

Staff Report

Report To: Corporate Services Committee
Report From: Kate Allan, Director of Corporate Services
Meeting Date: June 13, 2024
Report Code: CR-24-068
Subject: 2025 Operating Budget Public Engagement

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CR-24-068 respecting 2025 Operating Budget Public Engagement, the Corporate Services Committee recommends that City Council receive the report for information purposes.

Highlights:

- The City of Owen Sound is launching an OurCity project page and an online survey to consult residents on the 2025 Operating Budget.
- Effective budget engagement builds trust and strengthens the connection between Council, staff, and the community.
- Engagement with citizens regarding the operating budget will help align the community's current needs and expected service levels as well as Council and residential priorities.
- By including public engagement in the operating budget-building process, Owen Sound can ensure its budgeting process is robust, transparent, and community-focused.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

[Strategic Plan](#) Priority: Service Excellence.

Climate and Environmental Implications:

There are no anticipated climate or environmental impacts.

Previous Report/Authority:

N/A.

Background:

Public engagement in developing a city's operating budget is crucial. Effective engagement builds trust and strengthens the connection between Council, staff, and the community. It ensures that the operating budget best aligns with the community's current needs and expected service levels as well as Council and residential priorities, leading to sustainable development and enhanced quality of life.

City Staff currently build the City's operating budget using a variety of techniques. Fixed cost estimates for committed contracts and staffing levels are determined first. Estimated operating costs for city infrastructure including utilities, insurance and maintenance costs are updated to reflect current pricing and anticipated volumes. Where there are discretionary service levels, zero based budgeting principles are employed.

The City does not have the ability to dissolve services from one year to the next, as a corporation might. This means fixed costs, such as staff wages and facility operations, must be included in the budget first. Next, main contracts (such as transit and waste management) are included in the budget. After this, each additional cost that isn't fixed is analyzed and considered (such as professional memberships).

By including public engagement in the operating budget-building process, Owen Sound can ensure its budgeting process is robust, transparent, and community-focused, which will ultimately lead to better governance and higher public satisfaction. Public engagement is essential to ensure that priorities reflected through service levels capture the desire of residents.

Analysis:

Budgets are informed by service-level decisions. Each time the City undertakes a service analysis, updates a master plan or undergoes a comprehensive service review exercise, these tactics are essentially

informing the level of service that is ultimately costed in the operating budget. Public participation in these exercises is intended to continue. Additionally, City staff are continually working to improve citizens' participation in the decisions that impact them most. In June 2022, the City launched the community engagement website, OurCity, to create more opportunities for the community to be consulted on various projects. The 2025 Operating Budget Public Engagement plan relies heavily on utilizing the OurCity site and its features. The communications plan outlines ways the City intends to promote the OurCity project page, survey and other tools to residents.

By following the Community Engagement Policy (CE003) and utilizing the Community Engagement Assessment Tool, the 2025 Operating Budget project scored 20, or Medium, meaning the intended engagement level is to consult and involve the public in this project.

The methods for consulting and involving the public's opinions on the 2025 Operating Budget include an informative OurCity project page housing an online survey, an ideas-gathering tool for open feedback, and frequently asked questions or basic budget education. The online survey will be open from June 14, 2024, until July 15, 2024. There is no allocated financial budget for this project; all of the public engagement options and the channels used to promote them are costless.

A key communication goal of the survey and project page design is education. The budget survey format provides statistics, information, and explanations about services, thereby helping to inform residents about municipal services and "who does what."

Gathering this public input will help inform ongoing service delivery analysis (through the Service Review action items) and future engagement opportunities. Survey results will be reported on with preliminary drafted budgets, presented to City Committees in Fall of 2024.

Financial Implications:

There will be no financial implications or associated costs with gathering public engagement on the 2025 Operating Budget.

Communication Strategy:

The OurCity page related to the 2025 Operating Budget Public Engagement will be frequently updated and aligned with the Communications Plan.

Consultation:

Communications Advisor, Director of Corporate Services

Attachments:

Attachment 1 – DRAFT Online 2025 Operating Budget Survey

Attachment 2 - Communications Plan - 2025 Budget Engagement

Recommended by:

Carly McArthur, Communications Advisor

Kate Allan, Director of Corporate Services

Submission approved by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Kate Allan at kallan@owensound.ca or 519-376-4440 ext. 1238.