



**BUDGET
ENGAGEMENT
SUMMARY**

connectnorthsaanich.ca/2022-budget

February
2022

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ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Each year the District of North Saanich develops an annual budget outlining how tax dollars are invested to support our residents and the community.

Starting in 2021, the District implemented an engagement plan, as part of the budget development process, to better understand the priorities of the community it serves. This is the second year the District has initiated an online survey to gather feedback on the types of services the District provides, and the quality and/or quantity of these services.

This public feedback informs staff and Council as they work through the budget development and decision-making processes. It also provides residents with a window into the District's budget process.

This year, the District launched a project page, 2022 Budget, on the engagement website: www.connectnorthsaanich.ca/. The page included links to the District's strategic plan, operational and capital budgets, information about property taxes, and answers to frequently asked questions.

From January 10-February 7, 2022 we invited residents to provide feedback through a survey that was hosted on the project page. Printed surveys were also made available at Municipal Hall, and two residents opted to fill out hard copy versions. The District promoted the project page and participation in the survey through the District's website, email updates, social media posts, earned media coverage, posters in community gathering places, and through advertisements in the Peninsula News Review.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

January 10 to February 7, 2022

177 people took the survey

96% own their own home

24% have children under the age of 18

39% identify as female

48% identify as male

4% are people living with disabilities

50% are retired

35% are employed

8% own a business in North Saanich

21% live in Deep cove

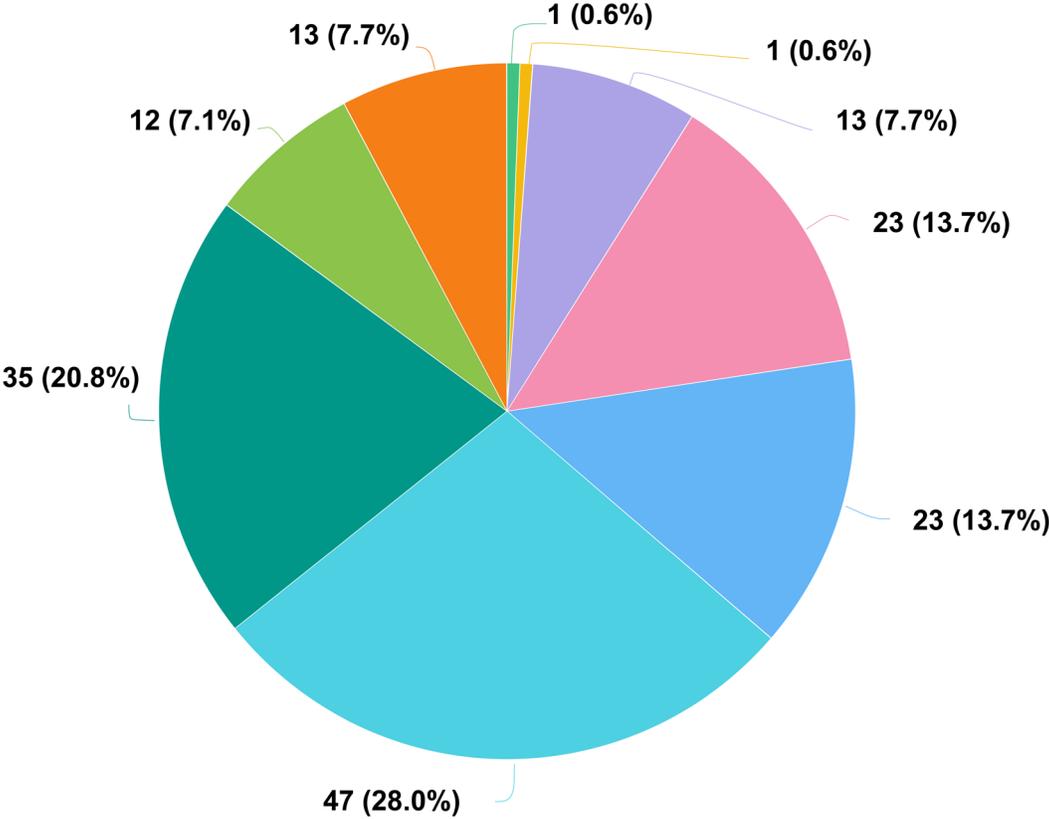
14% live in Ardmore

21% live in Dean Park

13% live in Lands End

AGE OF RESPONDENTS

Most respondents (70%) are 50 years and older



- 19 years and under
- 20-29 years
- 30-39 years
- 40-49 years
- 50-59 years
- 60-69 years
- 70-79 years
- 80 years or older
- Prefer not to say

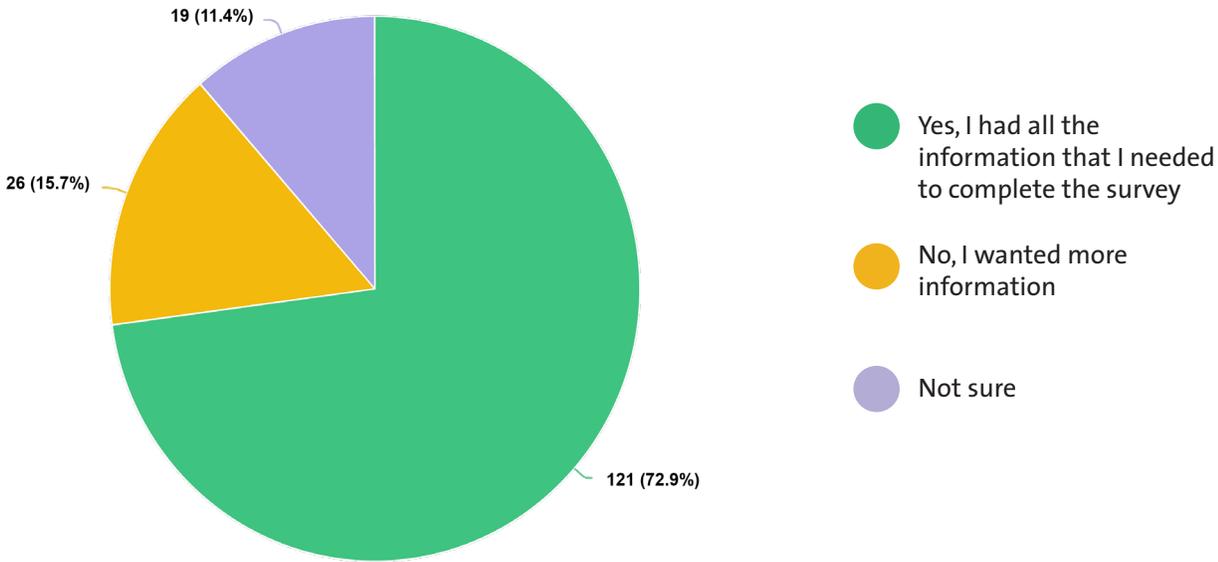
ACCESS TO BUDGET INFORMATION

73% reported they had sufficient information about the budget and service levels in order to participate in the survey

16% reported having insufficient information

Many people expressed appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the survey and indicated they were content with the information provided. However, a number asked for more detailed, itemized break-downs of areas like specific projects and departmental salaries.

Additionally, some respondents asked for more detail about what factors might be driving possible cost increases.



OVERALL TAXATION LEVELS

2021 Residential Property Tax Rate

- 67% felt that the 2021 residential property tax rate was appropriate
- 13% felt it should have been lower
- 12% felt it should have been higher

Many responses reflected residents' desire for the District to keep taxes low and offer minimal services, in keeping with its rural character.

Other common themes included concern about tax dollars spent on District projects, including expenses for public engagement and consultancy fees. A number of respondents noted the recent impacts of climate change, and that this would likely create new pressures on infrastructure.

Some respondents asked for additional services, including more park and trail maintenance, garbage collection, and the establishment of a more robust green waste program.

Increase in 2021 Residential Tax Rate

- 63% felt that the previous year's percentage increase in residential property taxes was appropriate
- 20% thought it should have been lower
- 10% thought it should have been higher

A general theme from respondents was the importance of the District balancing current service levels without placing an undue burden on homeowners. A number of people indicated their willingness to tolerate the increase when pegged to the general rate of inflation or the cost-of-living index.

A number of people mentioned the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives and asked the District to keep this in mind in keeping tax increases low.

Conversely, those who indicated a tolerance for higher tax increases cited priorities like climate change, bylaw enforcement, and a greater investment in road and trail maintenance.

2021 Business Property Tax Rate

67% felt that the 2021 business property tax rate was appropriate

10% felt it should have been lower

4% felt that it should have been higher

Most respondents felt the tax rate was appropriate and consistent with other rates in the region. People reflected that businesses are facing enormous challenges and that lower tax rates can help them survive.

One suggestion was that the business property tax rate could be established on a sliding scale, according to the size of the commercial entity.

Increase in 2021 Business Property Tax Rate

54% felt that the previous year's percentage increase in business property taxes was appropriate

8% felt it should have been lower

11% felt that it should have been higher

As with responses to the question about residential tax rate increases, a number of people mentioned the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and suggested the District keep this in mind in keeping tax increases low. Inflation was also mentioned as a factor in keeping tax increases low.

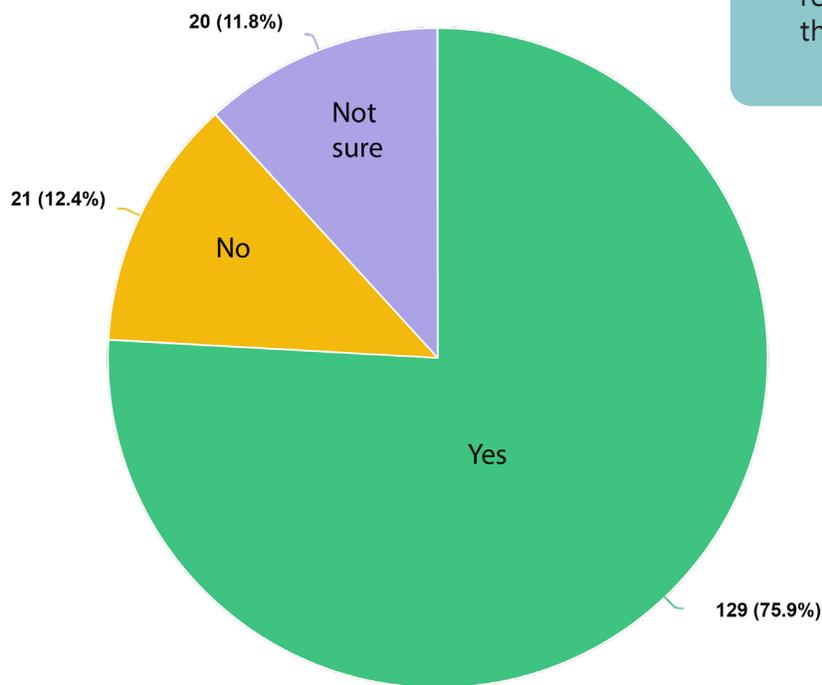
Another common theme was a suggestion that the average increase in business tax rates should mirror the residential tax rate increase. On the other hand, a number of respondents communicated that they felt taxes should continue to be greater for commercial operators than for residential homeowners.

INFRASTRUCTURE REPLACEMENT FUNDING

76% agreed with the District's current practice of incrementally closing the infrastructure replacement gap by allocating a 1% annual tax increase to replacement reserves each year.

13% disagreed with this practice

12% were not sure



Most respondents were in favour, communicating that this approach reflected responsible management and planning.

A number of respondents believe the increase should be higher than 1%, many citing the effects of climate change on infrastructure. Some suggested the calculation of infrastructure replacement may need to change, given the ongoing and increasing effects of extreme weather events.

Conversely, some respondents felt the municipality needs to manage with the funds it receives and do not support this approach.

PARKS & NATURAL AREAS

Maintenance

64% of respondents support the overall funding level for parks and natural assets

33% felt that funding should be increased

4% felt funding should be decreased

Many respondents reflected on the importance of parks, trail systems, and recreation in general for North Saanich residents. Most were happy with the status quo, and many pointed out that the natural appearance of District parks was appropriate for a region with a rural character.

Those who felt funding should be increased pointed to things like improved or new playgrounds for children, improved beach access, and restoration of areas affected by invasive species. Other ideas included increasing the number of garbage cans and benches in natural areas, expanding existing trail systems, and planting more trees to offset GHG emissions.

New Amenities

47% felt that the District should increase its capital budget to add amenities to natural areas, parks and trails

33% felt the District should not increase its budget for this reason.

11% not sure

This split was reflected in the comments: nearly half of the respondents felt that the status of the parks and other natural areas are fine, and that additional cost and maintenance fees are not currently required. Some felt that there are more important areas of the budget, such as road maintenance and emergency services.

Others voiced their opinion that natural spaces, parks, and trails make the District more livable and support an increase in the budget to improve access, upgrade existing features, and increase maintenance.

ASSET MANAGEMENT

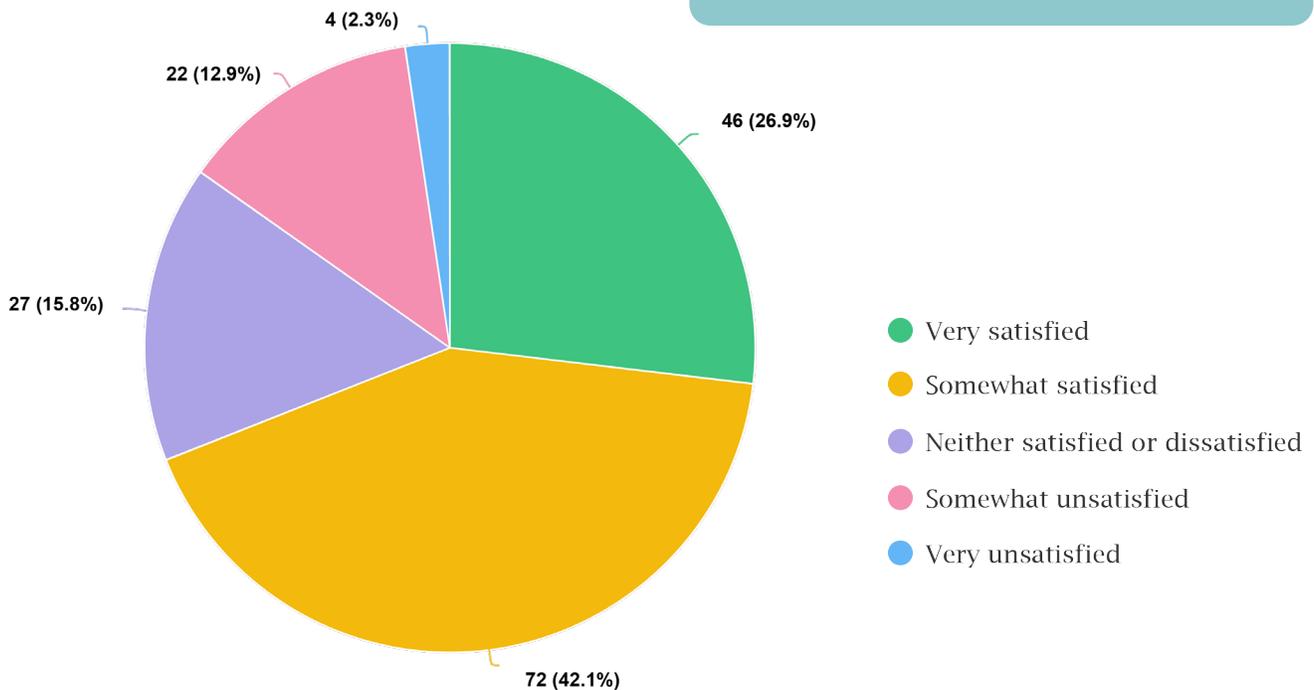
69% are somewhat or very satisfied with the condition of North Saanich infrastructure

15% are somewhat or very unsatisfied

As noted earlier, a consistent theme among respondents was an awareness of the impact of climate change on infrastructure, and the need to plan accordingly. Some expressed a desire to repair damage caused by recent significant weather events and many communicated the need for the District to adjust for future, potentially worsening, climate change.

Drainage, water infrastructure, and roadways were identified by many as most in need of attention now. Many also expressed a strong desire for more sidewalks and improved maintenance of pedestrian road shoulders.

A few respondents recommended the expansion of sewer lines to residential properties, and the phasing out of septic tanks and fields.



TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT

64% think the funding level for transportation upgrades is appropriate

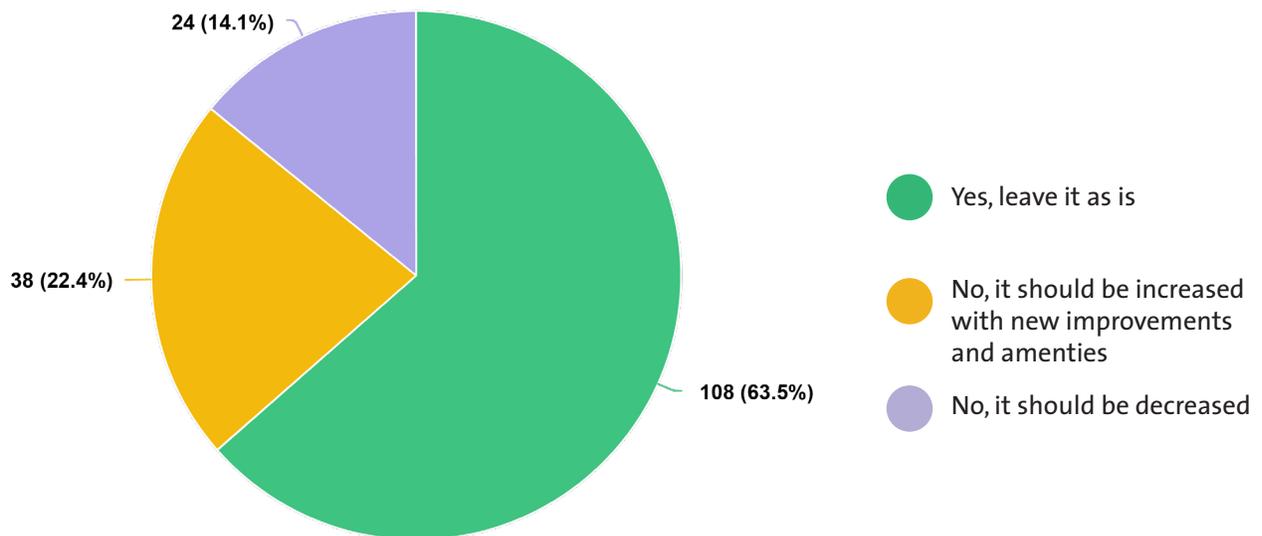
22% feel it should be increased

14% feel it should be decreased

Comments tended to revolve around cycling lanes and sidewalks. In both cases, respondents tended to be split between supporting and critiquing these modes of transport.

Those in favour of cycling lanes noted the lanes can also be used by pedestrians, and that e-bikes are increasingly popular, especially for an aging population. Others felt that dedicated bike paths were not a worthy investment and that cycling is a sport, rather than a transportation mode.

Those who voiced a desire for more sidewalks (and crosswalks) argue their presence is a vital safety issue, especially for young families. Others felt that sidewalks are unnecessary in a rural municipality.



GREEN WASTE SERVICES

37% think the District should continue this increased level of service in 2022 and fund it through property taxes

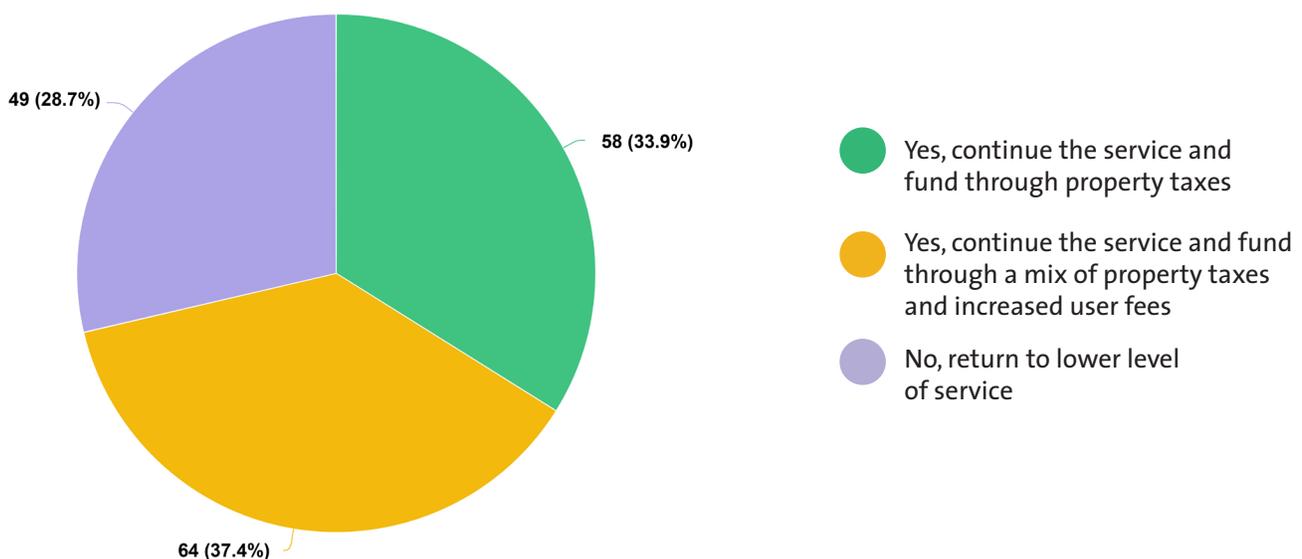
37% think the District should continue this increased level of service in 2022 and fund it through a mix of property taxes and increased user fees

29% want to return to a lower level of service

Climate change was yet again a factor in respondents' answers. Many commented that user fees for the green waste facility might discourage use and encourage people to burn more. Along these lines, some felt there should be a permanent ban on yard waste burning and residents should be encouraged to take their yard waste to a central facility at no cost.

Others felt that the green waste operations should be contracted out to a private company and the service offered on a pay-by-use basis.

Another suggestion was to levy user fees according to volume, rather than type of vehicle transporting the green waste.



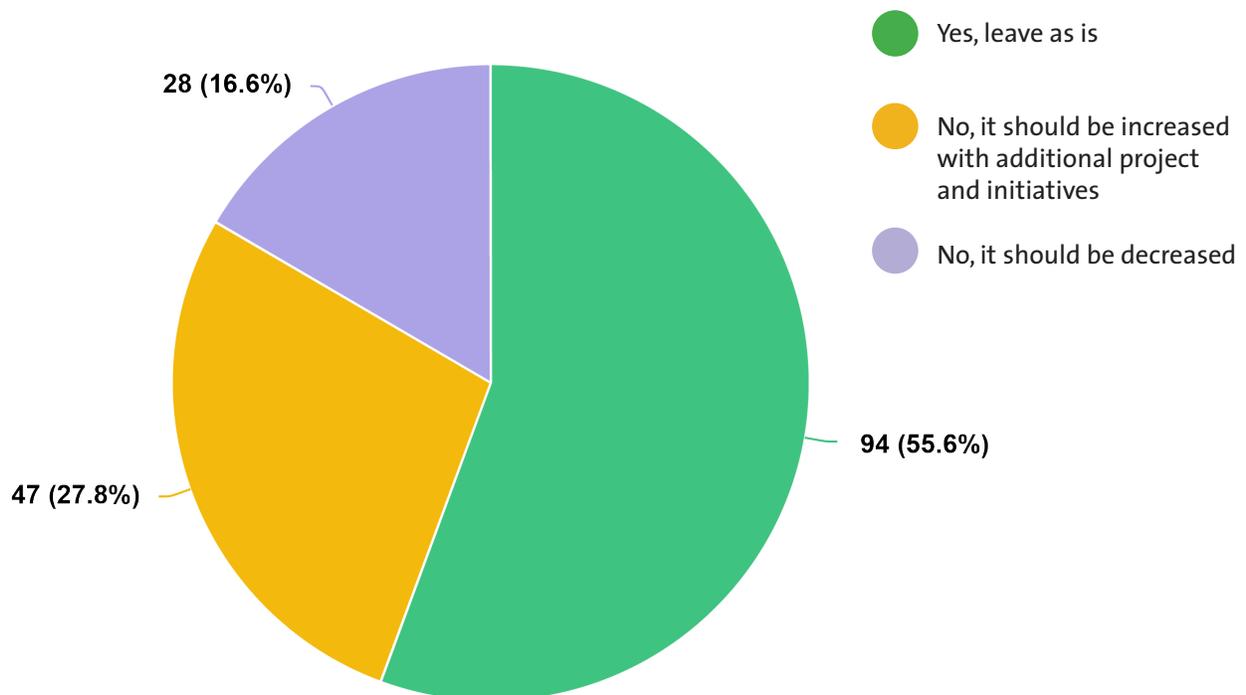
SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE ACTION

56% think the current funding level for sustainability and climate action initiatives is appropriate

28% think it should be increased, with additional projects and initiatives

17% think it should be decreased

Many commented that climate change should be considered a priority. Respondents asked how the District was partnering with other levels of government on this file. Others asked for a strategic plan to see how funds are to be leveraged. Others asked the District to consider initiatives to reduce carbon emissions (like electric charging stations in homes)—and to only fund projects that can show a proven return.



COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

Communications

73% are satisfied with the level of communication from the District

17% think there should be more communication

10% think there should be less communication

Respondents reflected that using a variety of communications platforms, including newsletters, social media, household mailers, the website, advertising in the local newspaper, etc., is an appropriate approach by the District, as residents have differing ways of receiving information. Some respondents noted they would like the District to make a greater effort to listen to residents as part of the communications approach and others expressed concerns about the communications budget.

Engagement

52% are satisfied with the level of engagement from the District

36% think there should be more engagement

12% think there should be less engagement

While many respondents were satisfied with the level of engagement, others were not; the Official Community Plan review tended to be a focal point for this criticism. Many people recognized the innate challenges of engaging in-person with the public during the pandemic. A common theme voiced by many was a desire for less reliance on consultants and more listening to the community.

OTHER SERVICES: INCREASE OR REDUCE?

We asked participants to identify any services not mentioned in the survey that they would like to see either increased or reduced.

Respondents provided a wide range of responses. One recurring theme was bylaw enforcement. Another was collaboration with neighbouring municipalities. Improved streetlighting and more crosswalks were mentioned by a few people, as was the introduction of sewer lines to more areas of the community.

We also asked if there were any other services that the District is not currently providing that residents would like to see offered.

The most common response was to suggest the District introduce garbage, recycling, and/or green waste pick-up, and install garbage cans at more public facilities. The expansion of sewage to unserved neighbourhoods was also mentioned. Respondents also offered feedback on the theme of culture, including a desire for public art, the introduction of an Indigenous Relations Office, and a request to promote local entrepreneurs and farmers.

COVID IMPACTS

74% feel COVID-19 no longer has a negative financial impact on them or their business

