



Merritt Information Item

FLOURISH UNDER THE SUN

To: Sean Smith, Chief Administrative Officer

From: Wayne Anderson, Director of Finance & IT

Date: March 25, 2021

Subject: 2021 Citizen Budget – Survey Results

This is provided as information, and no resolution is required. Council may make a motion to direct staff to take particular action if they wish.

Requirement for Public Input

As per section 166 of the Community Charter, “a council must undertake a process of public consultation regarding the proposed financial plan before it is adopted.”

2021 Budget Survey Process

With a limited ability to engage with the public in person due to Covid19, the City utilized the same Citizen Budget online budget survey software used in prior years. The cost of conducting the 2021 survey was \$2,850 plus tax.

The survey product comes with several templates that can be customized for each site. Staff and council were provided with sample survey templates used by other Canadian municipalities, including the City of Chilliwack and the City of Prince George. The final version of the survey was provided to staff and council prior to release to the public.

The survey was open to the public for the period of February 22nd to March 3rd. The survey was promoted through the following media channels:

- Q101 radio announcements
- Merritt Herald – City Page
- City of Merritt website – main landing page
- City of Merritt Facebook page

Citizen Budget

The survey allowed for completion as either a “Guest” or a “Logged In User”. The benefit of creating an account was the ability to provide comments, and to log back in to see and respond to comments, like how you can post and reply in Facebook.

The 2021 survey had the following sections:

Welcome

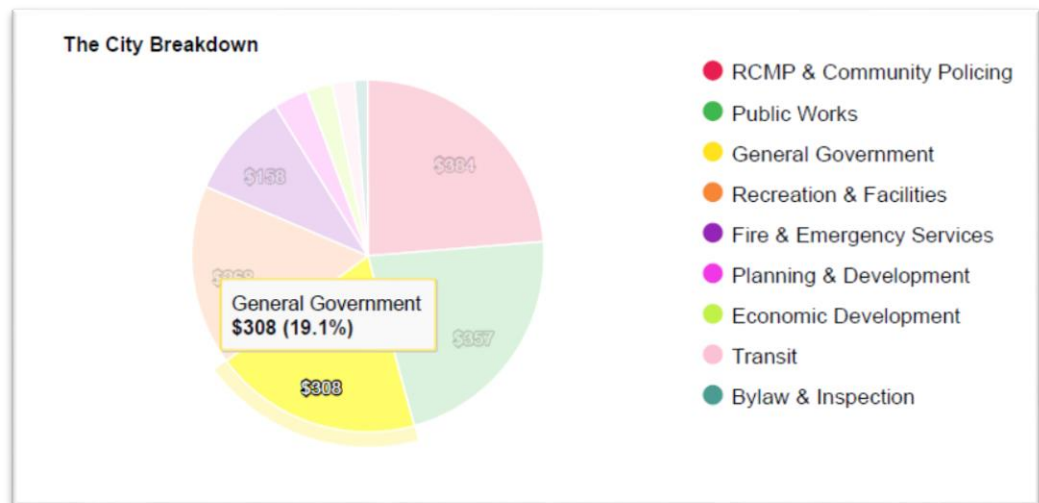
- Your Property Taxes
- Service Budgets
- Service Importance
- Funds Allocation
- About you
- Submit your Budget
- Fund Allocation Results
- Service Budgets Results
- Thank you!

Terms and Conditions

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1. Your Property Taxes

- Enter your assessed value from BC Assessment to see where your tax dollars are spent.



2. Service Budgets

- For each service listed under the property tax allocation, the participant provided input on funding (same, lower, or higher) along with comments.

Beyond inflationary and non-discretionary adjustments, do you support the same, higher or lower tax allocation for RCMP & Community Policing Services?

☐ Higher
 ☒ Same
 ☐ Lower

Here is a list of all comments received:

Service	Comment	Posted on	Like count
Bylaw and Inspection Services	If By-laws were to assume greater duties to assist the local RCMP then it might be prudent to increase their budget.	Feb 22, 2021 7:50pm	2
Bylaw and Inspection Services	There is a serious loose dog and cat problem in merritt that needs to be addressed. The current system is extremely ineffective. We need someone at least partially dedicated to dealing with loose dogs in town.	Mar 02, 2021 4:30pm	1
Planning and Development Services	The city seems to change its mind regarding previous decisions by the planning and development team, one wonders if there is a point in future planning if the council just changes their minds and decisions ad lib.	Feb 22, 2021 7:53pm	1
Planning and Development Services	Everyone in the department needs to get on the same page. When I was going through the building permit process, I was told something different every time I went in to ask questions. It was incredibly frustrating and added a lot of unnecessary delays to our project.	Mar 02, 2021 4:34pm	
Public Works - Roads, Parks and Infrastructure	Better road maintenance would be useful for the city.	Feb 22, 2021 7:51pm	
Public Works - Roads, Parks and Infrastructure	I would like to see better road maintenance BUT also think about the now and the future about things like planting trees and flowers in the meridians. That just takes up so much man power to maintain and replace. Better to use that manpower elsewhere.	Feb 23, 2021 6:25pm	
Public Works - Roads, Parks and Infrastructure	Depending on whether the maintenance of the water lines underneath the roads is part of this particular funding, they need to increase it to update our water systems, as it is BADLY needed.	Mar 02, 2021 8:45pm	
RCMP and Community Policing	The population figures for Merritt and surrounds coupled with the overall decrease in crime rates over the past 20 years do not suggest an increase in policing numbers is necessary.	Feb 22, 2021 7:49pm	
RCMP and Community Policing	Due to the amount of crime in the area, I would like to see more RCMP out. But on the other hand, catching these people, booking them in the detachment and out within the hour with a promise to appear, then going to court and getting a slap on the wrist IS NOT WORKING. I do know the RCMP has their hands tied.	Feb 23, 2021 6:22pm	
RCMP and Community Policing	Homes and businesses that have alarms should be able to connect directly to police and fire; and those services should respond immediately; instead of the current delay. Sure; penalize those that cause false alarms.	Mar 01, 2021 8:11pm	1
RCMP and Community Policing	Our dispatch for our emergency services needs to be local, so it doesn't cause undue delay. If this means we need to increase the budget to allow for it, then it needs to be increased.	Mar 02, 2021 8:43pm	

3. Funds Allocation

- a. Participants were provided the option to allocate \$1,000 in funding towards capital projects, ongoing programs, or strategic initiatives. A sliding scale was used for each category – in \$100 increments from \$0 to \$1,000. See “Results” below and in attached report.

4. About you

- a. This was an “optional” section for participants to provide us with some background on how long they have resided in Merritt, age, income, etc.
- b. See the attached report for the results from this section
 - i. 49% of respondents were over the age of 50
 - ii. 58% were female
 - iii. 63% earn over \$50k per year
 - iv. 53% have lived in Merritt for over 20 years and 28% have been here less than 5 years
 - v. 79% are homeowners
 - vi. 61% reside in apartments or condominiums
 - vii. 23% live in the Bench neighborhood with 21% in City Centre, 21% in Diamondvale and 13% in Colletville

Results

1. Funding Allocation Results

Here is a summary of the results, details are included in the attached report.

Funding Category	Percentage > \$0	Average \$'s
Roads and Infrastructure	86%	257
Downtown Revitalization	69%	206
Active Transportation	63%	161
Increased Residential Attraction	49%	133
Fund Reserve Accounts	53%	125
Water Conservation	43%	116
Attract Light Industries and Businesses	55%	92
Parkland Acquisition and Development	33%	67
Airport Expansion	18%	24

- Investment in “**Roads and Infrastructure**” was the highest ranked category with an average spend of **\$257** and only 14% selecting \$0 in funding.
- Only 18% of the respondents chose to apply funds for “Airport Expansion” for an average of \$24.

2. Service Budget Results

Like the funding allocation results, the “Public Works – Roads, Parks and Infrastructure” service category received more “Higher” votes than the “Same” or “Lower” votes.

None of the categories received more “Lower” votes than either the “Same” or “Higher” votes

Service	1 st Choice	2 nd Choice
RCMP and Community Policing	Same	Higher
Fire and Emergency Services	Same	Higher
Bylaw & Inspection Services	Same	Lower
Public Works – Roads, Parks and Infrastructure	Higher	Same
Transit Services	Same	Lower
Planning & Development Services	Same	Lower
Economic Development	Same	Higher/Lower
Recreation Programs & Facilities	Same	Higher

. Three categories that had “Lower” as the 2nd choice were:

- Bylaw & Inspection Services
- Transit Services
- Planning & Development Services

Survey Participation

As indicated in the attached report, we received input from 76 participants out of the 231 visitors to the site. I questioned my contact at Citizen Survey to see how that compares to other municipalities. Here is their response:

Your conversion rate was actually quite good - it's very common to have a much higher proportion of folks jump on, check out the platform, do some light reading, and choose to not provide input.

On most of our engagements we aim for at least 10% of visitors to go through and complete the engagement, and it looks like your conversion rate was 33%. To me, that speaks to the fact that you likely have a highly engaged community, and content was generally seen to be accessible and friendly.

Attachments:

Final Report – Merritt Citizen Budget 2021

Respectfully submitted,

Wayne Anderson, CPA, CMA
Director of Finance & IT