

Last chance to have say through Aurora's 2015 Citizen Budget?

By Brock Weir

If you think Aurora is spending too much money in certain areas and not enough in others, now is your chance to sound off before the 2015 Municipal Budget process gets underway.

The Town of Aurora continues to seek your input through an online survey dubbed the 'Citizen Budget', which will be open until 11.59 p.m. this Sunday night, November 30, on a variety of frontline services which have a direct impact on your tax bill. Through the online tool, you can enter the value of your home and see in real time how adjustments on spending in certain areas can have a direct impact on the tax rate. After completing the survey, which takes approximately eight minutes, you are entered for a chance to win an iPad Air.

According to Mayor Geoff Dawe, the idea for the online survey was adopted for Aurora after a meeting of Ontario municipalities in August. It is a great way to get what he describes as 'better-than-anecdotal input' from residents on the budget.

'People are prone to say taxes are too high, but very few people will actually give you any concrete input on where we could do better,' he says. 'This looked to be a great tool to be able to give residents an option to say, 'we think you're spending too much money on garbage pickup, but not enough on snow clearing,' [for instance].'

Many services, both frontline and more behind-the-scenes, come together to impact the overall tax rate. Aurora's Communications Department ventured to make the survey manageable for residents while explaining the function of each department and service.

'[We wanted] to put it out there in a very friendly format, something [residents] could do on their own time at their leisure, experiment with it for a little bit because there is no time limit on how long it takes to do the survey,' says Michael Kemp, Manager of Corporate Communications for the Town of Aurora. 'The nice thing about the tool is we can have instantaneous updating, so as soon as you've moved one of the levers you can see what the ramifications are, not only in that area of the budget, but in your taxes.

'In that respect, it is an incredibly powerful tool, and that is not something you necessarily get from a budget consultation. You don't get to see what the ramifications of that decision are instantaneously.'

Once the survey closes late on Sunday night, all the information will be amalgamated online and compiled into a report for consideration by the incoming Council. It will break down the results of every question and allow Council to see what the residents are looking for and how they informed the budget recommendations that are coming their way.

'If we find there is something that people want drastically different, I think it is something we have a duty to note,' says Mr. Kemp. 'It will then be at Council's discretion whether they would like staff to follow up [on it]. This survey takes seven or eight minutes to do. If you want to have your voice heard, this is a direct way of doing it. [Council] will see all the results come in, so it is your opportunity to have your say. If you have seven minutes to spare, you might win an iPad too!'

To have your say and participate in the Citizen Budget, visit www.aurora.ca/citizenbudget