



Citizen Budget Survey 2009

Summary Report | March 31, 2009

Executive Summary

For the third consecutive year, the Think City Society has conducted its annual Citizen Budget Survey. Since 2007, approximately 4,000 Vancouver City residents and business owners have participated in Think City's Citizen Budget project, greatly adding to the debate about civic priorities.

Throughout March of this year, the society conducted an online Citizen Budget survey and held stakeholder focus group consultations aimed at segments of the Vancouver community who have been under-represented in past city consultations. In all, 1,813 people completed this year's Think City Citizen Budget questionnaire.

Why the Citizen Budget Survey?

- Gather independently the public's views on the budget and priorities for the city;
- Encourage discussion on the city's budget; and
- Determine if there is public interest in being involved in decisions about the city's budget.

About the Citizen Budget Initiative

- In 2008, Think City adapted the City Choices survey, adding new questions and expanding answers to give more choice and to cover a wider range of issues.
- Think City reached out to the public to gather their views by using its own and a number of other organizations' email and phone lists, and by targeting organizations and demographic groups including youth, the Asian community and seniors –

communities that are often overlooked in the city's consultation process.

- For 2009, the society added to that model by:
 - Asking several in-depth questions on topics of current interest, including the tax shift and creating alternative revenue streams; and
 - Including a section on citizen engagement, surveying both interest in methods of participation, and knowledge of the city's current processes.

Comparison of Public Surveys

The city engaged Andrew MacKey and Associates to oversee the consultation process and eNRG Research Group (eNRG) to conduct a representative phone survey on the issues and an online survey available on the city's web site. Think City carried out the Citizen Budget survey.

While the response to both online surveys was based on self-selection, the Citizen Budget survey had a much higher response level, three times higher (1,813) than the city's survey (536).

Overview of Citizen Budget Results

What Are Your Service Priorities?

	Maintain	Increase	Reduce	Don't Know	Responses
Civic Grants	36.7% (644)	50.5% (887)	7.4% (129)	5.4% (95)	1,755
Community and Cultural Services	51.5% (900)	31.8% (556)	13.0% (227)	3.7% (64)	1,747
Libraries	57.9% (1,015)	34.2% (599)	5.9% (104)	2.1% (36)	1,754
Parks and Recreation	59.5% (1,047)	28.8% (506)	9.3% (163)	2.4% (43)	1,759



Police	45.0% (791)	28.3% (497)	22.9% (402)	3.8% (67)	1,757
Fire and Rescue	70.6% (1,231)	17.2% (300)	7.3% (128)	4.9% (85)	1,744
General Administration	41.6% (723)	2.9% (50)	47.2% (821)	8.3% (144)	1,738
Engineering	65.0% (1,137)	15.9% (279)	14.0% (245)	5.1% (89)	1,750
Utilities	68.0% (1,181)	19.5% (338)	7.8% (136)	4.7% (82)	1,737
Contingencies and Transfers	50.0% (867)	4.2% (73)	19.3% (334)	26.5% (459)	1,733
Debt	45.7% (791)	9.2% (159)	28.0% (484)	17.1% (296)	1,733

Property Tax Increases and Associated Service Impacts

	Percent	Count
0.00% No increase in tax rates \$20M-30M in services would have to be cut	21.7%	352
2%-3% A limited tax rate increase (\$10M-20M in either across the board or selective cuts)	42.4%	686
4%-6% A "close the gap" increase (including base and outside agency costs, plus programs approved in 2008 and priority funding requests for 2009 programs)	35.9%	581

Property Tax Redistribution

Please check ALL of the statements that you agree with below.

	Percent	Count
I agree with city council's decision to shift a share of taxes from non-residential to residential properties.	21.4%	371
I disagree with city council's decision to shift a share of taxes from non-residential to residential properties.	45.6%	791
I would like to know more about the tax redistribution and arguments for and against policy.	32.4%	561
I would like to see the city look into alternative options, such as reducing the tax impact on small- and mid-size businesses without shifting taxes from large businesses to residential property owners.	64.5%	1,118
I have no opinion.	3.4%	59

Creating Alternative Revenue Streams

Do you support any of the following options as ways in which the city might generate revenue?

	Percent	Count
The City of Vancouver should be given a fixed percentage of provincial and/or federal tax revenue (e.g., sales tax, income tax, gas tax, etc.).	72.3%	1,193
The City of Vancouver should develop and lease commercial and /or residential spaces for a profit.	44.9%	742
The City of Vancouver should auction off large-scale development permits to the highest bidder.	17.7%	293
The City of Vancouver should be given new taxation powers to collect additional taxes from non-residents (e.g., hotel accommodation tax, car rental tax, etc.).	47.9%	791
The City of Vancouver should charge non-residents higher user fees (e.g. parking, recreation, etc.).	31.9%	526
The City of Vancouver should sell city-owned property.	10.5%	174
I have no opinion.	5.1%	85
Other	14.4%	238

What are Your Policy Priorities?

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Don't Know	Count
Affordable Housing	5.3% (89)	19.7% (328)	74.2% (1,238)	0.8% (14)	1,669
Transportation	2.3% (38)	22.7% (376)	73.9% (1,223)	1.1% (19)	1,656
Reduction in Homelessness and Poverty	3.9% (65)	19.1% (319)	75.8% (1,264)	1.1% (19)	1,667
Parks and Recreation	4.4% (73)	49.0% (810)	45.7% (756)	0.8% (14)	1,653



Action on Climate Change	9.6% (159)	30.0% (496)	58.6% (970)	1.8% (30)	1,655
Childcare and Daycare	10.0% (166)	32.9% (546)	55.6% (922)	1.5% (25)	1,659
Four Pillars Drug Strategy	8.0% (133)	28.7% (476)	61.1% (1,015)	2.2% (37)	1,661
Civic Funding for Olympics	75.1% (1,247)	17.5% (290)	6.2% (103)	1.3% (21)	1,661
Public Libraries	5.0% (82)	42.6% (704)	51.5% (850)	0.9% (15)	1,651
Crime Prevention and Police	10.6% (175)	45.9% (757)	42.2% (696)	1.2% (20)	1,648
Planning and Policies	5.8% (96)	37.7% (621)	54.4% (897)	2.1% (35)	1,649

Citizen Participation

What level of citizen participation do you think is most appropriate for determining the city budget?

	Percent	Count
None: Decision making should be decided solely by elected councillors with input from staff and appointed commissions.	2.5%	41
Consultation: Residents should have the opportunity to complete a questionnaire and/or participate in city-led focus group consultations.	39.9%	658
Limited Participation: One or more groups of residents are provided with the means to perform an in-depth examination of options and proposals, and councillors are mandated to give greater weight to their recommendations.	31.8%	525
Binding Participation: Residents are provided with the means to learn about, deliberate, and make binding decisions on some or all of the city's budget.	23.9%	394
I have no opinion.	1.9%	32

Awareness and Participation in the City Consultation

	Percent Yes	Count Yes	Percent No	Count No
Received a postcard in the mail	18%	283	82%	1,293

	Knew About Percentage	Knew About Count	Did Not Know Percentage	Did Not Know Count	Participated Percentage
Budget section of city website	23.6%	378	67.1%	1073	9.3%
City's online budget survey	19.8%	316	59.4%	946	20.8%
Feb 21 st public forum on budget	23.1%	369	75.3%	1,204	1.6%
March 31 st public hearing	18.4%	293	78.1%	1,244	n/a

If you have not participated in any, or only some of the city's budget consultation processes, please let us know why.

	Percent	Count
I did not know opportunities to participate existed	50.0%	740
I do not believe I understand the budgeting process/issues enough to participate	22.8%	337
I do not feel my participation will make a difference	27.9%	413
I am not sufficiently interested in the City's operating budget.	6.6%	97
I am not interested in the current forms of participation available	6.9%	102
I do not have enough time to become involved	35.1%	520



Survey Demographics

No demographic data was made available to the public regarding the participants who completed the 536 offline and online city feedback forms so it is not possible to compare the city's self-selecting survey participants this year with Think City's self-selecting Citizen Budget participants. Below is a comparison of Citizen Budget participants with 2006 Vancouver census data. Overall, Citizen Budget participants are more likely to be older, better educated homeowners with higher than average household incomes.

1. Living Arrangements

Group	Vancouver Census	Think City
Rent	56.0%	40.7%
Own	44.0%	54.6%
Homeless	n/a	0.2%
Other	n/a	4.6%

2. Age Breakdown

Group	Vancouver Census	Think City
18-44	53.2%	41.6%
45-64	31.0%	45.4%
65 or above	15.8%	13.1%

3. Average Household Income

Vancouver Census	Think City*
\$47,299	\$50,000-plus

*Over 61.3% surveyed reported household incomes of \$50,000 or higher.

4. Education

Group	Vancouver Census	Think City
Less than high school	12.8%	1.1%
High school diploma	24.5%	9.1%
College degree	28.5%	20.7%
University degree	34.2%	69.2%

Conclusion

Think City's Citizen Budget consultation process reaffirmed the city's own research that showed the vast majority of the public supported maintaining existing city services. The society's survey adds to the available knowledge to help inform council about the budget priorities of Vancouverites.

Overall, the public consultation revealed that:

- Civic grants topped the list of service priorities to increase, while general administration was the most recommended to be reduced.
- Almost half of respondents were unaware of the property tax redistribution, and support for the scheme as-is remained low. However 65% of respondents favoured looking into alternatives options for small businesses.
- There was strong support for the city to be given a fixed percentage of provincial and/or federal tax revenue.
- Over 75% of respondents indicated that they did not participate in the city's consultation process because either they did not know about the opportunities and/or they felt that their participation would not make a difference.

There is significant interest in the budget, and citizens wanted to be involved. Yet the response to the city's survey and attendance at the public meetings were lower than last year. Clearly, there is a need for more effective public engagement.

While surveys are useful, they have limitations in supporting a more in-depth discussion on the budget and citizen priorities. Over 50% of respondents felt the city should explore techniques such as citizen juries, participatory appraisal, and deliberative inquiry to develop a more comprehensive conversation with the public. It is vital the public know their views are valued and considered when council deliberates the annual budget.

