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Town of Aurora

## Budget Committee Report

No. FIN21-043

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**Subject:** 2022 Budget Engagement Results

**Prepared by:** Jason Gaertner, Manager, Financial Management

**Department:** Finance

**Date:** November 8, 2021

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### Recommendation

1. That Report No. FIN21-043 be received.

### Executive Summary

At its June 1, 2021 public stakeholder consultation on the Town's 2022 budget, Council requested that staff provide it with an update on the feedback received through the Town's 2022 budget engagement campaign.

- Overall, the 2022 budget strategy has generated an increased level of public engagement
- The 2022 engagement strategy included a larger education component
- The input received was influenced by the COVID-19 reality that respondents were experiencing

### Background

**In response to its COVID-19 reality, the Town's 2022 budget engagement strategy was largely virtual**

A key component of the Town's budget review process includes the solicitation of input from its public stakeholders. On May 11, 2021 Finance Advisory Committee was presented with a 2022 budget engagement strategy which reflected the Town's current COVID-19 reality. The presented strategy which was largely virtual in nature was approved by the committee.

On June 1, 2021 as part of the 2022 budget public session, Council received an update as to what staff had heard through consultations to date. Council subsequently requested that staff present it with a report summarizing all input that staff have received through the Town's 2022 budget engagement.

## **Analysis**

### **Overall, the 2022 budget strategy has generated an increased level of public engagement**

The total visits to the Engage Aurora 2022 web page presently sit at 637; this figure's growth is expected to accelerate through-out Council's review and approval of the Town's operating and capital budgets for the coming year. The total visits to the 2021 budget page concluded the budget process with a total of 611 visits; 2022 visits will eclipse this figure.

The 2022 budget survey responses were more than double those received as part of the 2021 budget engagement concluding a significantly reduced survey period with 175 responses being received compared to 56 in 2021.

### **The 2022 engagement strategy included a larger education component**

The 2022 budget engagement strategy placed a stronger focus on educating stakeholders on municipal finance and the services that the Town provides to its citizens. For example, the Town's Deputy Treasurer was able to present an orientation to municipal finance and have a follow up discussion with the Youth Engagement Committee.

In addition, the Engage Aurora web page offered multiple educational Q&A's and other reference material striving to inform the Town's stakeholders further on municipal finance.

### **The input received was influenced by the COVID-19 reality that respondents were experiencing**

The input received reflected an increased interest in outdoor services such as Parks and Open Spaces and trails; 65 percent of all respondents included these services in their top three list of services where they wanted to see more tax dollars spent. The other most common top three service categories were Town Facilities and Community Planning. The top three identified service areas where respondents wanted to see less tax dollars spent included Enforcement & Licensing, Culture and Library Services. A summary of the survey responses received is presented under Attachment 1.

Survey respondents were also asked to identify desired improvements to the way in which they receive their existing services. The top three identified service improvements were:

- real time / historical water usage monitoring and alerts of abnormal water usage
- E-billing for tax and water bills
- online account inquiry and bill payments

The survey also allowed respondents to provide general comments or other feedback relating to the budget. Many of these comments included requests for further enhancements to the Town's existing outdoor services such as the construction of additional tennis & pickleball courts, dog parks, outdoor ball hockey rinks, trails and splash pads. Furthermore, these comments reflected a desire for the greater maintenance of the Town's open spaces, trails other public properties.

## **Advisory Committee Review**

None

## **Legal Considerations**

None

## **Financial Implications**

There are not any direct financial implications arising from this report. The input received through the 2022 budget engagement process is intended to inform the Budget Committee as it undertakes its review of the tabled draft 2022 budget.

## **Communications Considerations**

The Town of Aurora will use 'inform' as the level of engagement for this project. There are five different levels of community engagement to consider, with each level providing the community more involvement in the decision-making process. These levels are: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, and Empower. Examples of each can be found in the Community Engagement Policy. These options are based on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum and assist in establishing guidelines for clearly communicating with our public and managing community engagement.

## **Link to Strategic Plan**

Developing the annual budget supports all aspects of the Strategic Plan. Specifically, this report supports the Strategic Plan principle of excellent in municipal management.

## **Alternative(s) to the Recommendation**

Nil

## **Conclusions**

This report presents to Budget Committee a summary of the successes achieved through the 2022 Budget Engagement Strategy. In addition, a summary of the input received to date through this strategy are presented for the Budget Committee's consideration.

## **Attachments**

Attachment #1 – Town of Aurora Budget Survey Results

## **Previous Reports**

None

## **Pre-submission Review**

Agenda Management Team review on October 14, 2021

## **Approvals**

Approved by Rachel Wainwright-van Kessel, B.Math, CPA, CMA, Director, Finance

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer