

## STAFF REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

**PRESENTED:** September 24, 2024 **REPORT:** W24-003  
**FROM:** Communications **FILE:** 1630-20-2025  
**SUBJECT:** BUDGET PRIORITIZATION SURVEY SUMMARY

### RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**That** the recommendation of the General Manager of Community Engagement and Cultural Services be endorse.

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

**That** Committee of the Whole (COTW) receive COTW Report W24-003 and the Budget Prioritization Survey Summary, attached as Appendix A.

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee of the Whole (COTW) with a summary of results from the Budget Prioritization Survey. This survey is just one component of the many inputs that will inform Council deliberations related to the 2025 budget. The intent of the survey is to receive input from the community on their needs and to inform Council decision-making.

### DISCUSSION

#### Background

From July 7 to August 15, the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) initiated a Budget Prioritization Survey on its online platform, Engage Whistler. This is the second year the public has provided input through this process on spending priorities.

The intent of this early engagement opportunity was to:

- Provide guidance to staff on community needs and priorities; and
- Provide Council with community inputs for consideration during budget deliberations.

For context, the news cycle during the survey period included the following municipal stories, which could have bearing on the inputs provided in the timeframe presented:

- Whistler Waldorf School lease negotiations
- Rainbow Park reopening
- Wildfires in Jasper and the Sea to Sky
- Increased camping in Whistler due to lack of housing

- Province announces \$12.7M for Whistler housing project

The Budget Engagement Survey was hosted on [www.engage.whistler.ca](http://www.engage.whistler.ca) and included a survey to elicit opinions on municipal spending with a single-question poll for a high-level response on spending. Respondents were given agency to fill out the full survey, answer the one question or participate in both. Before answering the full survey, a series of demographic questions was used to ascertain who answered. Respondents were then asked to prioritize program and service spending and give one direct piece of feedback to Council. This information is provided in Appendix A.

Overall, more members of the community responded this year than in the inaugural year this digital approach was used. The first survey received 228 contributions, split between a survey and quiz, while this second round of research received 314 contributions, including 239 survey responses and 75 poll responses.

A 40-day promotion campaign leveraging traditional and new media was used to drive awareness this year, with Facebook garnering the most attention with 31,228 impressions and 2,376 engagements received, between conversions and reactions. The survey is one component of a multi-tiered engagement and communications effort underway to educate and encourage municipal budget participation. It is backed by the RMOW's six [Engagement Design Principles](#), which guide our focus whether staff are designing a survey or an in-person event. This year's budget survey and upcoming budget-related engagement events focus on pulling in information, giving citizens a choice on when and how to participate, actively working to bring diverse voices to the discussion, and bravely trying some new things.

The RMOW is consciously leveraging digital communication tools to generate more informal and frequent interaction with Council and the democratic process; however, it should be noted this particular tool is not statistically relevant as survey respondents self-select to participate. However, the results of this survey are intended as a conversation starter for Council and the survey itself is brought forward as a means of creating interest in the municipal budget process for the public. It is hoped it will also serve as a gateway for further democratic participation for those who may have not participated in the past.

### **Observations at a Glance**

#### *Respondent demographics*

Demographic questions are valuable for helping Council and staff understand who the citizens were that responded and to ensure diverse voices are heard. Respondents were asked for their age group, background, time lived in Whistler, household numbers, neighbourhood, and housing/dwelling type. The responses indicate:

- 9.7 per cent were second homeowners and two per cent were seasonal residents
- just over 56 per cent of respondents were between the ages of 30 and 49 years of age
- equity-seeking respondents, or those who identify barriers to equal access, opportunities, and resources, were noticeably absent in the results
- The largest respondent equity-seeking subgroup are those who self-identified as seniors, consistent with 2023 results.

#### *Council Priorities*

Respondents were asked to rank the Council priorities of housing, smart tourism, climate and community engagement. Housing remained the highest overall priority, followed by smart tourism, community engagement, and climate which were essentially tied for second place.

- 53.8 per cent indicate housing is a top priority, followed by climate action (19.21 per cent), smart tourism (14.85 per cent) and community engagement (14.85 per cent)
- When asked for a lowest priority, 35.81 per cent said climate action, followed by smart tourism (27.51 per cent), community engagement (24.89 per cent) and housing (9.75 per cent)

### *General Budget Feedback*

When it comes to budget literacy and process, respondents reported having somewhat of an understanding (53 per cent) or good understanding of the process (38 per cent):

- 61 per cent of respondents felt they received good value for their tax and utility dollars.
- When asked about satisfaction levels with specific municipal services, “*enabling affordable housing*” and “*development and building permitting processing*” had the most “very dissatisfied” responses, while the “*Whistler Public Library*” and “*treatment and delivery of safe drinking water*” had the most “very satisfied” responses.
- 67.3 per cent of respondents indicated the RMOW should invest more in “*enabling affordable housing*”, followed by “*recreation facilities*” (54.3 per cent) and “*emergency preparedness*” (50.6 per cent).
- When asked what the RMOW should invest less in, the most popular choices were “*parks planning*” and “*projects*” (38.3 per cent), “*climate response*” (23.8 per cent) and “*communications and engagement and online services*” (18.4 per cent).
- 23.8 per cent thought that climate response should receive less investment, yet 33.9 indicated it should receive increased investment and 36.8 per cent felt funding should remain the same.
- To articulate that there are tradeoffs during the budget process, respondents were asked to rank options for balancing the budget and “*postpone infrastructure projects for new amenities*” was ranked the highest, followed closely by “*continue to offer the same services, but not to the same level*” and “*increase business property taxes.*” (only 15 per cent of respondents were business owners)
- 55 per cent of respondents would be somewhat willing or willing to pay more in user fees to maintain or improve services.

Common themes from the open-ended questions include:

- General satisfaction with core services
- Concerns around overcrowding in the resort
- Requests for focus on locals needs before resort visitors
- A need for increased transparency and accountability
- Desire for more affordable housing for long-term and seasonal residents
- Calls for improved transit and active transportation
- Concerns about tax increases and the importance of fiscal responsibility

Appendix B provides a budget timeline. In terms of specific budget engagement, the following activities are coming up:

- *Coffee with Council: Budget Edition* (Thursday October 10, location to be determined)
  - Join Council for a coffee and an informal chat on budget and other municipal topics

- *Projects and Operations Budgets in 90 Seconds*
  - On October 22 and November 5, staff will share a 90-second ‘elevator pitch’ on what you need to know about the proposed operations and projects budgets. Videos will be posted on the [Budget 2025 engagement page](#).
- *Council Drop-In Office Hours (dates to be determined)*
  - The public can drop-in to municipal hall virtually or in-person during these sessions to discuss and provide feedback on budget.
- *Budget Quiz Night at a local pub*
  - An informal evening to connect with the public while learning about the proposed budget.

More details to be announced at [whistler.ca/engage](http://whistler.ca/engage).

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## **POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions**

[October 24, 2023: Information Report No. 23-107](#), 2023 Budget Early Input Survey Summary

[September 12, 2023: COTW Report No. 23-098](#), Community Engagement and Cultural Services Update, including the introduction of the RMOW’s Guiding Principles for Engagement

### **2023-2026 Strategic Plan**

The 2023-2026 Strategic Plan outlines the high-level direction of the RMOW to help shape community progress during this term of Council. The Strategic Plan contains four priority areas with various associated initiatives that support them. This section identifies how this report links to the Strategic Plan.

#### **Strategic Priorities**

Housing

*Expedite the delivery of and longer-term planning for employee housing*

Climate Action

*Mobilize municipal resources toward the implementation of the Big Moves Climate Action Plan*

Community Engagement

*Strive to connect locals to each other and to the RMOW*

Smart Tourism

*Preserve and protect Whistler’s unique culture, natural assets and infrastructure*

Not Applicable

*Aligns with core municipal work that falls outside the strategic priorities but improves, maintains, updates and/or protects existing and essential community infrastructure or programs*

### **Community Vision and Official Community Plan**

The Official Community Plan (OCP) is the RMOW’s most important guiding document that sets the community vision and long-term community direction. This section identifies how this report applies to the OCP.

This report and engagement summary aligns with, and advances towards, the goals and objectives of the OCP by providing timely and accessible information to the public; building meaningful input opportunities and by creating a welcoming space for community members to connect with each other and Council.

- 8.3.1.1. Policy - Provide opportunities for residents to connect with each other during municipal initiatives, events and activities.
- 8.5.1.1. Policy - Provide appropriate and meaningful opportunities for community and partner engagement in policy-making and other decisions where relevant and appropriate.

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## BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

### *Additional inputs for budget decision-making*

Community input is a priority for Council and staff, and serves as one input into a complex and challenging budget process where Council must also consider the following data points and financial realities as they make their decisions:

- Demands of a growing population that put pressure on civic services, programs and facilities
- Visitation that is influenced by macroeconomic trends, weather, and competition from other destinations
- Projected non-tax revenues such as Municipal and Regional District Tax Program (MRDT), Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI), fees and charges, grants and other external funding
- Building up Reserve levels that support short- and long-term asset management of the RMOW's infrastructure, whether pipes in the ground or our building assets.
- Corporate Plans and Policies including the OCP, Big Moves Climate Action Strategy and Council Priorities
- Current economic climate

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## LÍLWAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS

The RMOW is committed to working with the Lílwat People, known in their language as L'il'wat7úl and the Squamish People, known in their language as the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw to: create an enduring relationship; establish collaborative processes for planning on unceded territories, as currently managed by the provincial government; achieve mutual objectives; and enable participation in Whistler's resort economy.

The RMOW's engagement design principles ask us to actively seek a diversity of input. As the RMOW evolves and builds its relationship with the Lílwat People and the Squamish People, staff will seek their feedback and guidance on the best way to engage with their members living within, and outside of Whistler, who may wish to share their thoughts on the RMOW's budget decision-making.

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## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

- Inform     Consult     Involve     Collaborate     Empower

The community engagement strategy for the budget is set out in detail in the *Observations at a Glance* section above.

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## REFERENCES

Appendix A – 2025 Budget Prioritization Survey Summary of Results  
Appendix B – Budget Timeline

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## SUMMARY

In undertaking the early input budget survey, the RMOW receives a variety of perspectives on budget priorities from the community. Although not statistically relevant, the information provides context to help understand community needs, desires and priorities. These important insights can help to inform budget deliberations when the draft budget is presented to Council.

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## SIGN-OFFS

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