

## BUDGET 2023-2026 COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

### RECOMMENDATION

That the October 31, 2022, Communications and Engagement report CE01489, be received for information.

<b>Requested Council Action</b>	Information only		
<b>ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle</b>	<b>ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals</b>		
<b>CONNECTED</b> This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	<b>Regional Prosperity</b>		
<b>City Plan Values</b>	LIVE		
<b>City Plan Big City Move(s)</b>	N/A	<b>Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities</b>	N/A
<b>Corporate Business Plan</b>	Serving Edmontonians		
<b>Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• C593A -- Public Engagement</li> </ul>		
<b>Related Council Discussions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• October 31, 2022, City Council, FCS01393, Proposed 2023-26 Capital Budget</li> <li>• October 31, 2022, City Council, FCS01414, City of Edmonton Service Satisfaction Survey and Results</li> <li>• October 31, 2022, City Council, FCS01465, Performance Report</li> <li>• November 14, 2022, City Council, FCS01394, Proposed 2023-26 Operating Budget</li> </ul>		

### Executive Summary

- Administration conducted extensive engagement on the 2023-26 Capital and Operating Budgets during the summer of 2022, connecting with over 32,000 Edmontonians.
- A variety of engagement opportunities, both digital and in-person, provided ease of participation and a wide reach to diverse communities.

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- Administration’s robust approach to the budget engagement process ensured that a GBA+ lens was used at every step. GBA+ findings are outlined in the What We Heard report.
- Administration heard that participants care deeply about the City services that directly impact their lives, and these services vary.
- The engagement highlighted that the budget must balance many competing needs, including delivering excellent services and construction projects, keeping taxes and fees manageable for Edmontonians, and supporting vulnerable populations.

## REPORT

In June and July 2022, the City invited Edmontonians of diverse backgrounds to provide input on what Administration and City Council should consider when making decisions about the 2023-2026 Budget. Administration leveraged a “digital-first, in-person with intention approach” to meet Edmontonians where they are, whether it was online or at an LRT station, to make it easy for residents to participate and have their voice heard. Thousands of people participated in the 2023-26 Budget engagement opportunities. The input gathered reflects the views of those who chose to participate, and not necessarily the views of all Edmontonians. Administration is deeply grateful to Edmontonians for the time they generously gave to think about the City’s budget and for sharing their perspectives.

The City’s budgets encompass all the work the City does. Through this engagement, Administration sought broad input on spending priorities and the decisions and trade-offs associated with the next four-year budget. The City engaged with the general public, organizations and community groups, and harder-to-reach communities, tailoring the engagement approach to each group. This engagement is one input for Council to consider as it sets the 2023-2026 Budget.

### General Public

The City took a digital-first approach to engagement to make participation as easy and convenient as possible. Administration also undertook a substantial promotional effort to ensure Edmontonians were aware of the opportunity to participate in engagement activities, including billboards, print and digital advertising. Councillors also promoted the engagement opportunities through their various channels (newsletters, social media, conversations with constituents, etc.).

This approach resulted in the highest level of participation on the Engaged Edmonton platform ([www.engagededmonton.ca](http://www.engagededmonton.ca)) since the site launch in 2019-20. More than 32,108 Edmontonians visited Engaged Edmonton to learn more about the budget and participate in any of three digital engagement activities, which resulted in:

- 3,266 submissions to Balance the Budget, an interactive budget simulation tool that allowed participants to make trade-offs with a City budget by increasing, decreasing or maintaining spending to reflect their priorities.
- 3,988 contributions to an idea board, allowing participants to share their ideas for the 2023-26 Budget and show support for others’ ideas.

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- 2,020 responses to the Make It Count Survey, which asked respondents to share their level of comfort on the choices and trade-offs the City may need to contemplate on the capital and operating budgets.

### Organizations and Community Groups

The City engaged with organizations and community groups through virtual workshops and small group conversations that covered similar topics to those reviewed on Engaged Edmonton. Representatives from 42 organizations, including the not-for-profit and social service sector, hard-to-reach, business, and development/commercial property communities, participated in three workshops and 13 group conversations.

### Hard-to-Reach Communities

To understand how to best reach Edmontonians who would not typically participate in workshops or online engagement activities, or those who are under-represented in decision making, Administration began with interviews with key representative organizations, including the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association, the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council and the Edmonton Food Bank. These groups advised the City to connect with communities where they are. Respecting this perspective, the engagement team set up pop-up discussion stations and intercept surveys (in-person conversations with pedestrians) at key locations:

- PrideFest (June 25, Sir Winston Churchill Square)
- Hawrelak Park (June 29, 9330 Groat Rd.)
- Stanley A. Milner Library (July 6, 10172 100 St.)
- Clareview LRT Station (July 7, 48 St. and 139 Ave.)
- Southgate LRT Station (July 7, 111 St. and 48 Ave.)
- Jackie Parker Park (July 14, 4540A 50 St.)
- Whyte Avenue (July 14, 82 Ave.)

The City spoke to more than 800 people, using a variety of approaches depending on the location, covering topics similar to online engagement. Activities in the pop-up stations included asking for input on how participants would prioritize spending with a Build Your Budget game and sharing a variety of informational materials. The intercept survey used similar questions to the online survey.

### Key Findings

Edmonton is a diverse community and opinions on budget priorities varied based on which programs individuals use and value. Administration heard that participants care deeply about the City services that directly impact their lives, and there is a wide range of services that people use, rely on and value.

There was an overall sentiment of empathy among participants, who expressed an understanding that some individuals may be impacted by service reductions or fee increases more than others, including vulnerable populations and those on low and fixed incomes.

Other themes that emerged include:

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- A widespread recognition that the City has hard decisions to make.
- Coming out of the pandemic, there is a need to focus on improving community safety.
- The cost of living is going up and Edmontonians are facing increased financial pressures.
- Transit safety and connectivity are important.
- Participants want to connect with each other and celebrate Edmonton.
- Long-term solutions to climate challenges are needed.
- Participants are concerned about the overlapping nature of federal, provincial and municipal responsibilities.

Details on budget engagement are available in the What We Heard report (Attachment 1).

Administration has carefully considered what people shared throughout this engagement process. Edmontonians shared varied and often competing priorities, which include delivering excellent services, building Edmonton now and for the future, supporting vulnerable populations and keeping taxes and fees manageable for Edmontonians who are feeling increasing financial pressures.

### **Part of an Integrated Approach**

This report appears on the same agenda with two related Financial and Corporate Services reports: FCS01414 - City of Edmonton Service Satisfaction Survey and Results, which captures perceptions from Edmontonians about City services, and FCS01465 - Performance Report, which indicates the progress made towards the City's corporate objectives, including serving Edmontonians. These reports are all provided to support decision-making for Administration and Council on the budget.

### **Budget/Financial Implications**

Financial information is not included in this report, but the combination of public engagement and the other cross-referenced reports provide insights and information that can inform and supplement upcoming decisions related to the 2023-2026 business planning and budget cycle.

### **GBA+**

The City took a digital first, in-person with intention approach to budget engagement. While the online engagement made it easy and convenient for many Edmontonians to share their input on the budget, additional options were required to capture the input of Edmontonians who may be traditionally under-represented in an engagement process. The project team applied a GBA+ lens to do targeted outreach and ensure the City captured input from residents experiencing unique barriers and challenges, and those whose voices are heard less often. Administration conducted targeted outreach and engagement with 2SLGBTQ+ community members, non-English speakers, youth, seniors, racialized community members, women, people with disabilities, Edmontonians experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and people experiencing mental health and addiction challenges.

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. What We Heard Report, 2023-26 Budget Public Engagement