



2023 BUDGET ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

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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. The District implemented an engagement plan to gather feedback on the service levels and initiatives to support the decision-making processes and development of the 2023 budget. In addition to providing feedback opportunities on the budget items, public engagement offered residents an opportunity to learn about the budget process.

The District launched a project page: Budget 2023 on the District website, which included links to the District's 2022-2026 financial plan, the 2022-2026 financial plan bylaw, information about property taxes and frequently asked questions. Residents were invited to provide feedback through a survey, which was available on the web page or as a printed copy at the municipal hall. The project page and survey were promoted through the District's printed and electronic newsletter, website, and email as a public notice, social media, signage at the municipal hall, posters distributed around the community, and advertisements/editorial coverage in the Peninsula News Review.

While some respondents expressed satisfaction with the information, others responded that they would like to see employee salary information, the budget breakdown by area, and year over year cost comparisons included in future surveys.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

January 27 to February 17, 2023

184 people took the survey
compared with 177 in 2022

94% own their own home

17% have children under the age of 18

37% identify as female

49% identify as male

9% are people living with disabilities

53% are retired

34% are employed

8% own a business in North Saanich

25% live in Deep cove

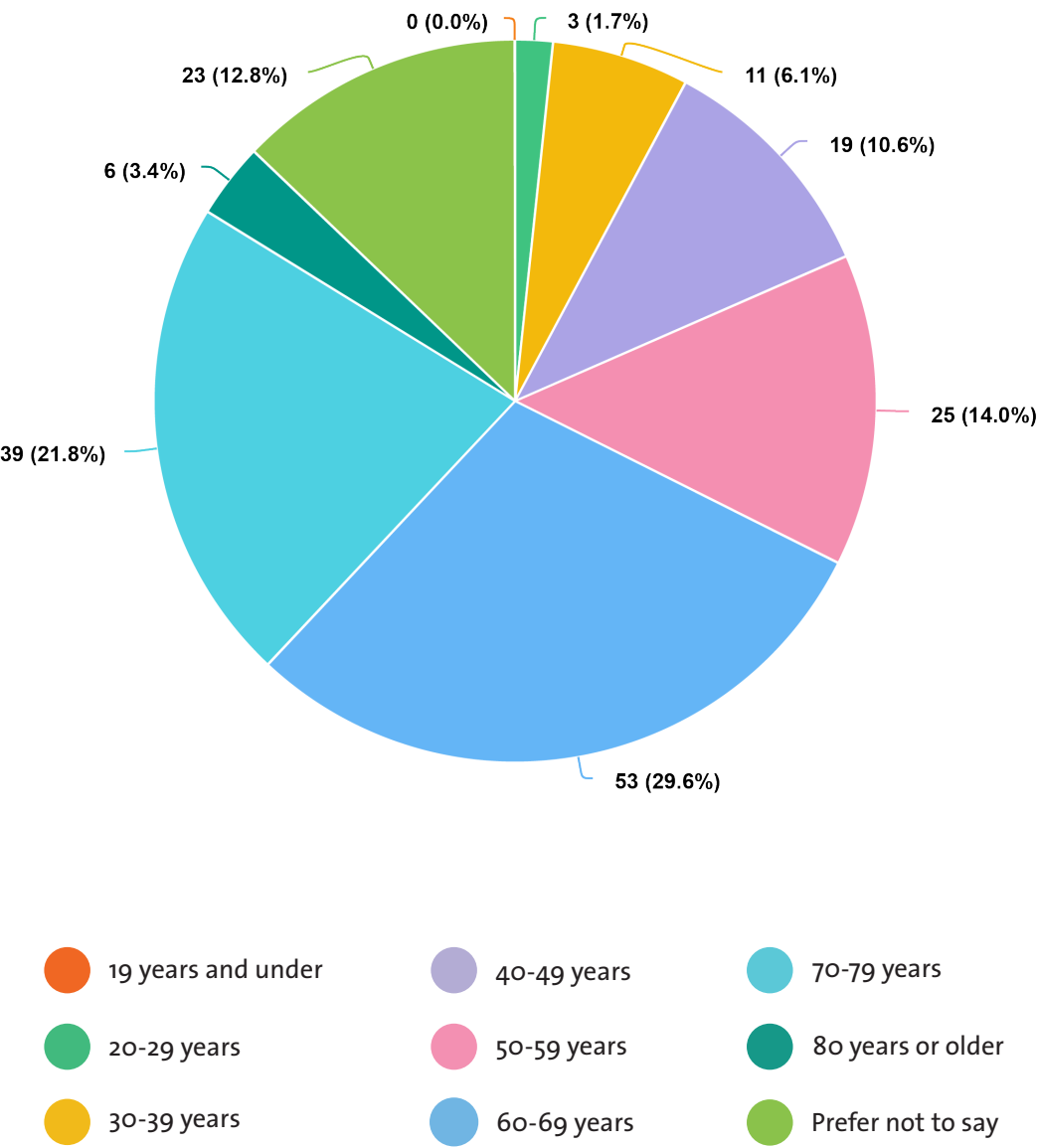
7% live in Ardmore

29% live in Dean Park

20% live in Lands End

AGE OF RESPONDENTS

Most respondents (70%) are 50 years and older

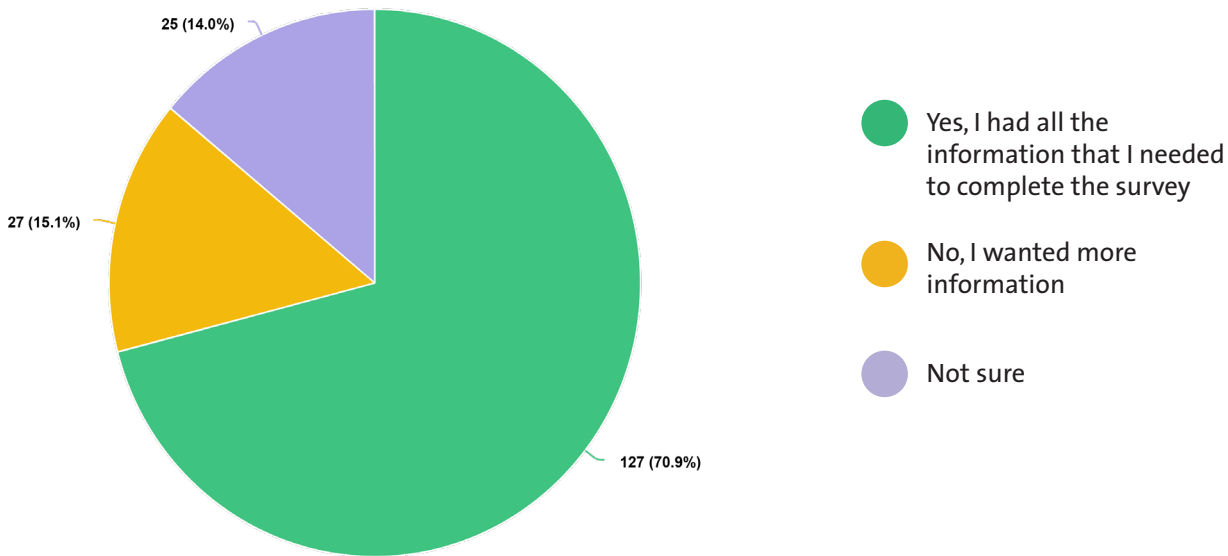


ACCESS TO BUDGET INFORMATION

71% reported they had sufficient information about the budget and service levels in order to participate in the survey, compared with 73% in 2022

15% reported having insufficient information, compared with 16% in 2022.

When asked if the survey provided the information needed in order to participate in the survey, many respondents felt it was adequate, while some asked for more details and background information for some of the subject areas. There were also requests for year over year comparisons and details on employee salaries and benefits.



OVERALL TAXATION LEVELS

2022 Residential Property Tax Rate



Common themes for which services residents would exclude or include from the 2023 are a desire for increased road maintenance and sidewalk implementation. There was some support for increases to enhance and maintain parks, to protect the environment, conduct additional bylaw enforcement and add additional waste services such as garbage pick-up and expansion of the green waste facility. There were also concerns expressed about the current economy and uncertainty about how the economic forecast may effect spending priorities.

Increase in 2022 Residential Tax Rate



Most respondents felt the tax increase was appropriate. The common theme that emerged from responses received was to focus the budget on essential services only. From those who suggested additions, there were requests for more sidewalks, parks, green initiatives, and affordable housing. Reductions were suggested in capital expenditures.

2022 Business Property Tax Rate

58% felt that the 2022 business property tax rate was appropriate

8% felt it should have been lower

8% felt that it should have been higher

While the majority of respondents felt the taxation level was about right, some of the comments received suggested that taxes should be increased for large scale businesses, while lowered for small businesses. Other suggestions included focusing on efficiency rather than eliminating services, and finding ways to create more areas in which small business could operate in North Saanich.

Increase in 2022 Business Property Tax Rate

52% felt that the previous year's percentage increase in business property taxes was appropriate

8% felt it should have been lower

12% felt that it should have been higher

A common theme throughout the responses was that large-scale businesses should pay a higher tax rate than small businesses. Multiple respondents suggested that the average increase in business tax rates should mirror the residential tax rate increase. As mentioned in the previous question, it was suggested that the budget focus on mostly essential services.

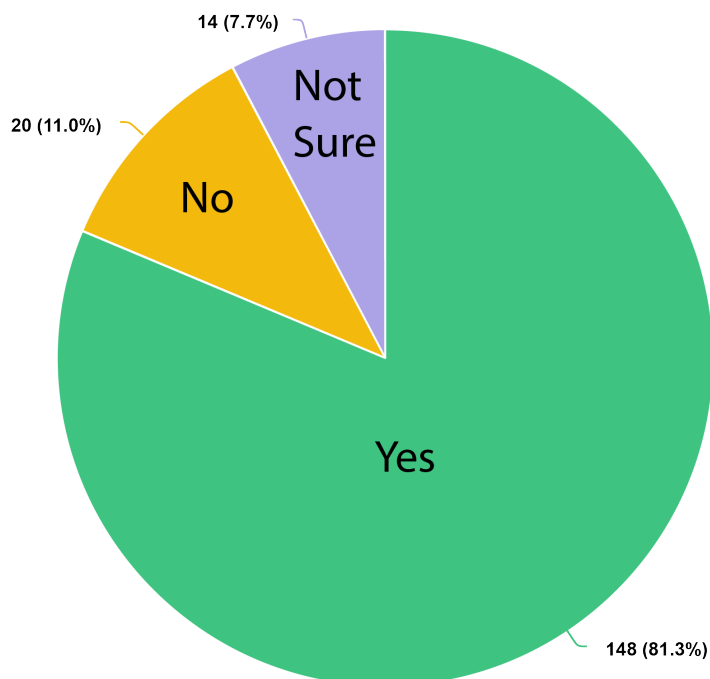
INFRASTRUCTURE REPLACEMENT FUNDING

81% 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.

11% disagreed with this practice

8% were not sure

A large percentage of respondents were in favour of creating a reserve fund and feel it is an important part of planning for infrastructure maintenance. A number of respondents believe the increase should be higher than 1%, many citing the effects of climate change on infrastructure and increasing supply chain issues. Some suggested the calculation of infrastructure replacement should be based on future requirements or that the calculation may need to change, given the ongoing and increasing effects of extreme weather events.



PARKS & NATURAL AREAS

Maintenance

68% of respondents support the overall funding level for parks and natural assets

25% felt that funding should be increased

7% felt funding should be decreased

Most respondents were satisfied with the proposed budget allocation, and many pointed out that the natural appearance of District parks was a large part of North Saanich's character. The importance of parks, trail systems, and recreation for mental health and well-being was a theme through throughout the responses. Playgrounds for all neighbourhoods, beach access, and trail improvements were the top priorities for respondents, along with accessibility considerations and parking. Other comments included managing invasive species, increasing the number of garbage receptacles, and creating more walking paths.

New Amenities

43% felt that the District should increase its capital budget to add amenities to natural areas, parks and trails

42% felt the District should not increase its budget for this reason.

15% not sure

Responses to this question were almost equally split. Nearly half of the respondents felt that the status of the parks and other natural areas are fine, or that this is not the right time to consider any additional projects. Some mentioned that only consider funding what is essential for safety and maintenance; others were in support of increasing the budget only for amenities such as washrooms or boat accesses. Some voiced suggestions for new recreation opportunities to be considered.

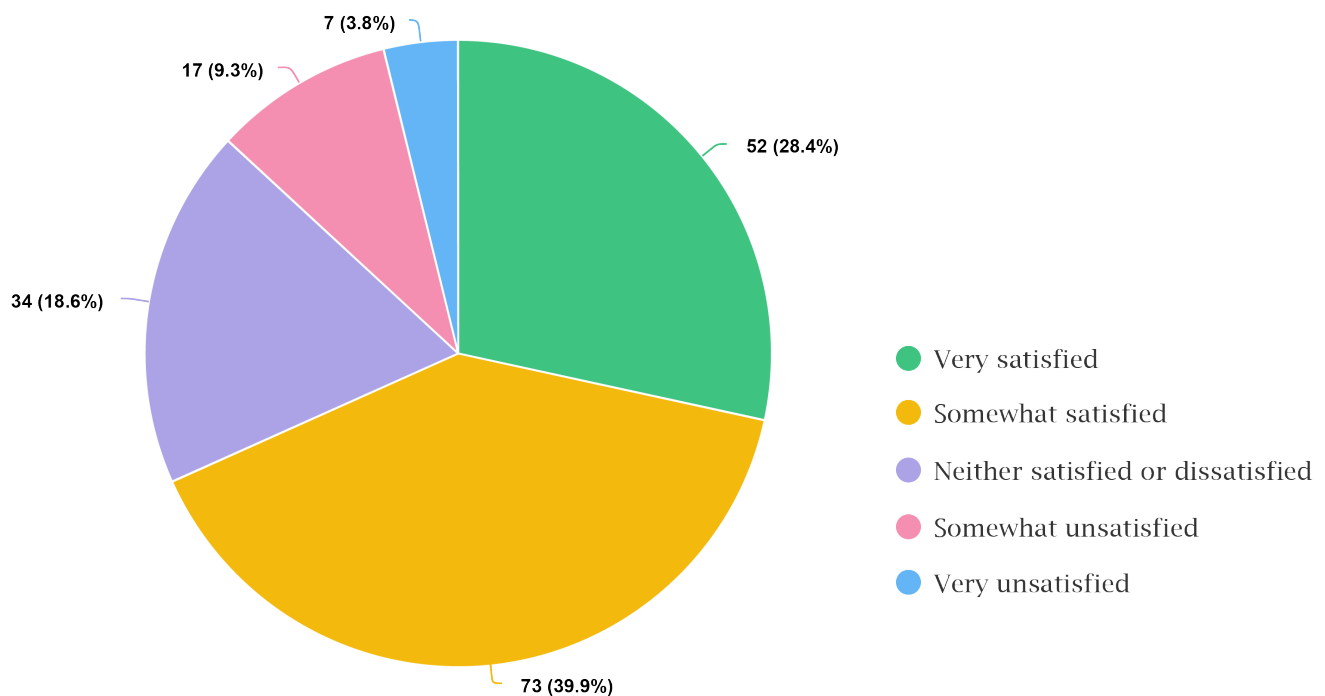
ASSET MANAGEMENT

Operations

68% are somewhat or very satisfied with the condition of North Saanich infrastructure

13% are somewhat or very unsatisfied

A key theme for respondents was road maintenance, including snow clearing, street cleaning, pothole repair, and road resurfacing. Flood mitigation was also an area of note, with mentions being made of the recent repair at Chalet Road. Many respondents noted that Public Works has been responsive to their requests, while others mentioned a desire to expand services to include green waste pick-up.



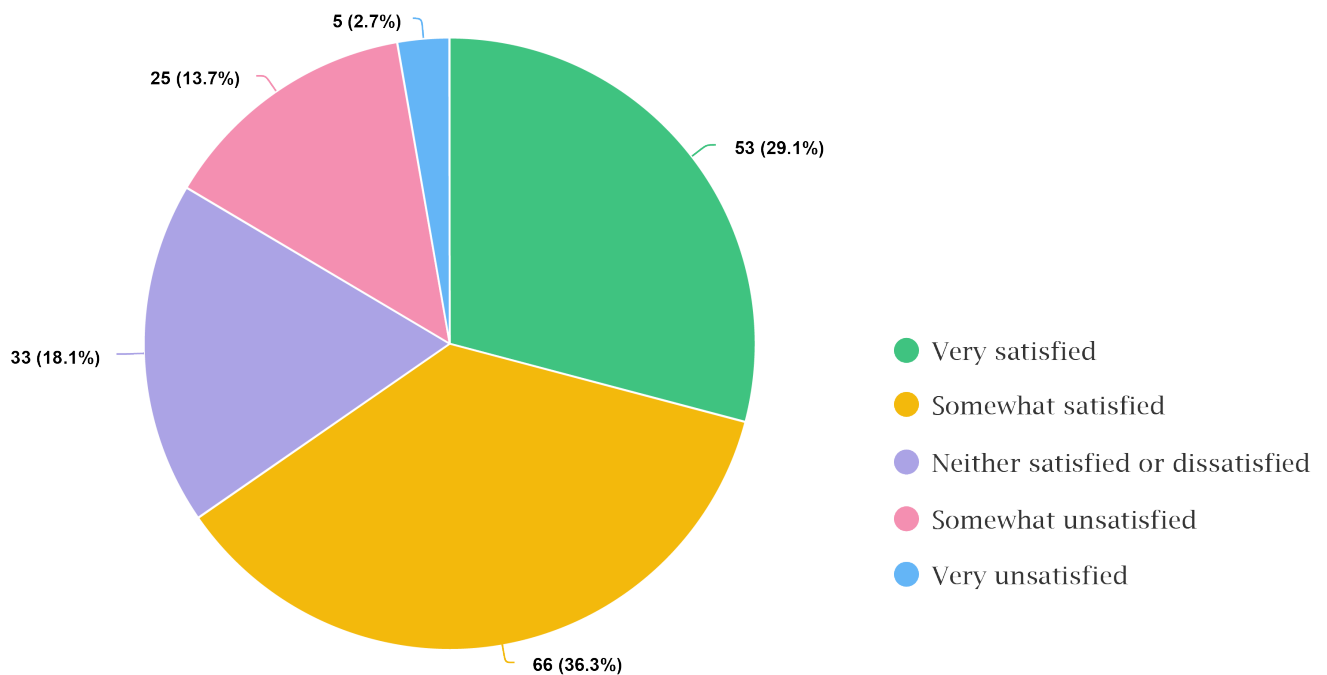
ASSET MANAGEMENT

Maintenance

65% are somewhat or very satisfied with the maintenance of North Saanich infrastructure

16% are somewhat or very unsatisfied

Regarding infrastructure maintenance, satisfaction levels were mixed. As stated earlier, road maintenance was a key concern, with many identifying potholes and overall road conditions as top priority. Bike lane maintenance and tree trimming along roads were also mentioned to be of importance to several respondents. Beach access, accessibility, and parking were again echoed as areas in which respondents wished to see improvements. The concern that environmental impacts be considered in all infrastructure maintenance was noted as well.



TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT

Infrastructure

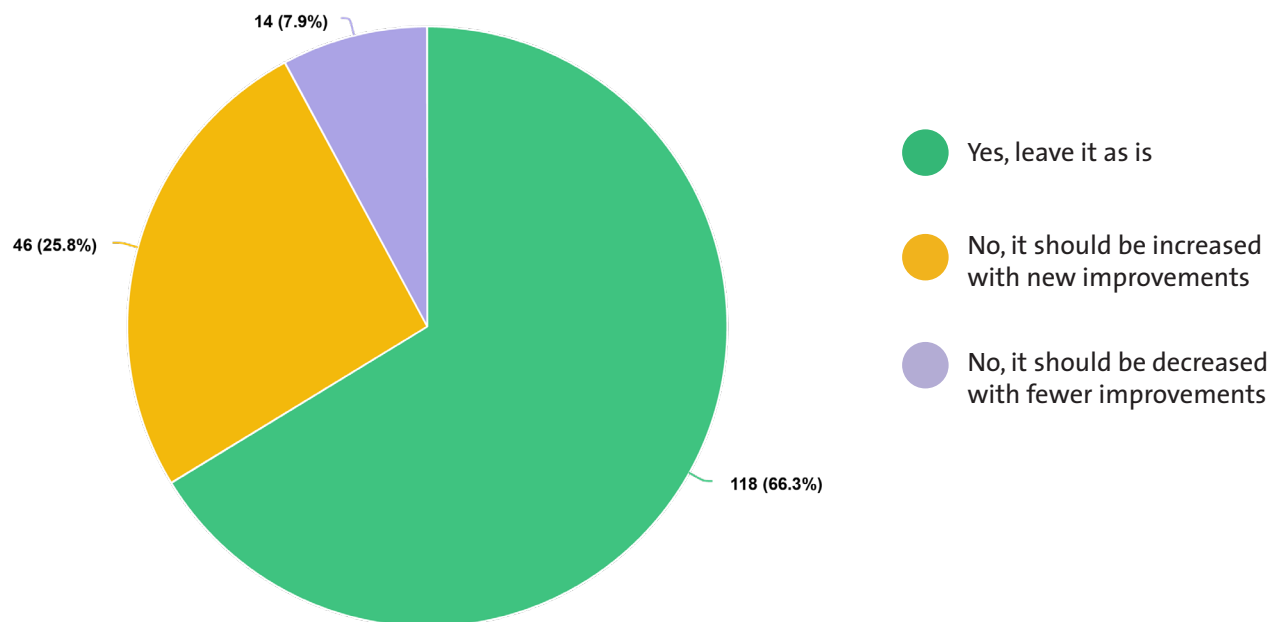
66% think the funding level for transportation improvements is appropriate

26% feel it should be increased

8% feel it should be decreased

Comments tended to mirror some of the previous comments in making road safety for drivers a priority. Paving, line painting and pothole repair were common points addressed, as were improved lighting and reflective materials where needed.

Many respondents saw focusing on sustainable and active transportation a priority, asking for additional bike lanes and bike lane maintenance, more transit infrastructure, and additional sidewalks. Some cited the increasing popularity of e-bikes and the need to promote them as a safe and viable method of transportation in the community. Many of the respondents noted the importance of ensuring that all plans for transportation improvements kept maintaining the rural feeling of the community top of mind.



TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT

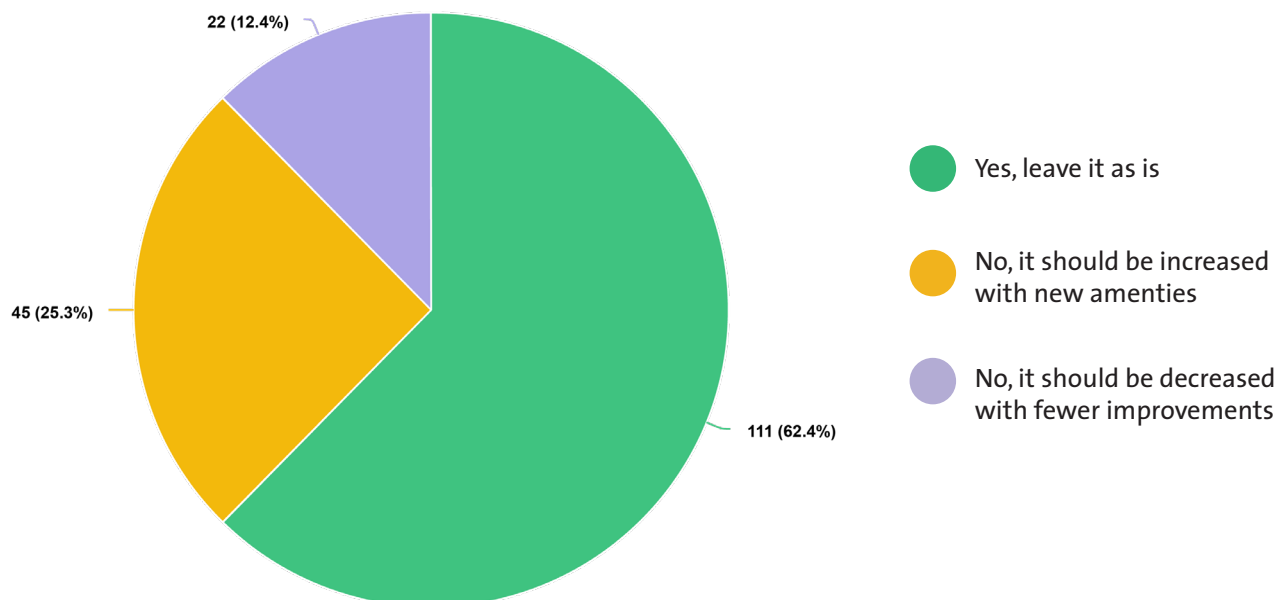
Safety Improvements

62% think the safety improvements measures for transportation is appropriate

25% feel it should be increased

12% feel it should be decreased

Respondents who commented on the level of funding for safety improvements appeared to be divided in their responses. While many are of the opinion that traffic calming measures are unnecessary, others feel that additional traffic calming measures are essential. The same can be said for street lights; while some felt that additional lighting was a key component to enhancing safety, others thought the current level of lighting was adequate for North Saanich's rural neighbourhoods. Speed enforcement, sidewalks, and controlled crosswalks were all mentioned as areas that, if improved, will result in making the community safer for pedestrians.



TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT

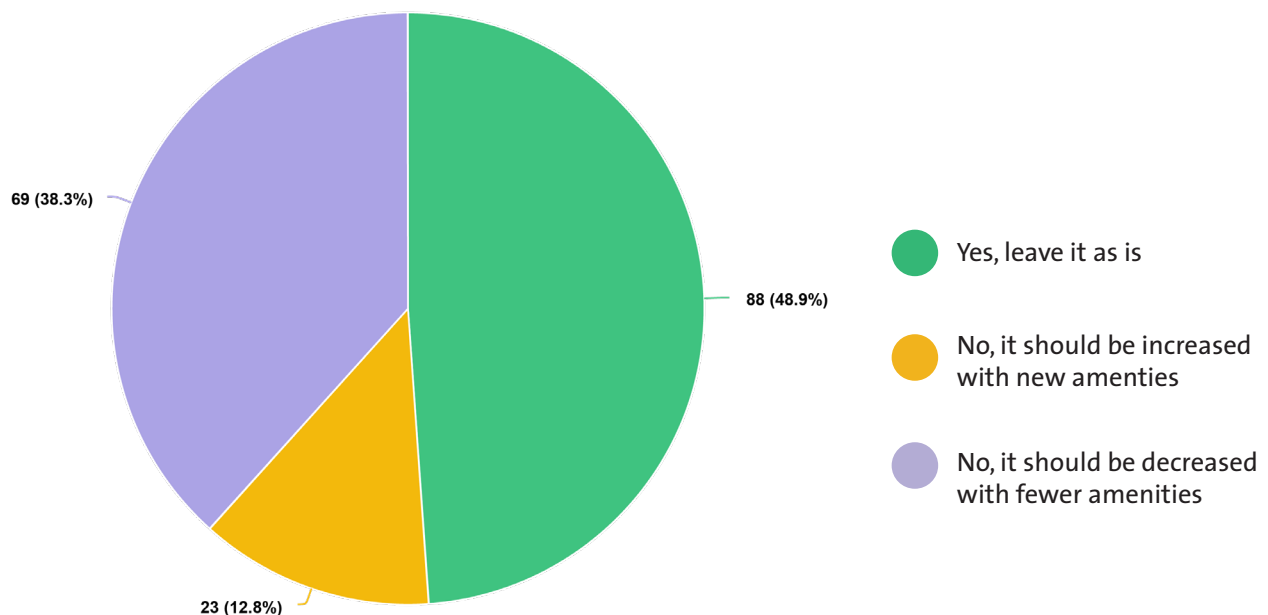
Active Transportation

49% think the funding level for active transportation amenities is appropriate

13% feel it should be increased with new amenities

38% feel it should be decreased

Responses to the level of funding for active transportation were also divided. Most of the responses were focused on lanes for cycling; while some see additional bike lanes as a necessity for improving sustainable transportation and encouraging active lifestyles, others see the creation of bike lanes an unnecessary expenditure for a rural community, and that the roads can be shared by both vehicle and bike traffic. For those opposed, some commented that this is not a priority or that cycling in North Saanich is primarily for recreation and not as a means of transportation.



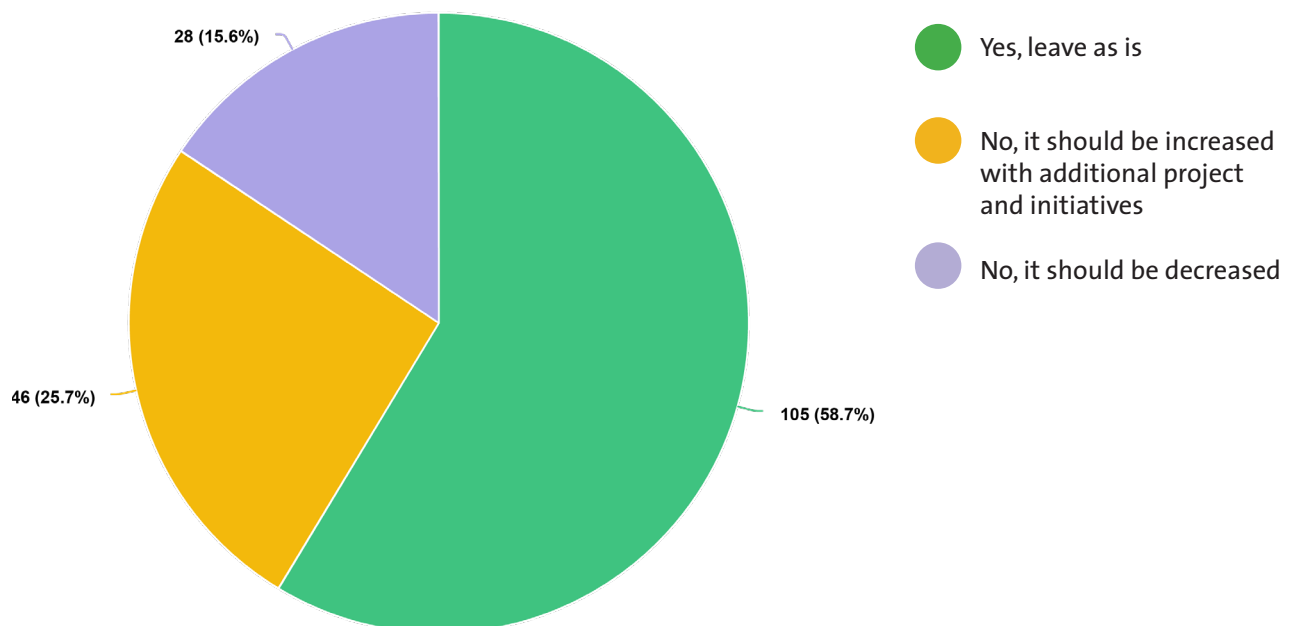
SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE ACTION

59% think the current funding level for sustainability and climate action initiatives is appropriate

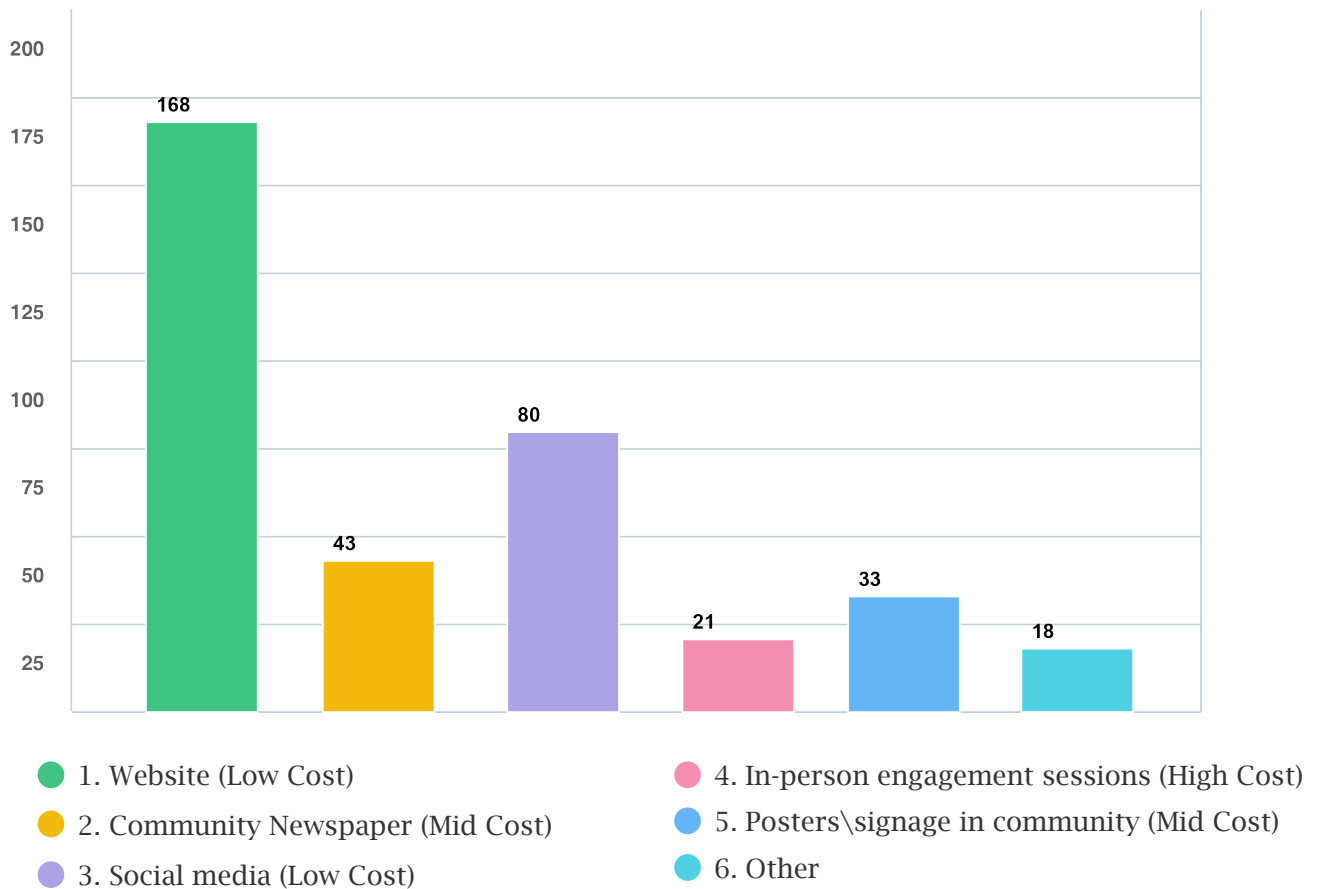
26% think it should be increased, with additional projects and initiatives

16% think it should be decreased

Many commented that climate change should be considered a priority and that responsibility should fall to all levels of government. Respondents commented that climate action should be factored into every decision made by the District. Some asked the District to consider initiatives to reduce carbon emissions (like incentives for solar electricity and electric charging stations in homes)—and to only fund projects that can show a proven return. Others asked to assess the impacts from the large scale operators in the community, and to consider climate action factors when issuing building permits.



COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT



Respondents tended to lean towards low-cost digital methods as their preferred method of receiving information from the District. There was strong support for increasing frequency of email communications and for reducing the use of paper, while others rely on the printed newsletter that accompanies their water bill for information. Others would like to see the website as the main source for information, and for the District to look at ways to make it easier to navigate for information. Some respondents noted they would like regular in-person opportunities to connect, as happened pre-pandemic.

Many mentioned that they look to local media for information, and they would like to see the District include regular updates in those publications (both print and online). Overall, feedback reflected that residents have a desire for regular updates and that using a variety of communications platforms is key in reaching all demographics.

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 the need to increase bylaw enforcement. Another was to expand on green waste collection, either by offering pick-up service or increasing facility hours. Some respondents requested that sewer lines be introduced to more areas of the community, and that parks, trails and green space are seen as priorities.

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 and washrooms at more public facilities. Respondents also offered feedback on the theme of community culture, including a desire for small neighbourhood hubs, and increased Indigenous Relations efforts.

COVID IMPACTS

When asked if COVID-19 continues to have a financial impact on their business or family, most respondents are not being as negatively impacted directly as in previous years, but are seeing financial increases due to inflation and supply chain issues.

BUDGET PROCESS INTEREST

When asked about their interest in the budget process, respondents expressed their interest in being informed as taxpayers, and in ensuring that climate change and North Saanich's natural environment are considered in the budget process.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

When asked to provide any additional comments, a common theme from respondents was a desire to decrease spending overall in this current economy.

