



# Citizen Budget Survey 2011

## Summary Report | Dec. 2, 2010

### Executive Summary

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For the fifth consecutive city budget, the Think City Society has conducted its annual Citizen Budget Survey. Since 2007, nearly 8,000 Vancouver City residents and business owners have participated in this project, greatly adding to the debate about civic priorities.

From Oct. 27 to Dec. 1, Think City conducted an online Citizen Budget survey. In all, 1,758 people completed this year's Think City Citizen Budget questionnaire, our second-highest rate of participation.

- For 2011, the society:
  - Kept the 2010 survey format; and
  - Added new questions about restoring and ranking importance of services cut in the 2010 operating budget;

#### Why the Citizen Budget Survey?

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

### Comparison of Public Surveys

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The city conducted a representative phone survey on the issues and an online survey available on the city's web site from Oct. 11 - Nov. 22. Think City carried out its Citizen Budget survey Oct. 27 - Dec. 1.

While the response to both online surveys was based on self-selection, as in the past three budget consultations, the Citizen Budget survey had a much higher response level, four times higher (1,758) than the city's survey (400) for the 2011 budget.

### Overview of Citizen Budget Results

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#### What Are Your Service Priorities?

	Maintain	Increase	Reduce	Don't Know	Responses
Civic Grants	41.8% (721)	<b>44.1% (760)</b>	12.2% (210)	1.9% (33)	1724
Community and Cultural Services	<b>52.4% (895)</b>	30.2% (516)	14.0% (240)	3.4% (58)	1709
Libraries	<b>53.2% (923)</b>	39.7% (688)	5.9% (103)	1.2% (21)	1735
Parks and Recreation	<b>57.6% (991)</b>	29.8% (512)	11.3% (194)	1.3% (22)	1719
Police	<b>49.7% (859)</b>	12.2% (210)	35.4% (612)	2.7% (46)	1727
Fire and Rescue	<b>75.5% (1294)</b>	11.6% (198)	9.6% (164)	3.4% (58)	1714
General Administration	<b>44.5% (760)</b>	2.5% (42)	44.2% (755)	8.8% (151)	1708
Engineering	<b>67.2% (1161)</b>	10.9% (188)	18.5% (320)	3.4% (58)	1727
Utilities	<b>70.7% (1221)</b>	13.9% (240)	11.5% (199)	3.9% (68)	1728
Contingencies and Transfers	<b>48.5% (826)</b>	3.0% (51)	19.9% (339)	28.6% (486)	1702
Debt	<b>56.3% (961)</b>	9.8% (168)	21.7% (371)	12.2% (208)	1708

## Property Tax Increases and Associated Service Impacts

	Percent	Count
0% - No new increases to tax rate (cuts of \$20.6 million to cover the existing budget shortfall)	18.8%	316
<b>2% - A limited tax rate increase (\$10 million in either across the board or selective service cuts)</b>	<b>41.3%</b>	<b>694</b>
4% - A "close the gap" increase (fully covers \$20.6 million budget shortfall)	40.0%	672

## Additional Property Tax Acceptable for New/Expanded City Services

% Tax Increase	0%	1%	2%	3%	4%	5%	6%	Average
Number in support	559	<b>381</b>	315	46	80	51	77	<b>2.3%</b>

## 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.	15.9%	258
<b>I disagree with city council's decision to shift a share of taxes from non-residential to residential properties.</b>	<b>58.0%</b>	<b>939</b>
I would like to know more about the tax redistribution and arguments for and against policy.	29.3%	474
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.	65.3%	1058
I have no opinion.	3.6%	59

## Tax Redistribution Versus Service Cuts

City council should delay the planned 2.0% tax shift from business to residents for 2011, and instead raise all property taxes to 4.0%.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
35.3%	<b>37.6%</b>	11.6%	7.4%	8.1%
(712)	<b>(757)</b>	(233)	(149)	(164)

## What are Your Policy Priorities?

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Don't Know	Count
Affordable Housing	6.7% (116)	23.8% (412)	<b>69.3% (1200)</b>	0.2% (3)	1731
Transportation	2.8% (49)	28.8% (497)	<b>67.8% (1171)</b>	0.6% (10)	1727
Reduction in Homelessness and Poverty	5.1% (88)	23.4% (405)	<b>70.8% (1226)</b>	0.7% (12)	1731
Parks and Recreation	5.0% (86)	44.5% (766)	<b>50.2% (865)</b>	0.3% (6)	1723
Action on Climate Change	13.7% (237)	32.4% (561)	<b>53.3% (922)</b>	0.6% (11)	1731
Childcare and Daycare	11.2% (193)	32.9% (567)	<b>54.6% (942)</b>	1.4% (24)	1726
Four Pillars Drug Strategy	9.1% (157)	36.0% (621)	<b>53.4% (923)</b>	1.5% (26)	1727
Public Libraries	4.7% (82)	33.0% (571)	<b>62.0% (1072)</b>	0.3% (5)	1730
Civic Funding for Olympics	9.4% (162)	41.3% (714)	<b>48.7% (841)</b>	0.6% (10)	1727
Crime Prevention and Police	13.6% (233)	<b>51.5% (884)</b>	34.1% (585)	0.8% (14)	1716
Planning and Policies	4.8% (83)	38.5% (666)	<b>55.7% (964)</b>	1.0% (17)	1730



## Restoring 2010 Service Cuts

Should city council restore some or all of the cuts it made to public services in 2010?

	Percent	Count
Yes	57.2%	917
No	21.9%	351
Don't Know	20.8%	334

Respondents were asked to prioritize funding restoration by department. The rank order is:

- |                                    |                           |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Community and Cultural Services | 6. Utilities              |
| 2. Libraries                       | 7. Engineering            |
| 3. Parks and Recreation            | 8. Police                 |
| 4. Civic Grants                    | 9. General Administration |
| 5. Fire and Rescue                 |                           |

## 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.	1.9%	30
Consultation: Residents should have the opportunity to complete a questionnaire and/or participate in city-led focus group consultations.	35.6%	572
<b>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.</b>	<b>41.0%</b>	<b>658</b>
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.	20.0%	321
I have no opinion.	1.6%	25

## 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	30.3%	482	54.7%	869	15.0%
Stakeholder discussions	34.1%	535	62.6%	981	3.3%
City's online budget survey	25.1%	399	51.4%	818	23.5%
October 28 open house	24.6%	386	74.4%	1,165	1.0%

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

	Percent	Count
<b>I did not know opportunities to participate existed</b>	<b>48.1%</b>	<b>684</b>
I do not believe I understand the budgeting process/issues enough to participate	19.6%	279
I do not feel my participation will make a difference	32.6%	464
I am not sufficiently interested in the City's operating budget.	5.1%	72
I am not interested in the current forms of participation available	5.5%	78
I do not have enough time to become involved	34.8%	495



## Survey Demographics

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Once again, no demographic data was made available regarding the participants who completed the 400 online city surveys, 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 and 2008 civic election data. Overall, our participants are more likely to be older, civically-engaged, better-educated homeowners with higher than average household incomes.

### 1. Living Arrangements

Group	Vancouver Census	Think City
Rent	<b>56.0%</b>	41.6%
Own	44.0%	<b>54.3%</b>
Homeless	n/a	0.1%
Other	n/a	4.0%

### 2. Age Breakdown

Group	Vancouver Census	Think City
18-44	<b>53.2%</b>	38.4%
45-64	31.0%	<b>44.2%</b>
65 or above	15.8%	17.4%

### 3. Average Household Income

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

### 4. Average\*\* Property Value Breakdown

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

### 5. Education

Group	Vancouver Census	Think City
Less than high school	12.8%	1.0%
High school diploma	24.5%	7.3%
College degree	28.5%	18.0%
University degree	<b>34.2%</b>	<b>73.7%</b>

### 6. Voted in Last Civic Election

Voted	2008 Turnout	Think City
Yes	30.8%	85.6%
No	69.2%	14.4%

\*Over 63.1% surveyed reported household incomes of \$50,000 or higher.

\*\*Approximate average of resident-owned properties.

## Conclusion

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We believe the Citizen Budget project positively adds to publicly available knowledge and can help inform council about the budget priorities of Vancouverites. The results of the 2011 survey confirm that citizens favour a balanced and fair mix of tax increases and service cuts, provided they reflect their civic priorities.

Overall, the survey revealed that:

- 41.3 per cent support a mixture of service cuts and tax increases, 40.0 per cent oppose any service cuts and 18.8 per cent oppose any tax increases.
- Libraries, civic grants, utilities, fire and rescue, community and cultural services, and parks and recreation topped the list of citizen priorities, ranging from 82 per cent to 93 per cent support for maintaining or expanding these services. Reductions in funding for police (35.4 per cent) and general administration (44.2 per cent) were supported by a significant minority of respondents.
- Dropping the tax shift was supported four to one. Nearly two-thirds of respondents want the city to look into other options for small business tax relief.
- 72.9 per cent want a delay in the planned tax shift from business to residents for 2011, and see all property taxes raised to 4.0 per cent.
- 48.1 per cent were unaware of the various ways to participate in the city's budget consultation process.
- Despite significant interest in the budget, participation in the city's own consultation process continues to be quite low, underscoring the need for more effective public engagement.

