

Citizen Budget survey leaves Councillors with questions

By Brock Weir

Some Council members might find it encouraging that most of the respondents in this year's 2016 Budget Survey are happy with the bang they get for their tax buck, but it is all in the eye of the beholder as Budget talks get underway.

The results of the third annual online survey, which asks residents to weigh in if they would like to see more or less tax dollars ? or status quo ? spent in various municipal departments while seeing how their suggested surveys would impact their tax bill in real time, indicates more than half of respondents ?want no change? or boost in certain areas.

Councillors, however, questioned whether the numbers presented can actually be taken to the bank.

?We received what we thought was almost 200 survey submissions,? said Dan Elliott, Treasurer for the Town of Aurora.

?Unfortunately, after it closed on the Monday we found someone had sort of stuffed the ballot box with the same IP address about 50 times or more, so we have now removed that so that you have a clearer picture of what was represented in those 132 survey responses.

?For these services, 50 per cent of residents [who] responded said we want no change or we want you to spend more money in these areas. It was almost all of our services. Prepared to pay the same or more, more than 50 per cent of those residents said that. What the numbers mean though, 83 per cent of the people fell in that category of wanting to spend the same or more [on infrastructure renewal].?

Once again, however, all was not rosy when it came to respondents' satisfaction with how much of their tax dollar is going towards cultural services, particularly in light of Council's impending decision to provide budget boosts to ?cultural partners? including the Aurora Cultural Centre and the Aurora Historical Society.

?The Town Services where greater than 50 per cent of the residents wanted to decrease the portion of their tax bill going to a specified service, after we filtered out all of the other ones, only one showed up on this side of the ledger,? said Mr. Elliott. ?The Cultural Services were very close with only 51 per cent of the respondents said decrease. Of those, 60 per cent wanted the maximum decrease allowed in a survey. That was an interesting piece of information for Council.?

It wasn't the only interesting piece of information to Council, and it left Councillors wanting more ahead of further budget meetings. There were more questions that had to be addressed and Councillor Paul Pirri requested a full breakdown of the results at a future meeting.

?I am always concerned when we could potentially be skewing numbers,? said Councillor Pirri. ?For 2017 Citizen Budget survey results?we're including ?no change? with increase and we're looking at a percentage. I would be interested in seeing how many people would like to see ?no change? or decrease and I think ?no change? could easily fit into either category.

?It is easier to paint a rosier picture if no change is included with the increase section. If possible, it would be appropriate to see how many people don't want to see anything changed compared to not changed or increased.?