. Questions in the survey looked at ranking and prioritizing City infrastructure, current satisfaction levels of each, as well as areas and tolerance for increased/decreased infrastructure investment, to name a few. This phase also included development of a Capital Budget 101 document to provide a further breakdown of the process for residents.

The second phase in the engagement approach for capital will come closer to the finalization of the budget (around November). This will more specific look at the proposed capital budget which would be developed once the preliminary document is available. This survey would break down some of the budget items and allow residents to weigh in on the specific projects identified by staff in their draft budgets.

## Objectives

The goal behind this year's communications and engagement strategy is as follows:

- Provide residents with additional educational material and resources around the budget process.
- Encourage direct engagement from as many residents as possible.
- Provide council and staff with public feedback to help shape a budget and plan that best serves their residents.



# Engagement Strategy

## Timeline

- July – Public engagement plan and timeline approved by Finance Committee and Council. Survey launched and promoted.
- August – Preliminary public feedback presented to Finance Committee and Council. City staff obtain guidelines and considerations for budget preparation.
- October – Series of working group meetings with Executive Management Team and Finance Committee to develop draft budget.
- November – Draft capital budget posted for public feedback.
- December – Final presentation of public feedback and capital budget meetings, subsequent approval and adoption.



## Tactics

Communications used a number of channels to inform and engage the public through this first phase including:

- Budget Webpage
- Online Survey
- Budget 101 Document
- Project Email
- Comment Card Form
- Media Release
- Email to News Subscribers
- Website Alert
- Social Media
- Community Press Ad
- Belleville Updates Newsletter
- Marquee Signs

# Results & Metrics

Communications around Phase 1 and the Preliminary Capital Budget Survey have garnered the following results:

## Webpage

Total views of webpage during survey period (July 14-Aug. 9):

- Belleville.ca/Budget – 638 (380% traffic increase compared to previous period)
- Capital Budget 101 Page - 123
- News Release - 16

## Social Media

Social media metrics during survey period (July 14-Aug. 9):

- Facebook – 3 Posts Total with Average Reach of 1,288 and Engagement of 69
- Twitter – 3 Posts Total with Average Reach of 620 and Engagement of 22

## Digital

- Email to News Subscribers – Reached 245 Subscribers
- Belleville Updates Newsletter – Reached 129 Subscribers
- Marquee Sign (QSWC) –AADT of 22,000/Month

## Print

- Community Press Ad – Total Reach of Approx. 18,553 Belleville Households

The results above were collected using Google Analytics, Meta Business Suite, Twitter Analytics, iCreate reporting and annual average daily traffic (as last reported in 2014).

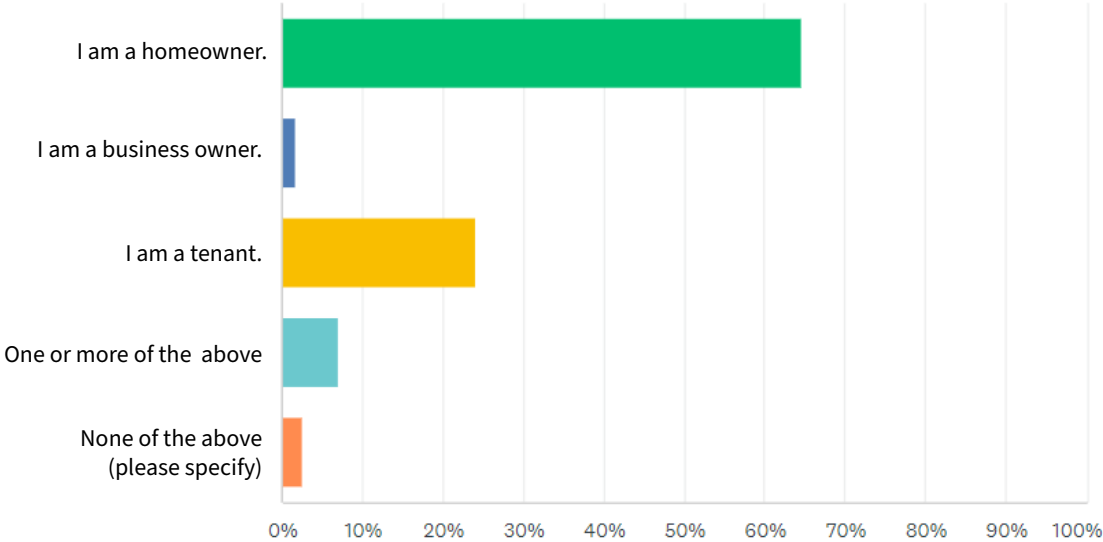




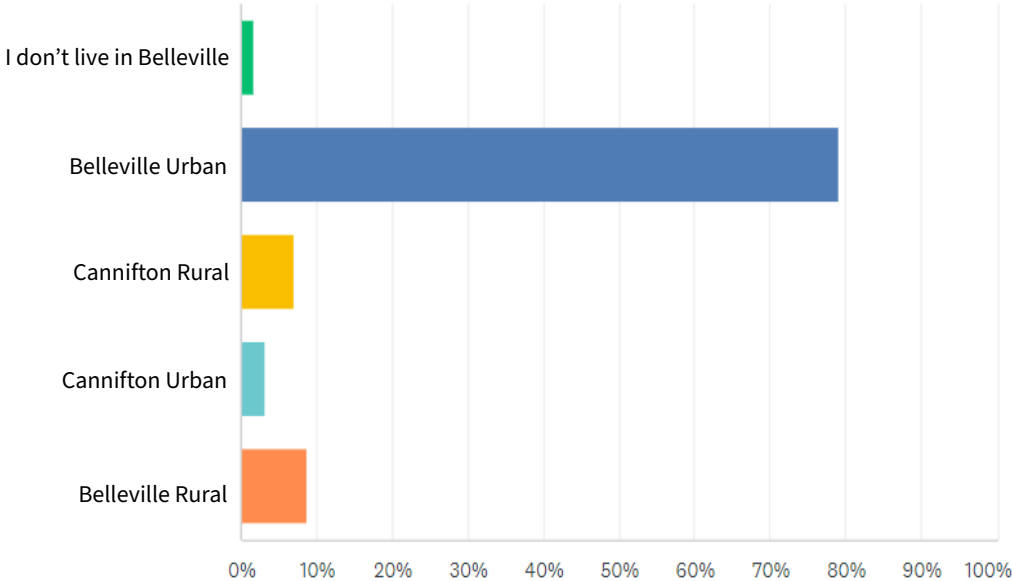
# Survey Summary

The Preliminary Capital Budget Survey ran from July 14 to Aug. 10. Below is a summary of the 422 responses received. Note: all comments for “please specify” under questions 1 and 8 can be found in Appendix A.

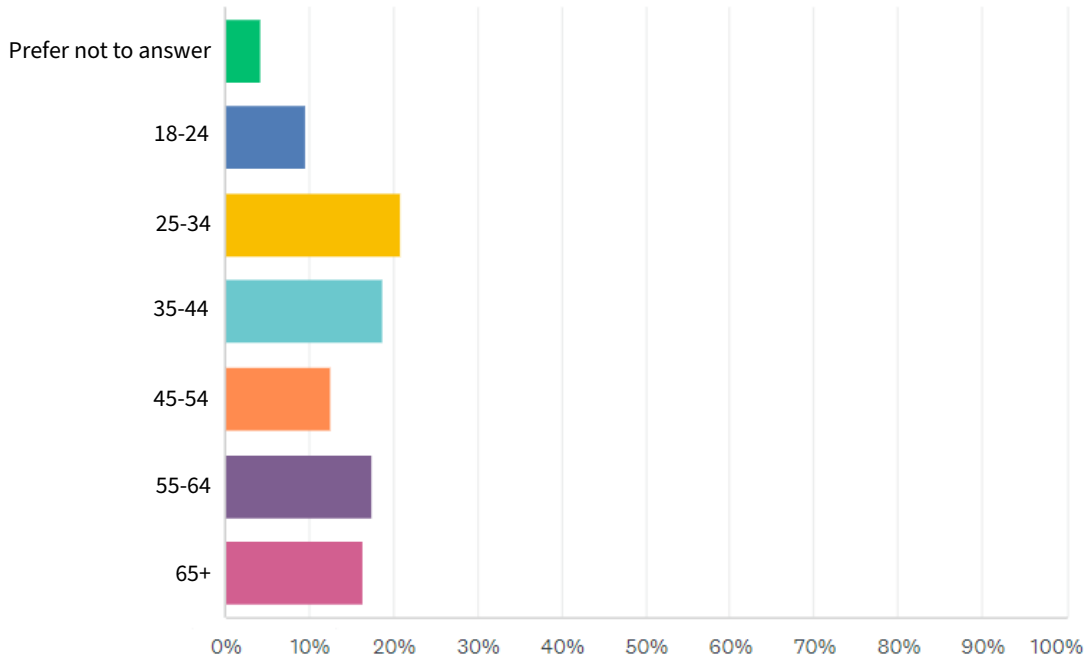
## Do you live and/or own a business in Belleville?



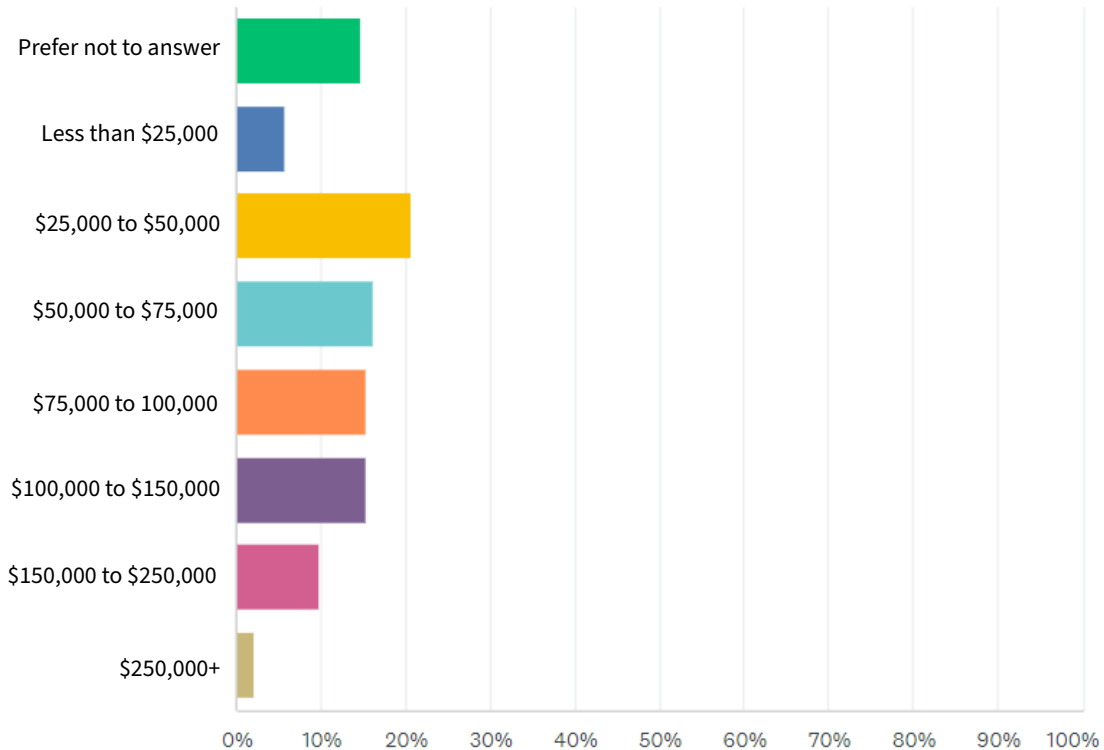
## Which tax billing area do you live in?



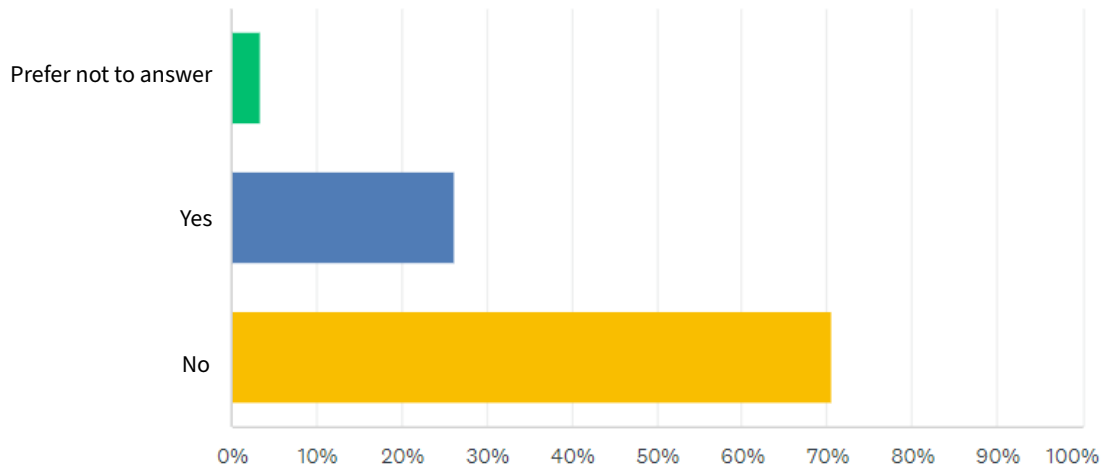
## How old are you?



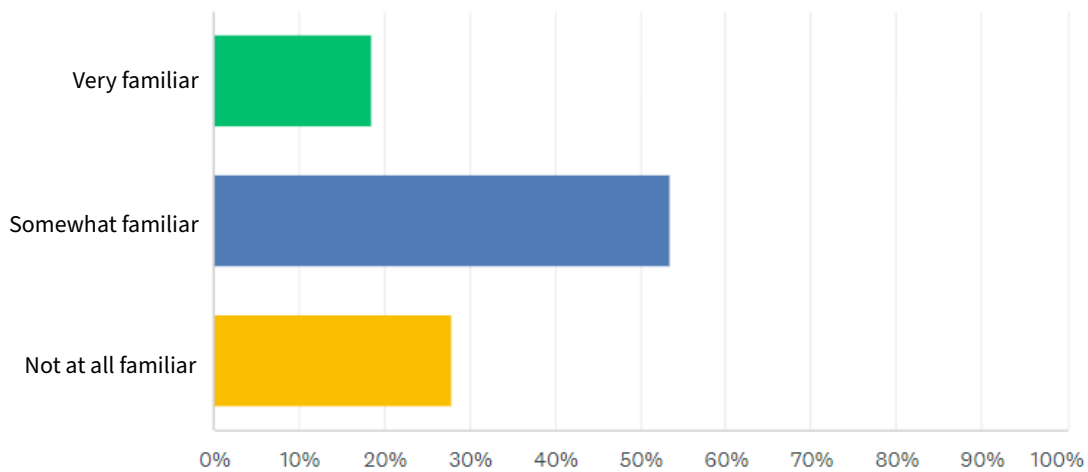
## What is your annual gross household income?



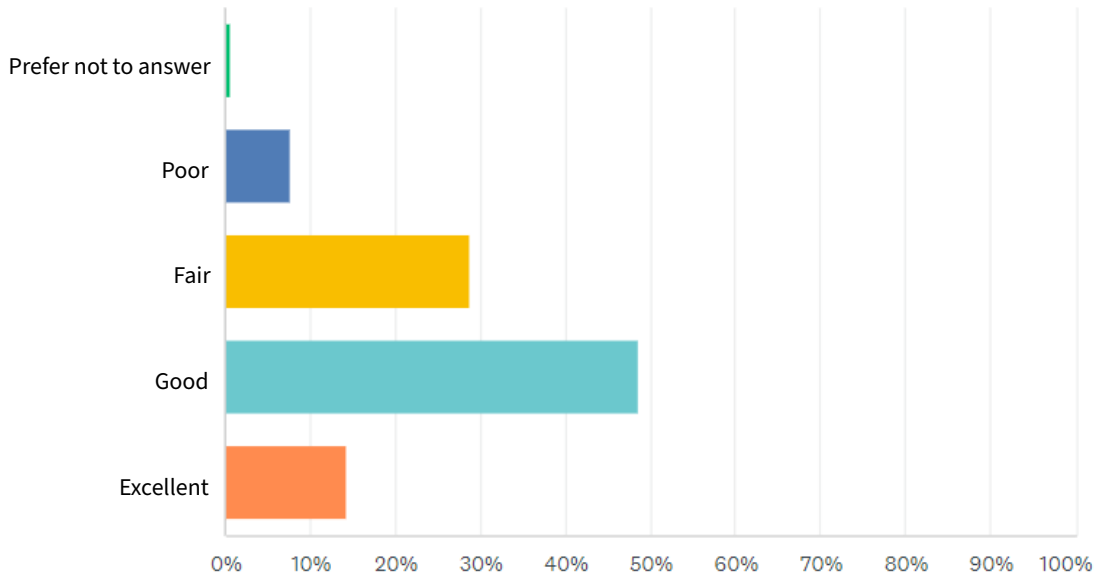
## Do you currently have any children under the age of 18 living in your household?



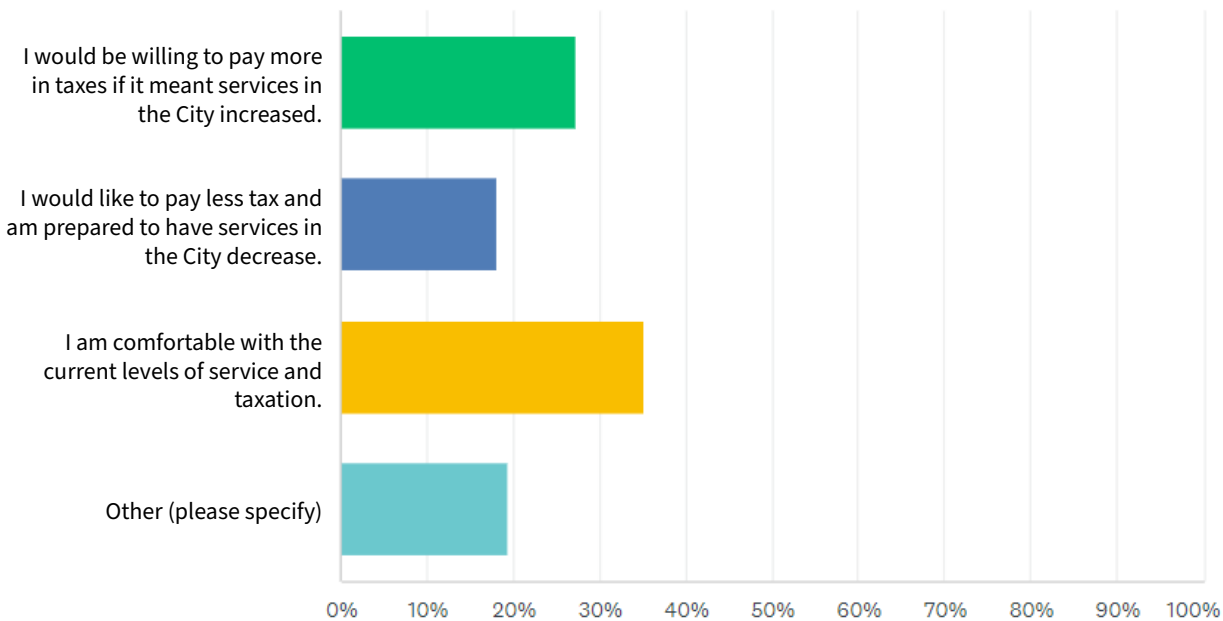
## How familiar are you with how the City develops the annual Capital Budget?



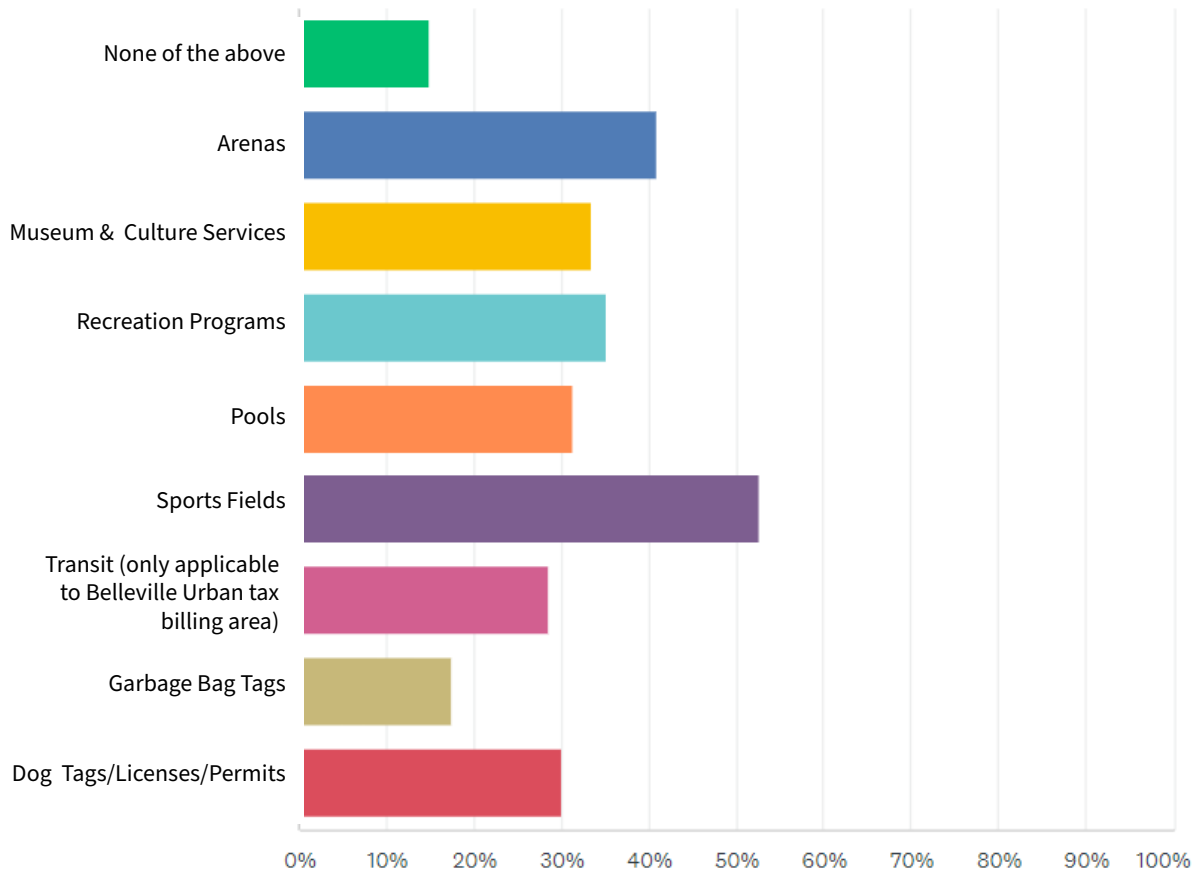
**Please think about the overall quality of life in the City of Belleville for you and your family. Would you say that the quality of life in the City is...**



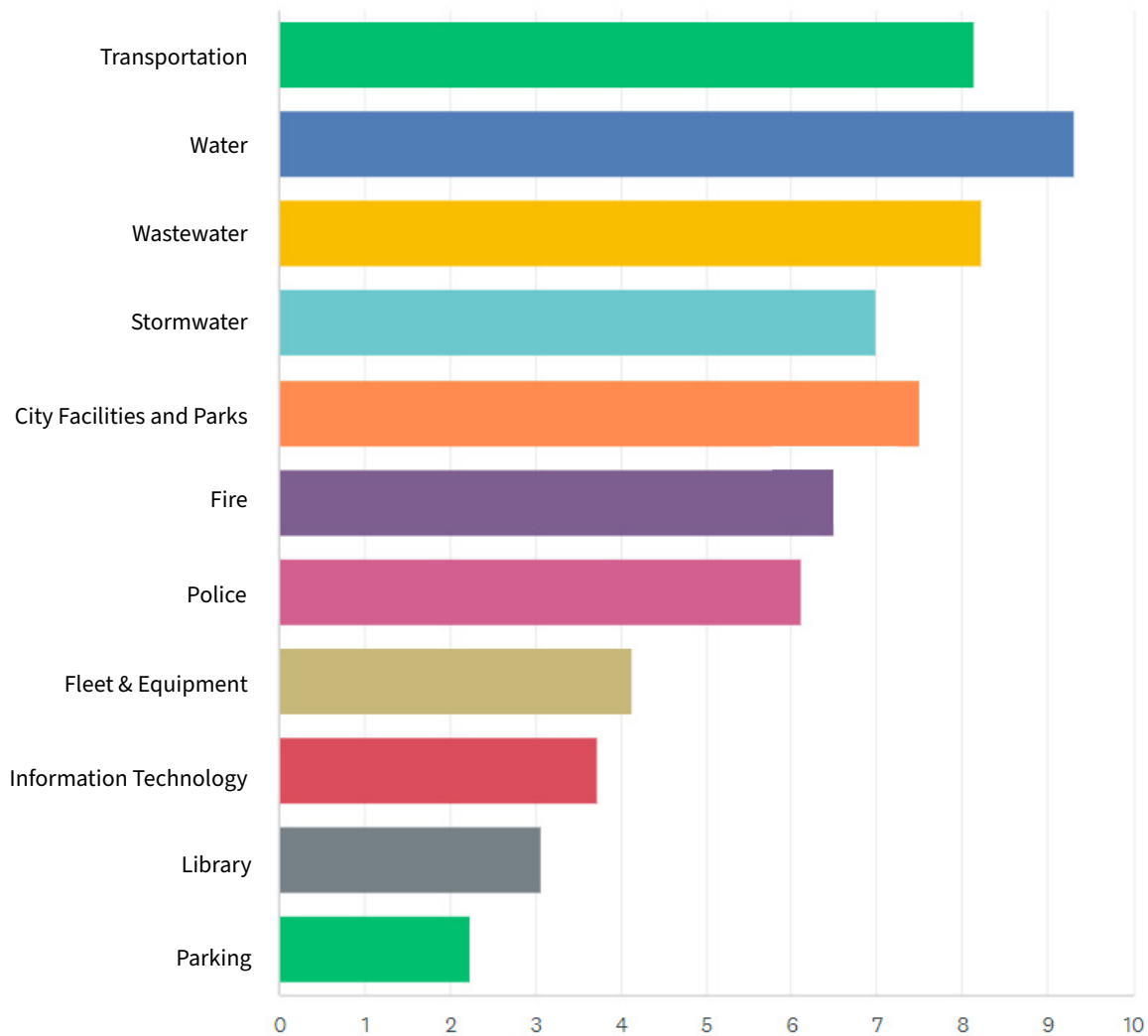
**Thinking about the services provided by the City of Belleville and the taxes you pay, which of the following statements best describes you?**



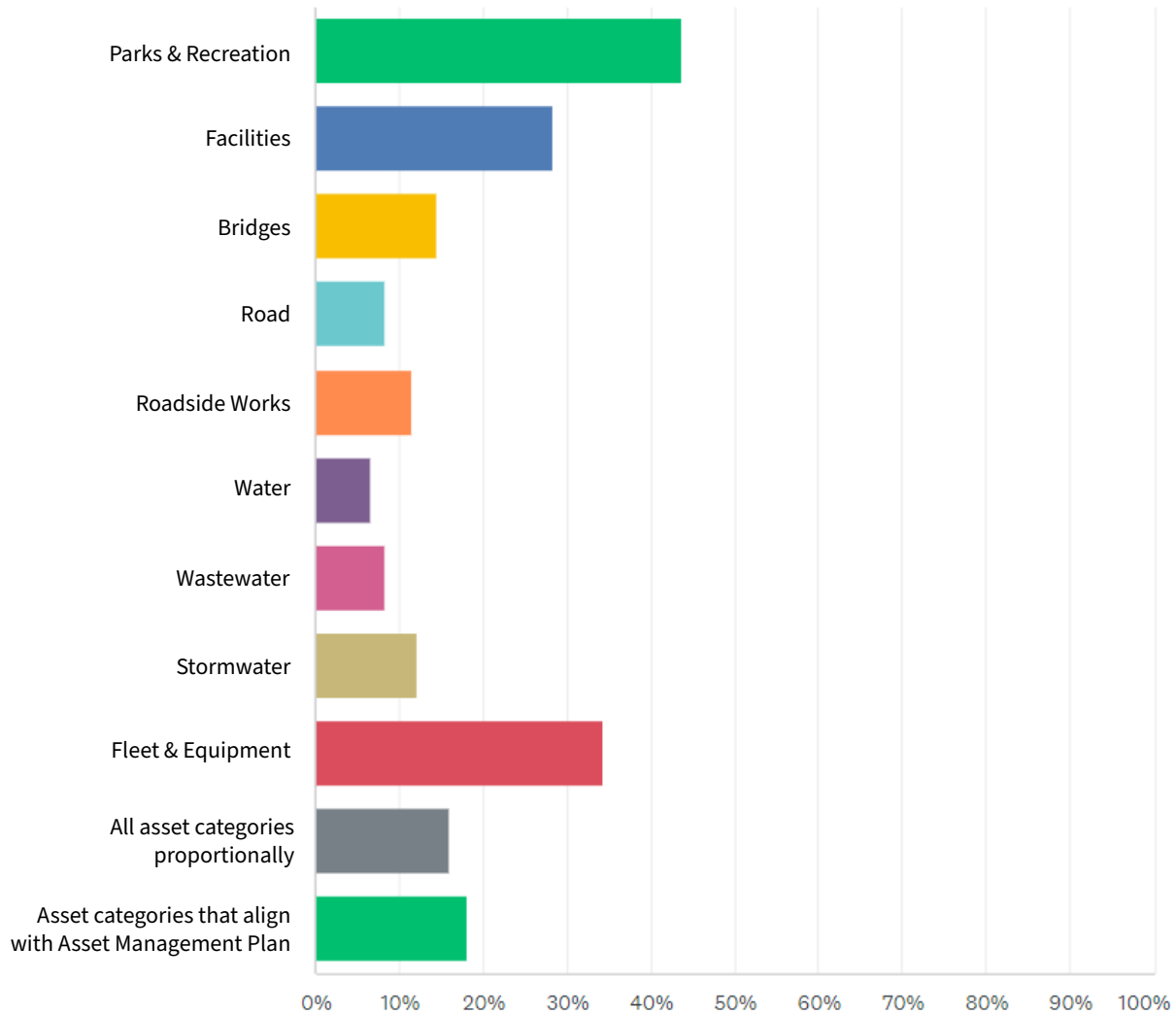
**The following services currently receive funding from user fees. Please identify which service(s) you would support an increase in user fees to reduce reliance on property taxes.**



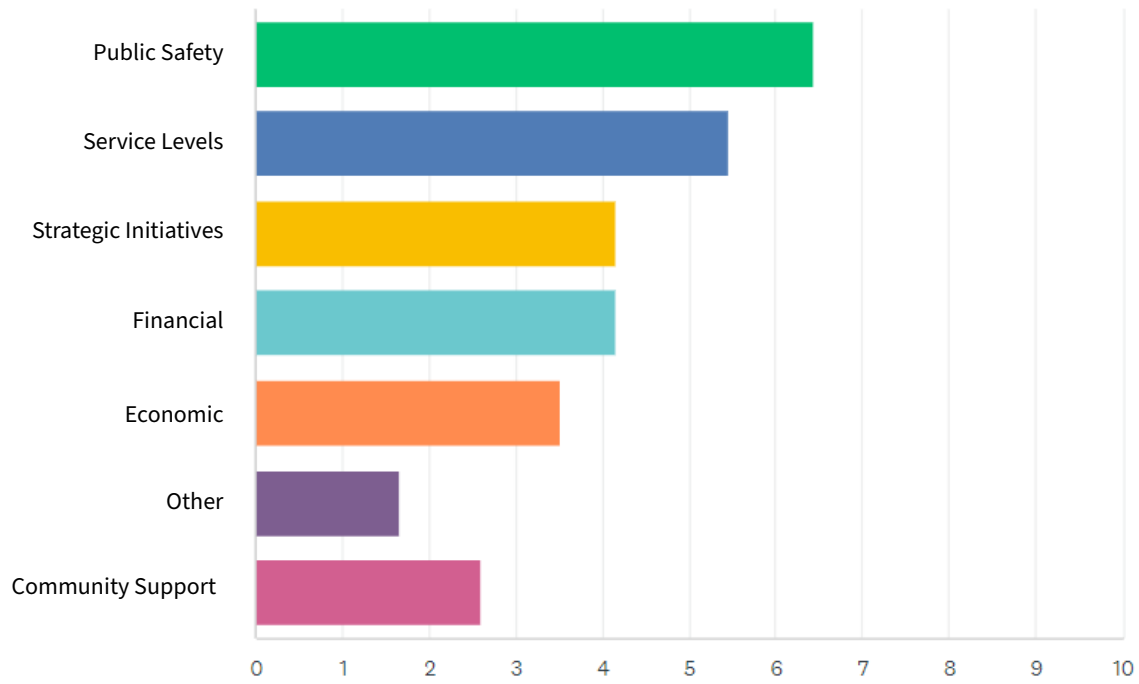
## In your opinion, how would you prioritize the City's annual capital investment by departmental area (high to low)?



## In your opinion, what Asset Categories would you initially consider for further deferral to future years?



## In your opinion, how would you rank the above-noted criteria (high to low)?





# Appendix A

Comments for “please specify” under questions 1 and 8 can be found below.

## Q1: Do you live and/or own a business in Belleville?

- Student
- Youth Sports Facilitator for Sports Group
- I am living in Belleville and working full time.
- Student
- Belong to Belleville Theatre Guild
- I live in Quinte West but volunteer in Belleville.
- Work for the City
- Work in Belleville
- Homeowner & Business Owner
- Live with parents
- Belleville Urban

## Q8: Thinking about the services provided by the City of Belleville and the taxes you pay, which of the following statements best describes you?

- I believe belleville rural is not looked after like the rest of the city is. Very little police on the rural roads. Roads are terrible.
- Cricket ground required
- Already paying enough taxes
- Less taxes and more facilities
- Too much tax for poor service
- I want to pay same tax and have better services.
- Need more service with the same amount
- I am paying taxes and yet bud route 9 doesn't fall under the area I live in!
- Less tax and more quality of living
- We want our cricket ground and we can pay taxes for services increased and we are willing to help financially
- need a cricket ground in Belleville.
- It would be a lot appreciated if we can get a cricket playground in belleville. There is a huge number of people who play cricket but we dont have any playground for it. We just have to compromise in small baseball grounds. I hope we would get our own ground. We are willing to pay our fair share for it too.
- Would like to pay less and improve the level of services
- I pay too much for what I receive. Please stop tax break for bussiness.

# Appendix A

- Live in Stirling
- Taxes are high for what is available.
- I feel I pay too much taxes for the services the city currently provides.
- I am not prepared to pay more but I would like to see a different use of taxes.
- Would like more traffic policing - if this means more taxes, so be it - the roads in Belleville are an unregulated mess.
- Belleville has higher taxes than other cities and we have more add on expenses ie we pay for garbage pickup. Several cities that friends live in do not.
- I would pay more taxes for specific services to increase, such as public transportation, mental health counselling, support and resources for the unhoused, and low-cost recreational activities for all ages
- Not a City resident.
- Belleville tax base is high and for little service. Pay for garbage, roads not maintained etc. homeless problem etc
- I would like to see a different allocation of existing tax dollars
- Not much services available
- I am comfortable with the current tax level but think that the parks operation could improve with some adjustments to their models. It seems that some of the smaller projects I am comfortable with current tax level but feel small, easy projects are not being dealt with in a timely fashion and tend to linger. For example the area that is caged off because a few interlocking stones are out of place and has been like this for 2-3 years. Water line currently running from South Front street to the bathrooms in Victoria park.
- Services should be better for the taxes we pay
- I would like to have actual services offered for the taxes I pay.
- Increase service through effective cost management
- I am comfortable with the current level of taxation, and expect better services.
- n/a
- We all pay enough in taxes. It's time to have people do their jobs as opposed to being paid to do nothing.
- I live in rural area where we pay taxes and receive little services for them
- I live in Ward 2 and would like to see the services increase to reflect the amount I pay in taxes.
- I would like to see money that typically goes into the police budget from the city be allocated to increased city services
- i would pay more taxes if they were spent in better places of service
- I think the funds are not allocated appropriately. Taxes are too high, we can't keep up with the cost of living.
- i am comfortable with the current levels of taxation, but think that there should be additional revenue sources from user fees especially related to roads and transportation (e.g. speed cameras to enforce speed limits with fees going towards road improvements). there should be less reliance on user fees for pools and recreation programs to make them more accessible to all
- We pay too much for way too few services
- I pay enough taxes, but find the services lacking. I have no desire to pay more until I see some improvement. We are in East Hill, the roads in this area are terrible. The lack of police presence and inability to respond to a call when we need them is frightening.
- Belleville's taxes are higher than most cities the same size, and i am yet to see the benefits from my high taxes
- Snow removal NOT snow pushed into our driveway!

# Appendix A

- The open ditch between independent and Hastings on#2 looks like a sewer
- taxes are very expensive here to not even take garbage for free
- I feel there is less services than there should be for the amount I spend on taxes. More services less meetings less committees less lunch breaks. More safety down town
- pay taxes now for services I fo not have
- I agree we must all pay our share but I do not agree to the new fairgrounds being built in thurlow. Waste of taxpayers money. Past mayor pipe dream
- I am comfortable with the higher than average taxes but disappointed with how poorly the money is managed
- Our taxes are very high for what we have. I pay more than my partner in a beautiful suburb of Ottawa
- Shift budget to social services, decrease the bloated police budget
- I am not sure how to answer this. Raised taxes at this time is very hard on the population. Rental units are almost impossible to afford. Paying utilities on top is a killer . Getting rebates, government money of any kind is a bandaid solution. Street drugs are killing people, mental health services are very limited, children are raising themselves at alarming rates, because either both parents work, are on disability of social services. Instead of throwing people in prison for stupid things, tag them and force them to work and gain experience through out their sentence. Maybe it will help them to get work when released. Strict but not mean or abusive. Have all services for mental health and addictions available and part of their treatment plan. I know alot of this may cost some money, but putting it back in the community should help lower the cost of detaining our younger offenders.
- Tax should stay the same spending should be monitored heavily
- Robbery
- I pay a sizeable amount of tax especially since I retired and my income has decreased.
- I will like to pay less tax for same service
- I'd be comfortable if my family had sidewalks in front of our house!
- Do not increase property and decrease in other services
- Comfortable w/current taxation, increase services.
- Taxes are outrageous for the amount of services provided.
- I would prefer that health and safety services be managed as a priority without an increase to taxation and without a decline in service. Can you do it?
- No more taxes for the elderly.
- I would like to see taxes remain at the current levels , but , that the City spend its money more efficiently along with the ceasation of so many “vanity” projects.
- Rising administrative salaries and waste are the two biggest factors holding back the city from providing increased services at the same tax rate. The way the question is phrased is insulting to the taxpayers.
- The City needs to take a hard look to find inefficiencies across all City departments in an effort to re-direct current budgets to provide more services. Creative solutions, innovation and service level partnerships should be explored where possible to reduce overhead.
- I believe that most of the fees go to pay employee salaries
- I feel we pay more than we should in Thurlow. We don't want the buses, sewers, water but we seem to be paying more and more each year
- Not sure?
- I think our taxes are too high for the level of services provided.
- Spend dollars more effectively, stop wasteful spending

# Appendix A

- For the taxes I pay, there is NO services!
- Belleville taxes are very high relatively to other cities in Ontario
- We appear to be paying MORE taxes with LESS services.
- I would like to see taxes remain the same and service levels increase
- I feel that quality of service is substandard especially in sidewalk, landscape maintenance and road repairs. Slow and non existent in many cases.
- we pay too much property tax
- I see many large expenditures for items that are not adressing major issues. I think taxes are esessential, but the value needs to be evident. Taxes are twice as high as Toronto for example.
- I would like City Hall to STOP WASTING MY TAX DOLLARS
- The City of Belleville should make people with higher incomes pay higher taxes.
- I think the city masssivily wastes the money they are given and should learn how to divide it properly and have employees who actually work so our money is not waisted on them standing around.

# Appendix B

The comments below were received through the designated project email ([budget@belleville.ca](mailto:budget@belleville.ca)) and online comment card form:

- I would like to see a problem with the Sarah Court recreation trail corrected. At 123 Sarah Court the trail ends and joins the sidewalk? or the street? The users do not seem to know. I have lived [here] for 14 years and I do not know! The huge increase in use by people with motorized (mostly electric) transport devices has made the area hazardous to one's health. There are families with young children and many residences have multiple vehicles frequently parked haphazardly close to or overlapping on to the sidewalk. This makes the area a danger not just to the residents but to the people using the trail. There is an obvious solution. Re-route the trail for a short distance on the east side of the residences, where it should have been in the first place. It was discouraging to hear the administration of the time boasting about bringing in the total project which was an auxiliary water main under budget when dangerous situations like this combination of high density residential sidewalk and the recreation trail were done. Hopefully, this situation will be remedied before there is a serious life-threatening accident.
- The survey is a waste of time since council is absolutely not interested in hearing what the taxpayers have to say. Council will just do as they want anyway. If they listened they would have all the sunken manhole/sewer covers fixed by now.
- Please try to instill a sense of personal responsibility in the "homeless" that are starting to invade our beautiful city. They are starting to take over some of our public walkways.