



Citizen Budget Survey 2010

Summary Report | Dec. 3, 2009

Executive Summary

For the fourth consecutive city budget, the Think City Society has conducted its annual Citizen Budget Survey. Since 2007, nearly 6,200 Vancouver City residents and business owners have participated in Think City's Citizen Budget project, greatly adding to the debate about civic priorities.

From Nov. 6 to Dec. 1, the society conducted an online Citizen Budget. In all, 2,158 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 city hall's 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 list of supporters and enlisting their help in finding new participants.

- For 2010, the society:
 - Added new questions about alternatives for new revenues and expenditure cuts;
 - Continued the 2009 survey's in-depth questions on the controversial business tax break or tax shift; and
 - Continued the 2009 survey's 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 conducted a representative phone survey on the issues and an online survey available on the city's web site from Nov. 4-20. Think City carried out its Citizen Budget survey Nov. 6 - Dec. 1.

While the response to both online surveys was based on self-selection, as in the past two budget consultations, the Citizen Budget survey had a much higher response level, three times higher (2,158) than the city's survey (680) for the 2010 budget.

Overview of Citizen Budget Results

What Are Your Service Priorities?

	Maintain	Increase	Reduce	Don't Know	Responses
Civic Grants	48.6% (1,027)	39.5% (836)	9.5% (201)	2.4% (51)	2,115
Community and Cultural Services	57.5% (1,214)	27.8% (587)	11.4% (241)	3.3% (69)	2,111
Libraries	58.9% (1,258)	32.8% (700)	7.3% (156)	1.0% (22)	2,136
Parks and Recreation	61.0% (1,295)	27.8% (591)	9.7% (205)	1.5% (32)	2,123
Police	52.1% (1,104)	12.9% (274)	32.2% (682)	2.7% (57)	2,117
Fire and Rescue	76.6% (1,616)	11.4% (241)	9.2% (194)	2.8% (60)	2,111
General Administration	38.0% (792)	2.2% (45)	49.4% (1,029)	10.4% (217)	2,083

Engineering	66.4% (1,394)	9.2% (194)	19.7% (413)	4.7% (98)	2,099
Utilities	73.5% (1,549)	13.8% (290)	9.3% (195)	3.5% (74)	2,108
Contingencies and Transfers	41.5% (850)	2.7% (56)	22.4% (459)	33.4% (685)	2,050
Debt	53.0% (1,092)	10.0% (207)	23.6% (486)	13.3% (275)	2,060

Property Tax Increases and Associated Service Impacts

	Percent	Count
0.0% No new increases to tax rate (cuts of \$32.6 million)	20.9%	433
3.0% A limited tax rate increase (\$16 million in either across the board or selective cuts)	45.4%	940
5.0% A "close-the-gap" increase (fully covers \$28.1 million budget shortfall and \$4.5 million in outside charges)	33.7 %	699

Additional Property Tax Acceptable for New/Expanded City Services

% Tax Increase	0%	1%	2%	3%	4%	5%	6%	Average
Number in support	629	473	354	206	42	93	83	2.3%

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.	13.2%	268
I disagree with city council's decision to shift a share of taxes from non-residential to residential properties.	54.1%	1,103
I would like to know more about the tax redistribution and arguments for and against policy.	38.3%	780
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.	75.0%	1,529
I have no opinion.	3.1%	64

Closing the Gap Alternatives

Do you support council implementing any or all of the following four options to close the budget shortfall?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
\$22.0 Million Gap Closer: City council should delay the planned 2.0% tax shift from business to residents for 2010, and instead raise all property taxes to 4.0.	35.3% (712)	37.6% (757)	11.6% (233)	7.4% (149)	8.1% (164)
\$10.5 Million Gap Closer: City council should consider boosting the property endowment fund's management fees to keep pace with assets growth.	14.2% (286)	39.9% (804)	12.7% (256)	4.6% (93)	28.6% (576)
\$2.75 Million Gap Closer: Council should freeze wage increase for senior management in 2010.	62.9% (1,276)	27.9% (566)	4.3% (87)	1.5% (30)	3.4% (70)
\$2.6 Million Gap Closer: City council should extend street parking hours to 9:00 pm and increase offsite parking charges further.	25.0% (507)	32.4% (658)	23.5% (478)	14.3% (290)	4.9% (99)

What are Your Policy Priorities?

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Don't Know	Count
Affordable Housing	4.2% (90)	19.6% (419)	75.7% (1,616)	0.5% (11)	2,136
Transportation	3.1% (65)	26.1% (554)	70.2% (1,492)	0.7% (15)	2,126
Reduction in Homelessness and Poverty	3.9% (82)	20.1% (427)	75.4% (1,605)	0.7% (15)	2,129
Parks and Recreation	3.1% (65)	40.0% (851)	56.7% (1,207)	0.2% (4)	2,127
Action on Climate Change	9.1% (193)	31.9% (676)	58.3% (1,238)	0.7% (15)	2,122



Childcare and Daycare	8.4% (178)	31.6% (671)	59.1% (1,255)	0.9% (20)	2,124
Four Pillars Drug Strategy	7.3% (155)	36.4% (775)	55.1% (1,171)	1.2% (26)	2,127
Civic Funding for Olympics	82.8% (1,762)	13.5% (288)	2.8% (59)	0.9% (20)	2,129
Public Libraries	3.3% (71)	28.7% (614)	67.8% (1,449)	0.2% (4)	2,138
Crime Prevention and Police	12.0% (255)	51.2% (1,087)	36.1% (767)	0.6% (13)	2,122
Planning and Policies	4.0% (84)	35.8% (759)	59.4% (1,260)	0.8% (18)	2,121

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.	1.1%	23
Consultation: Residents should have the opportunity to complete a questionnaire and/or participate in city-led focus group consultations.	33.9%	680
Limited Participation: Residents and stakeholders are provided with the means to perform an in-depth examination of particular budgetary options and proposals, and councillors are mandated to demonstrate how they incorporated or took into consideration the recommendations of these citizens.	41.9%	841
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.	21.6%	434
I have no opinion.	1.5%	30

Awareness and Participation in the City Consultation

	Knew About Percentage	Knew About Count	Did Not Know Percentage	Did Not Know Count	Participated Percentage
Budget section of city website	24.9%	492	61.8%	1,224	13.3%
City's website comments area	23.6%	465	70.2%	1,385	6.2%
City's online budget survey	21.7%	429	58.8%	1,163	19.6%
Community meetings	37.4%	739	57.1%	1,128	5.4%
Dec. 3 public hearing	29.2%	576	65.8%	1,296	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	46.0%	816
I do not believe I understand the budgeting process/issues enough to participate	25.5%	453
I do not feel my participation will make a difference	31.4%	557
I am not sufficiently interested in the City's operating budget.	4.3%	77
I am not interested in the current forms of participation available	7.0%	125
I do not have enough time to become involved	34.5%	613



Survey Demographics

Once again, no demographic data was made available regarding the participants who completed the 680 online city survey, so it is not possible to compare the city's self-selecting participants with Think City's Citizen Budget participants. Below is a comparison of Citizen Budget participants with 2006 Vancouver census data. Overall, our 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%	41.6%
Own	44.0%	54.3%
Homeless	n/a	0.1%
Other	n/a	4.0%

2. Age Breakdown

Group	Vancouver Census	Think City
18-44	53.2%	41.1%
45-64	31.0%	45.6%
65 or above	15.8%	13.3%

3. Average Household Income

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

4. Average** Property Value Breakdown

Vancouver	\$700,000
Think City	\$550,000

5. Education

Group	Vancouver Census	Think City
Less than high school	12.8%	0.8%
High school diploma	24.5%	7.6%
College degree	28.5%	20.0%
University degree	34.2%	71.6%

*Over 61.6% surveyed reported household incomes of \$50,000 or higher.

**Approximate average of resident-owned properties.

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. Our society's survey adds to the available knowledge to help inform council about the budget priorities of Vancouverites.

Overall, the public consultation revealed that:

- Libraries, civic grants, utilities, fire and rescue, and parks and recreation topped the list of service priorities, while general administration was the only area recommended to be reduced.
- 58.6% were unaware of the property tax break for businesses, and support for the tax shift has dropped from 21.4% in last March's 2009 Citizen Budget survey to 13.2% today. Three-quarters of respondents favoured the city looking into alternatives options for small business tax relief.
- Deferring the tax break for businesses and freezing managers' salaries for 2010 scored high among respondents. Support for more revenues from longer parking meter hours was mixed.

- Only 4.3% said they were not interested in participating in the city's budget consultation process.

Despite significant interest in the budget, participation in the city's online survey and attendance at public budget meetings continue to be quite low, underscoring the need for more effective public engagement by city hall.

While surveys are useful, they have limitations in supporting a more in-depth discussion on the budget and citizen priorities. Nearly two thirds 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.

