

BUDGET 2019 SURVEY FOR CITIZENS

Citizen Report- Findings and Recommendations



December 2018

Prepared by the Finance & Administration
and Communications Departments

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Methodology 2

Survey Results 3-20

Survey Summary and Recommendations as Approved by Council 21

Citizen Questions and Comments-Answers to Common Themes 22-23



Introduction

As part of the Budget 2019 Community Engagement plan, “Stay Informed. Get Involved”, Lethbridge County invited citizens to participate in the Budget Survey to help Council and Staff understand the priorities of residents and business owners in the County.

Background:

Included in Lethbridge County’s Public Participation Policy #174 are the two guiding principles of Inclusiveness and Transparency. Based on these principles, the County is committed to informing and engaging its citizens and stakeholders in the 2019 budget process. This will achieve the objective of involving the public and will assist County Council to better understand the capital and operating priorities of the stakeholders. The County’s Finance and Administration Department have collaborated with the Communications Department to build a sustainable approach to budget engagement; incorporating community feedback and ensuring the public can “Stay Informed and Get Involved”.

Objectives:

The goals of the survey were:

1. To inform local stakeholders about the County’s key spending areas and build a knowledgeable community that is prepared to engage with budget planning during the preparation of the County’s upcoming budget cycle.
2. To provide all citizens with the opportunity to share their input on the County’s budget priorities.
3. To share the County’s budget messages, and promote engagement and connectivity.

The survey investigated what citizens feel are important capital projects and what projects should receive additional or less funding. Administration also wanted to know if citizens felt they were receiving enough information on the budget process and their satisfaction with current programs, services, and policies as directed by Council.

Overall, the aim of the Budget 2019 Survey was to gather citizen feedback to help Council and Administration prepare the most effective budget possible.



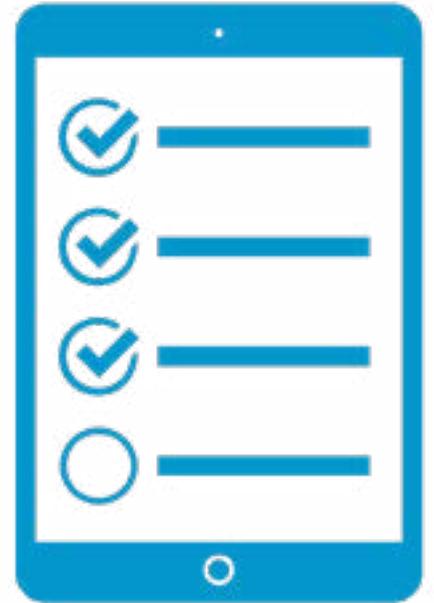
Values under the 2018
Strategic Plan

Methodology

Survey Methodology:

A 30 question survey was made available to County citizens asking for feedback on proposed budget items to help Council and administration determine priorities during the preparation and deliberation of the 2019 Budget.

The survey was available from October 1 to November 1, 2018 through an online form posted to the County's website and social media pages, as well as the County app. Printed surveys were offered at the Lethbridge and Picture Butte administration offices. The survey was advertised through the County website, social media, Sunny South News, County Connection, County Crier, signage in the administration offices, and app. Councillors were given informational cards to hand out to citizens to encourage participation in the survey. A Public Service Announcement was sent to all local news (radio, television, online, and print).



Limitations:

The limitations identified in the Budget 2019 Survey include:

1) *Survey design and data collection process:*

- Respondents had the option to skip questions completely. In order to gather more complete information and reduce skipped questions, each question should have been made mandatory before moving onto the next.
- While all questions will be made mandatory, an option such as “not applicable” should be available for levels of service that may not apply to all respondents.

2) *Notification and access to survey:*

- Some citizens may not have access to a computer or County locations (too far, cannot drive, etc.).
- Some may not have been aware that the County had issued a survey (do not have social media, do not read local news, etc.).
- Future survey notifications could be sent with the quarterly County Connection or in utility bills to ensure more citizens have access (time withstanding).
 - In the future, administration could allow more time for survey advertising and data collection.



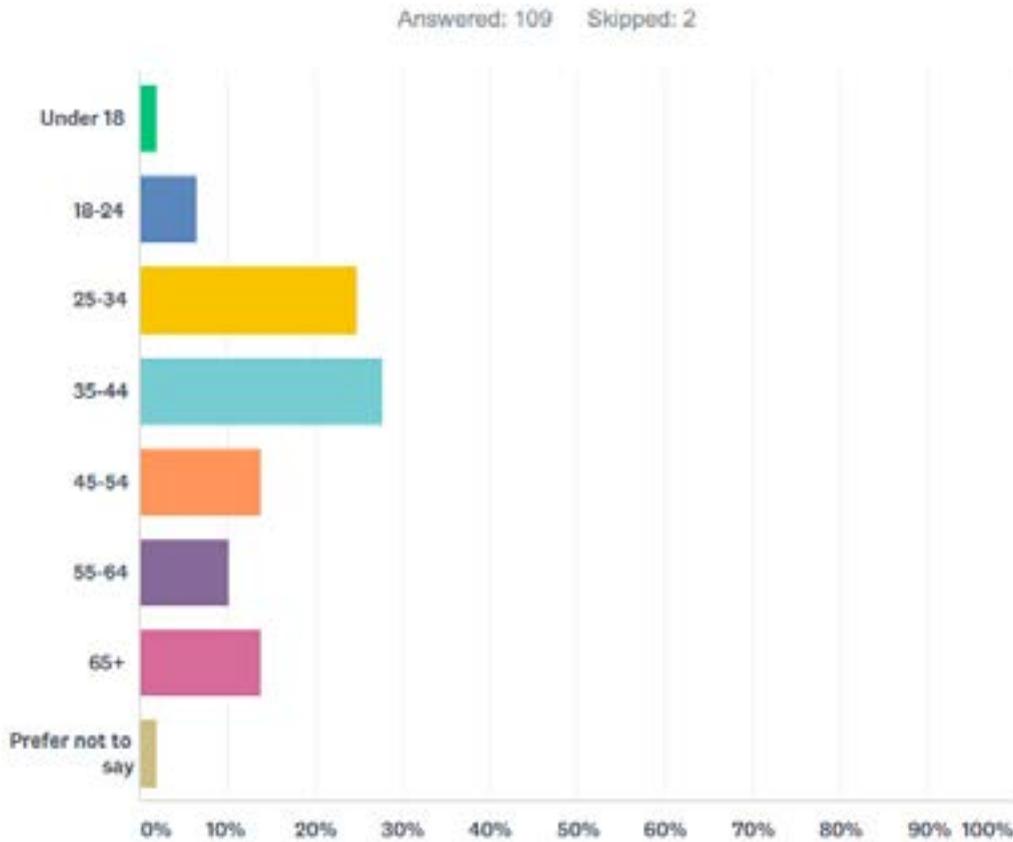
3) *Self-reporting data:*

- When asked to self-report, there are a number of biases or issues that may arise.
- Respondents may not fully understand the question or interpret it in the same way as others.
- Controlling the sample is not possible when asking respondents to self-report. There were no controls in this survey that would prevent a non-County person from participating in the survey, or to prevent a citizen from filling it out more than once.

Survey Results

Demographics

Q1. What is your age?



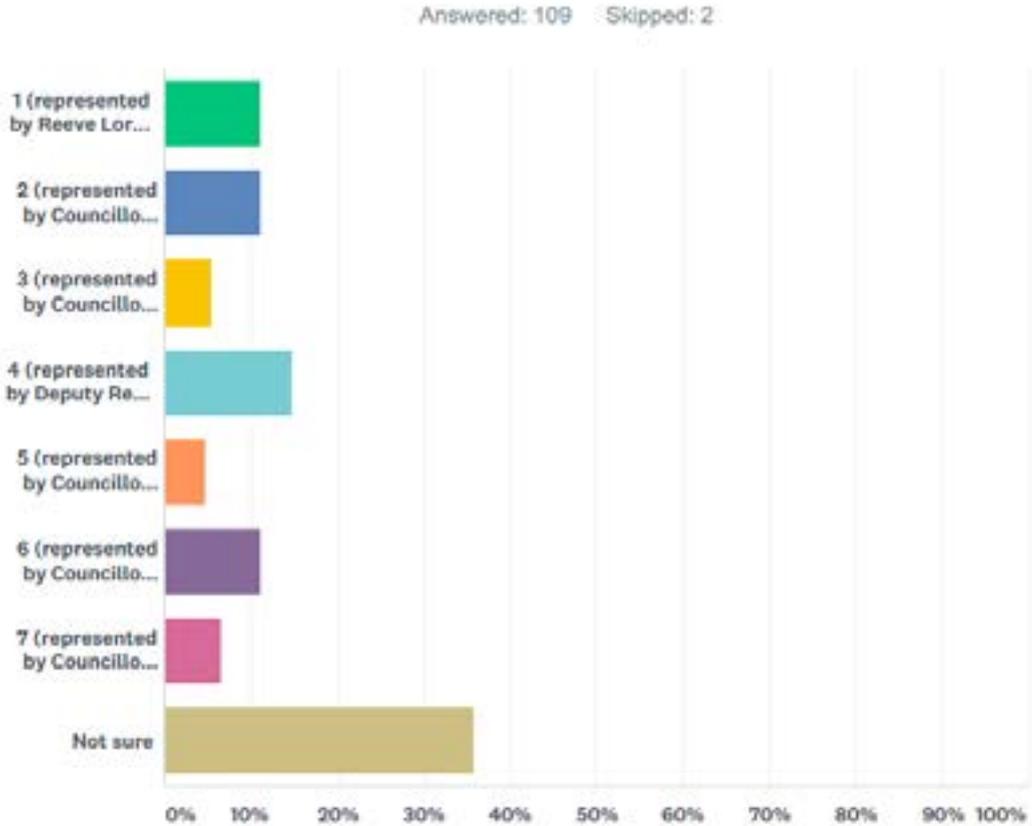
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	2%	2
18-24	6%	7
25-34	25%	27
35-44	28%	30
45-54	14%	15
55-64	10%	11
65+	14%	15
Prefer not to say	2%	2
TOTAL		109

53% of survey respondents were between 25-44.

Survey Results

Demographics

Q2. What division do you reside/work in?



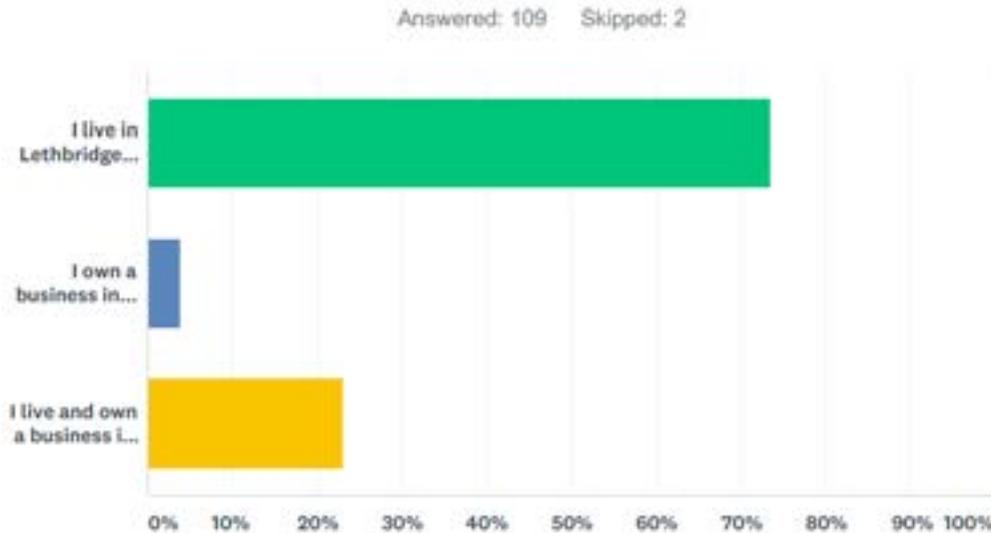
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1 (represented by Reeve Lorne Hickey)	11%	12
2 (represented by Councillor Tory Campbell)	11%	12
3 (represented by Councillor Robert Horvath)	6%	6
4 (represented by Deputy Reeve Ken Benson)	15%	16
5 (represented by Councillor Steve Campbell)	5%	5
6 (represented by Councillor Klaas VanderVeen)	11%	12
7 (represented by Councillor Morris Zeinstra)	6%	7
Not sure	36%	39
TOTAL		109

Respondents were somewhat evenly distributed between Divisions 1-7, with 36% not knowing the Division they reside in.

Survey Results

Demographics

Q3. Please select the answer that applies to you:



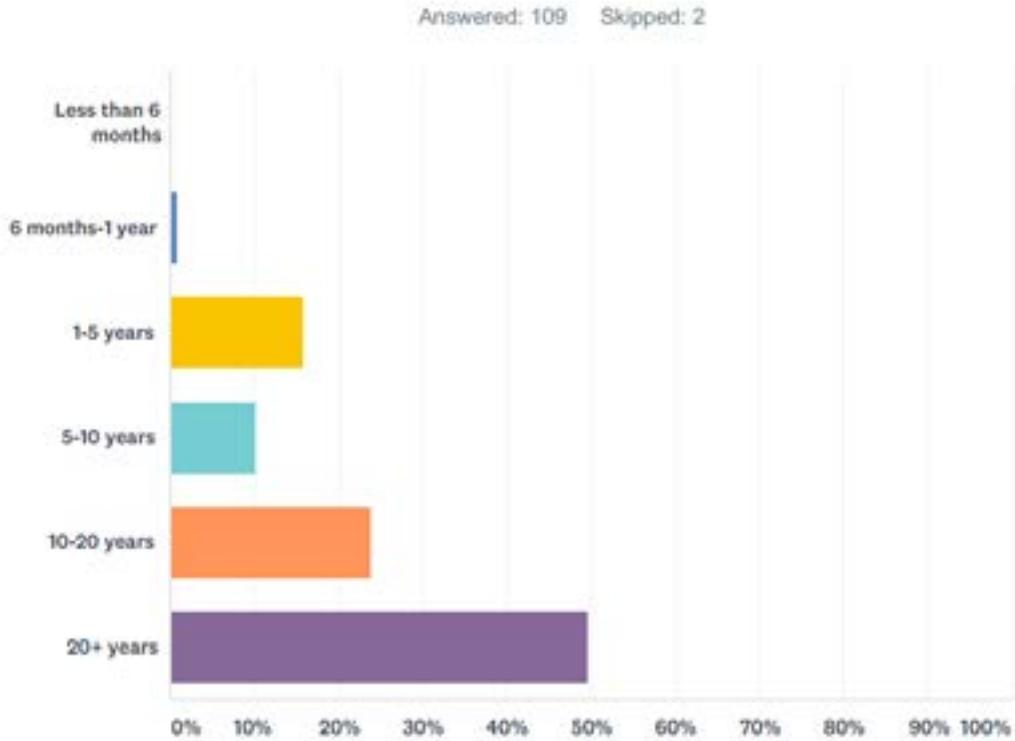
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I live in Lethbridge County	73%	80
I own a business in Lethbridge County	4%	4
I live and own a business in Lethbridge County	23%	25
TOTAL		109

The majority of the respondents reside in Lethbridge County with a small percentage that both live and own a business in Lethbridge County.

Survey Results

Demographics

Q4. How long have you lived or owned a business in Lethbridge County?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Less than 6 months	0% 0
6 months-1 year	1% 1
1-5 years	16% 17
5-10 years	10% 11
10-20 years	24% 26
20+ years	50% 54
TOTAL	109

Half of respondents have lived in Lethbridge County for 20+ years.

Survey Results

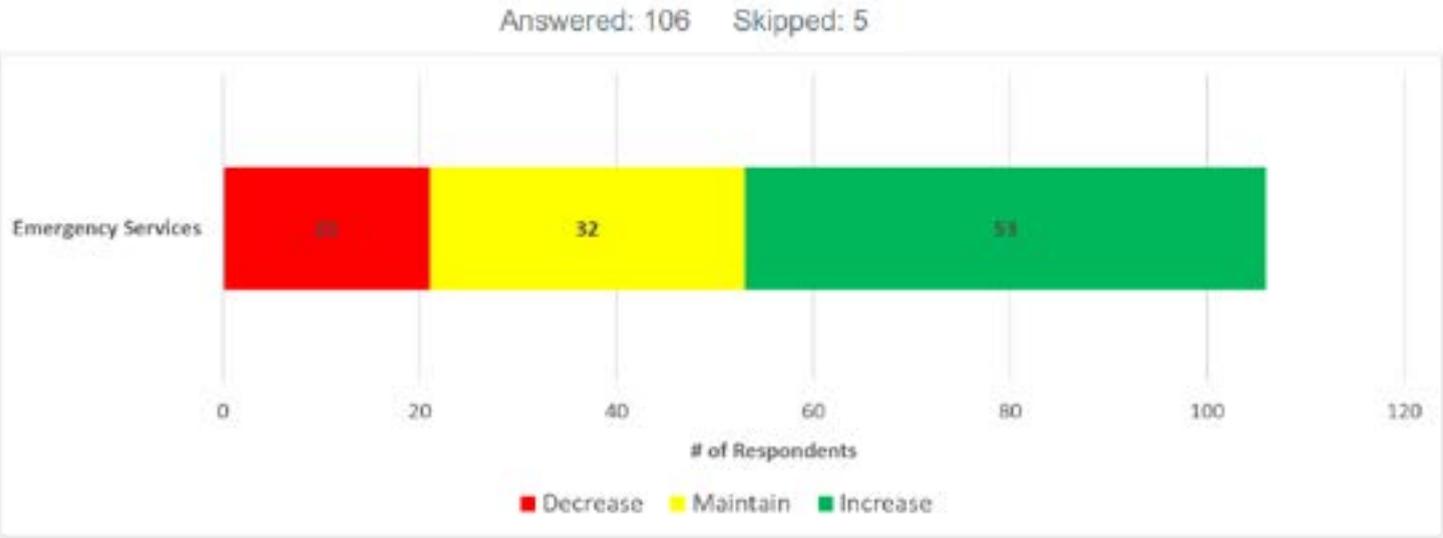
Emergency Services

The Emergency Services department has gathered information for the upcoming 2019 budget to include costs related to hiring a third Community Peace Officer (CPO). Since its inception in 2013, the Lethbridge County CPO Program has successfully raised public awareness and enforcement of the rules and regulations that fall under provincial law and municipal bylaw. The County's Peace Officer goals continue to be public safety, protection of infrastructure and quality of life for all.

Based upon the current administrative responsibilities, training requirements, court time and leave, the existing two Peace Officers are often challenged to provide adequate patrolling and enforcement coverage for 6 days a week. On any given day the County may be reduced to 1 or 0 Officers on duty because of these program requirements. The limited staffing of the Peace Officer Program also challenges the County to provide adequate total area patrolled on a daily basis. Patrols are limited to 'hot zones' where other less active areas of the County receive little or no regular patrols. Adherence to all Alberta Peace Office Program management requirements is also a challenge due to the absence of a uniformed lead-hand to directly oversee and assist with the daily activities of each Peace Officer in the field.

Upon the hiring an additional CPO to ensure adequate coverage, the Emergency Services annual operating budget increase would be approximately \$120,000+ to include burden rate wages, training, uniforms, equipment, etc. There would also be a one-time capital cost of \$115,000 for a vehicle and related equipment. These vehicles are on a 5 year replacement program, where an annual rate is collected by the Fleet Department and put into a reserve to cover the replacement cost.

Q5. Would you like to see this program/level of service Increased (as proposed), Maintain the current level of service or Decrease the level of service?

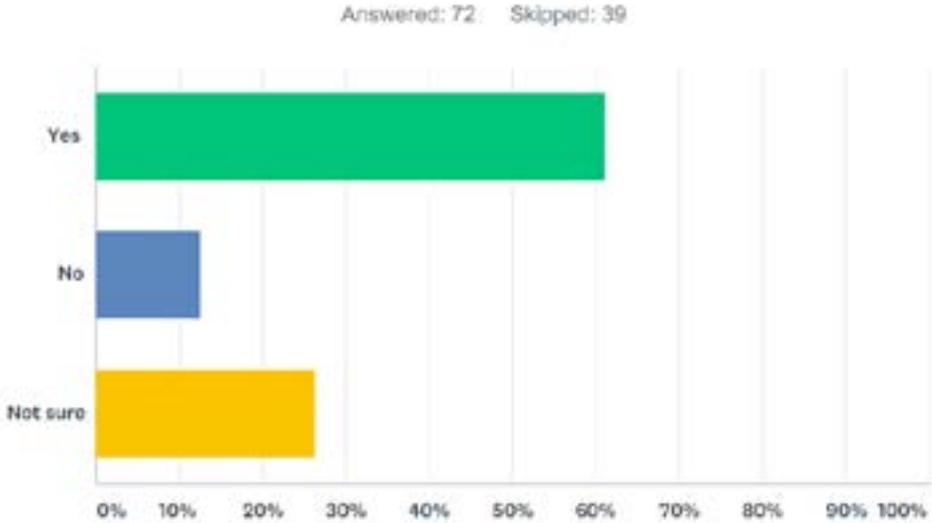


Although the graph indicates that respondents would like to see the level of service increased, based on the comments below Administration believes that there may be some misconception as to what the legislated roles and duties of the Community Peace Officers are versus the RCMP.

Survey Results

Economic Development

Q8. Business owners: Would the addition of high speed (broadband) internet connection enhance your business services or entice business development?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	61%	44
No	13%	9
Not sure	26%	19
TOTAL		72

The majority of respondents indicated that high speed internet would enhance business services.

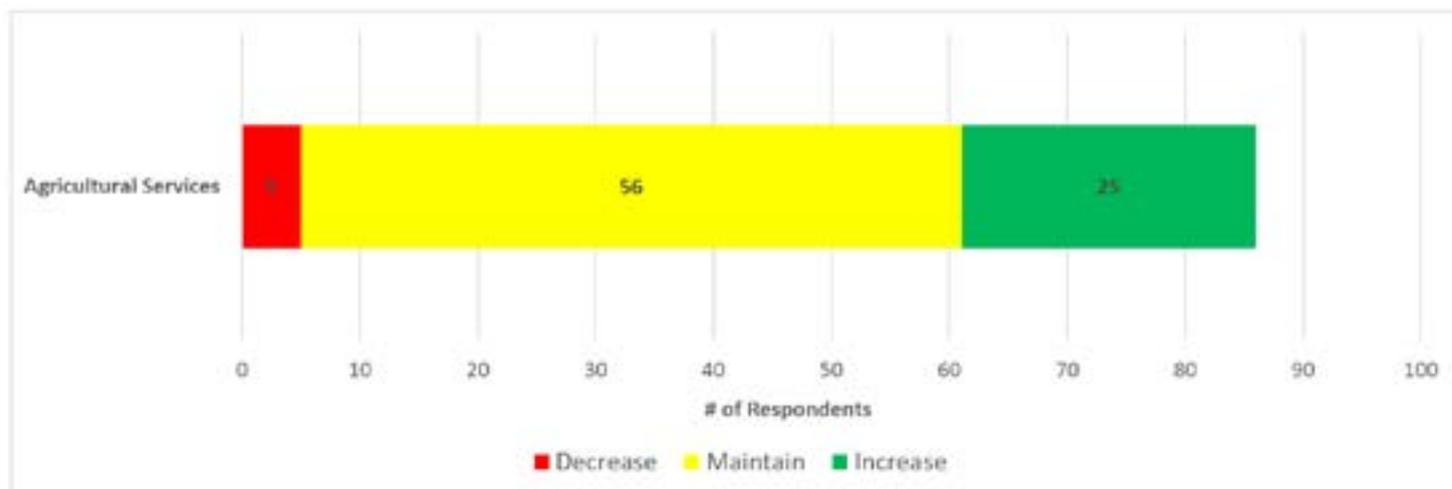
Survey Results

Agricultural Services- Parks

The Agricultural Services Department is responsible for the maintenance of the County's park grounds and equipment within the parks. The 2018 Operating budget for the Agricultural Services parks activities is \$91,580. This budget includes 2 seasonal staff to provide services such as mowing, spraying, tree trimming, irrigation maintenance, machinery repairs and playground equipment inspections and maintenance.

Q10. Would you like to see this program/level of service Increased (as proposed), Maintain the current level of service or Decrease the level of service?

Answered: 86 Skipped: 25



Respondents indicated they would like the level of service to be maintained.

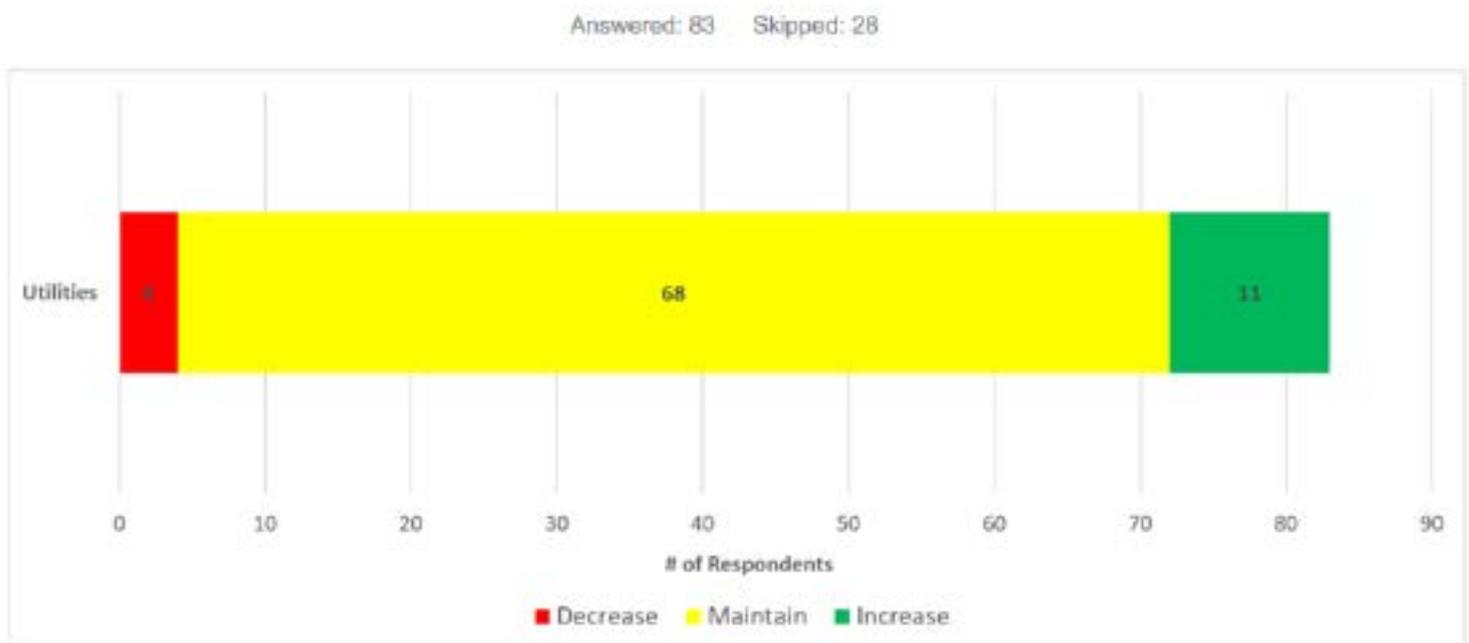
Survey Results

Utilities

The Utility Department is responsible for water treatment and distribution in the County. Over the past few years the department has been working to be at full cost recovery within its operations. This means that the services provided are fully funded through user fees rather than taxation. This gives the department the opportunity to budget funds to be transferred to a utility reserve for future capital upgrades. As the County purchases water from the City of Lethbridge, some of the fee increases cannot be changed as the County needs to ensure that our rate increases match the City's, and there are funds that will cover the County's costs for operations and some future capital replacement. The 2018 Water Treatment & Distribution operating budget is \$2,032,940, plus an annual total reserve transfer (for all utility services) of \$384,030 for a total of \$2,416,970. Revenue collections budgeted for water services is \$2,540,700. This revenue covers the operations of the water services and some potential future capital costs. This rate method of cost recovery through operations applies to wastewater and residential garbage services as well.

NOTE – The Regional Waste Program is funded through general property taxes which are calculated based on assessment and is included on all tax notices.

Q12. Would you like to see this program/level of service Increased (as proposed), Maintain the current level of service or Decrease the level of service?

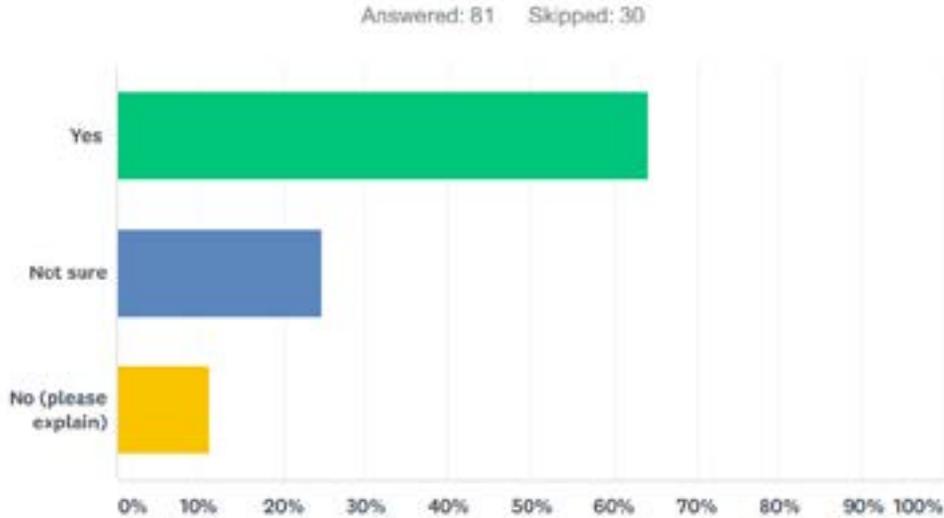


The response was overwhelmingly in favour of maintaining the current level of service for water treatment and distribution.

Survey Results

Utilities

Q13. Is the current utility rate method (water services funded by the users and not through general taxation) one that you feel is fair? If NO, please provide comments.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	64%	52
Not sure	25%	20
No (please explain)	11%	9
TOTAL		81

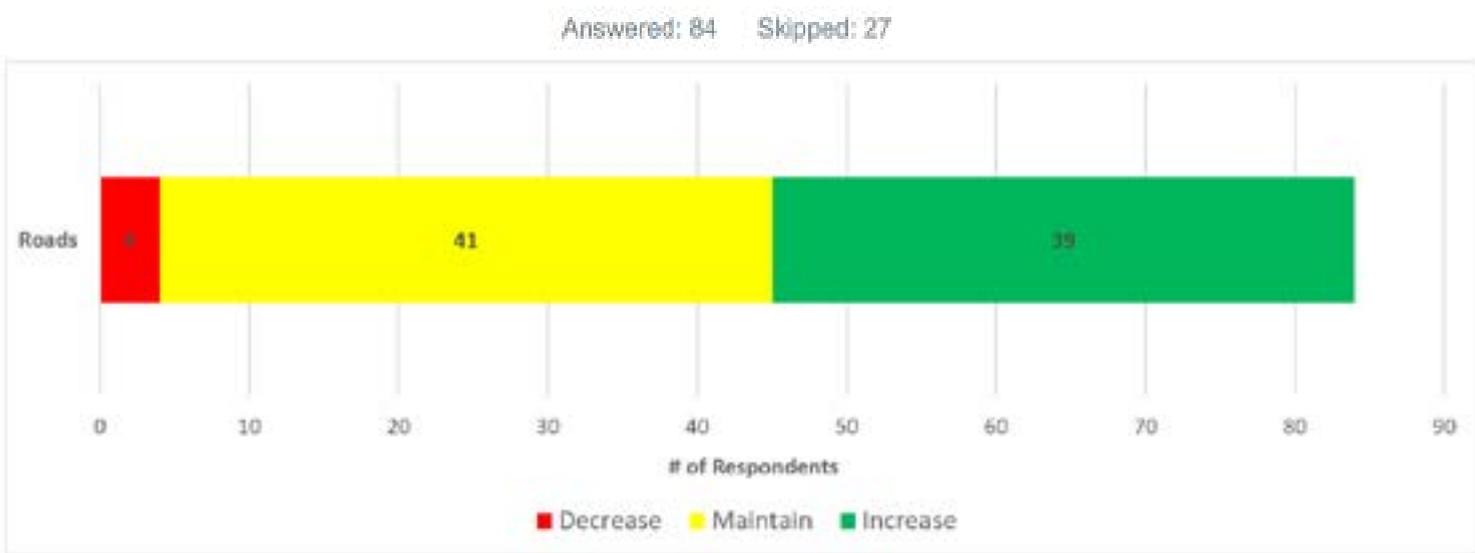
The majority of respondents indicated that they feel the current rate method is fair. The County will continue to budget based on the user pay model and will incorporate annual transfers to reserves for future capital projects/upgrades.

Survey Results

Public Works- Roads

The County is responsible for the maintenance of approximately 2,000 km of roads, including gravel roads. Grading is one of the largest budget items for the Public Works department. In 2018, due to the work done as part of the Calcium Base Stabilization Project, the number of grader division areas were modified and reduced from 9 to 8 in 2018 with further reduction planned. The reduction in costs associated with grading was moved to the Haul Road Base Stabilization Maintenance program budget to ensure all roads are kept up to standard.

Q14. Would you like to see this program/level of service Increased (as proposed), Maintain the current level of service or Decrease the level of service?

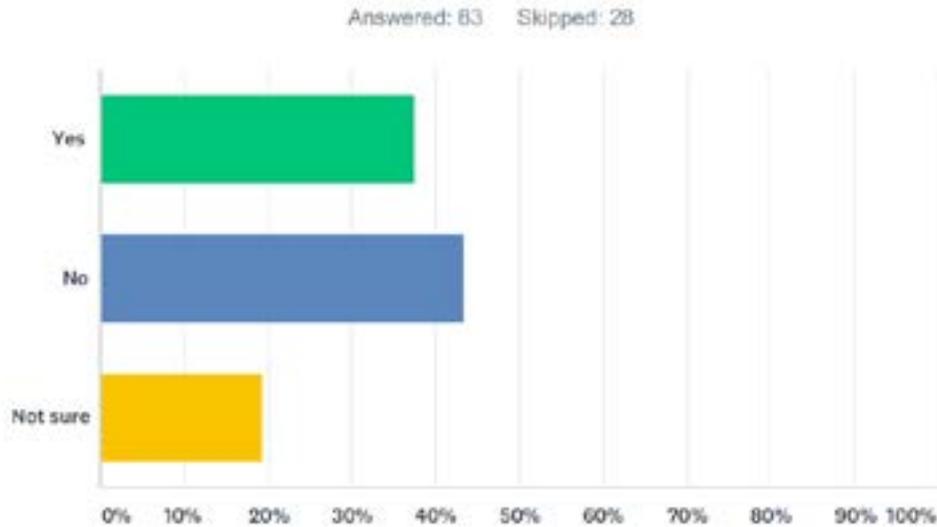


Responses were fairly evenly split between maintaining or increasing the current level of service regarding the grading activity and maintenance of the Base Stabilized roads.

Survey Results

Public Works- Roads

Q15. Have you noticed a change in the service delivery for grading since modifying the grader division areas?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	37%	31
No	43%	36
Not sure	19%	16
TOTAL		83

Responses were almost evenly split between yes and no, with more respondents noting that they have not noticed a level of service change in this area.

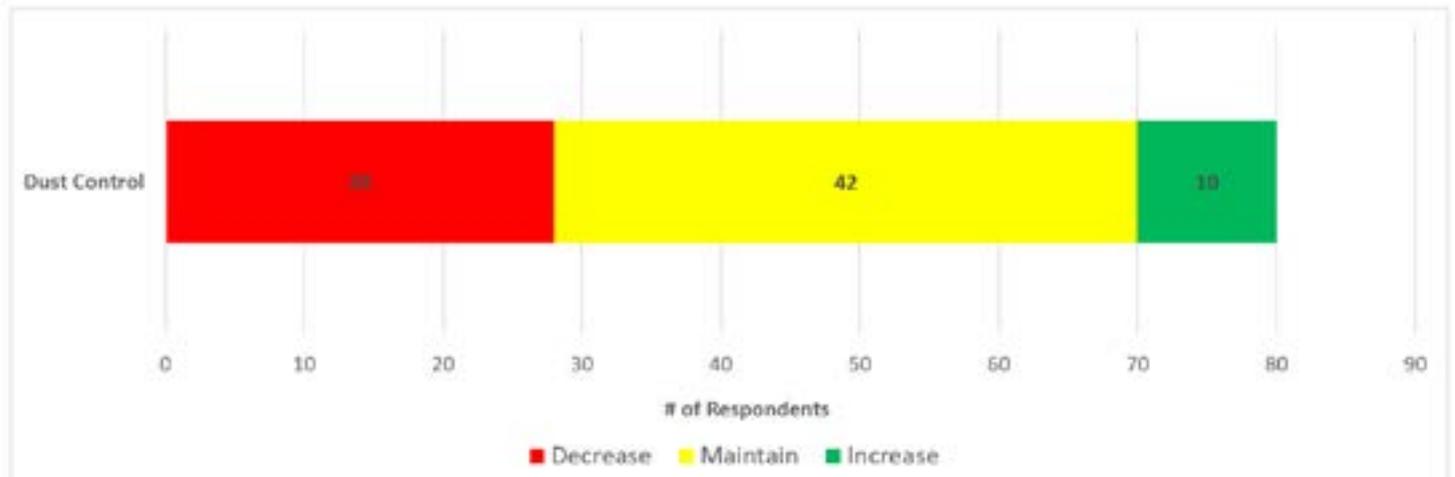
Survey Results

Public Works- Dust Control

Currently the County offers Residential Dust Control to any citizen that applies at a 50%/50% cost share with up to 200 meters of dust control a year. The costs vary depending upon the number of applications and linear feet of dust control required. The average cost over the last 5 years is approximately \$520,000, with 50% of that cost covered by tax payers (\$260,000 – 1.8% of 2018 taxes required).

Q17. Would you like to see this program/level of service Increased (as proposed), Maintain the current level of service or Decrease the level of service?

Answered: 80 Skipped: 31



42 of the 80 respondents to this question indicated they would like to see the Residential Dust Control Program continue with the 50%/50% cost sharing.

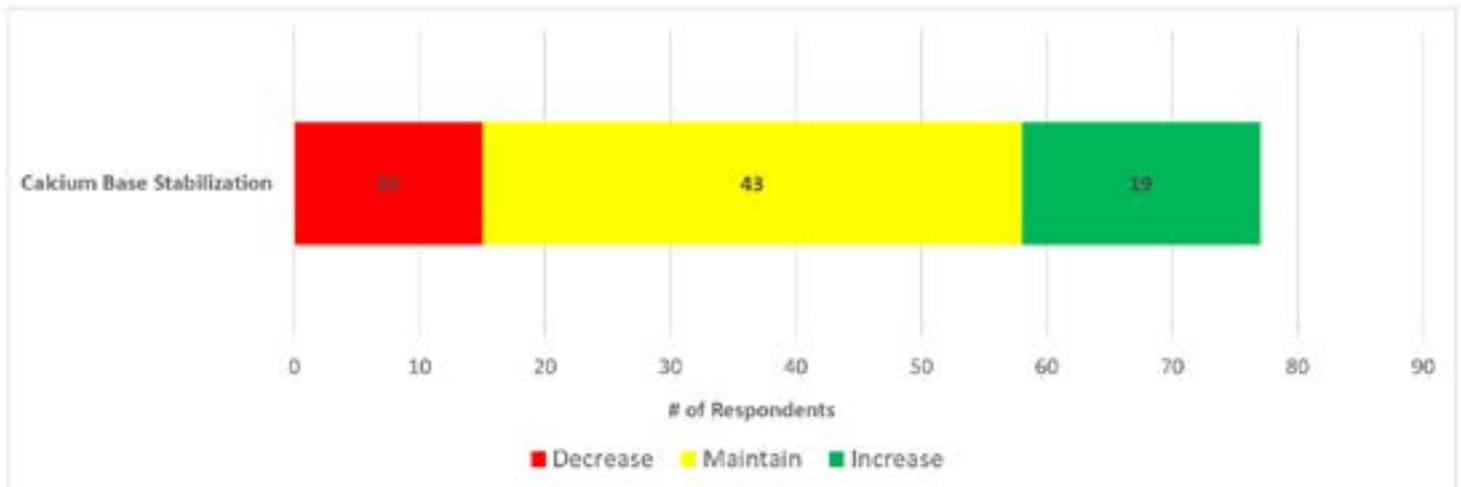
Survey Results

Public Works- Calcium Base Stabilization

Over the past two years the County has invested over \$13,000,000 in the Calcium Base Stabilization project. The program included the application of calcium to stabilize 121 miles of gravel roads that were identified as Haul Routes as per Council policy. This project was fully funded by a debenture. Due to the stabilization program, Public Works has realized efficiencies with the day-to-day operations. These cost efficiencies for road maintenance will be utilized to fund the annual debenture payment on the Haul Routes.

Q19. Would you like to see this program/level of service Increased (as proposed), Maintain the current level of service or Decrease the level of service?

Answered: 77 Skipped: 34

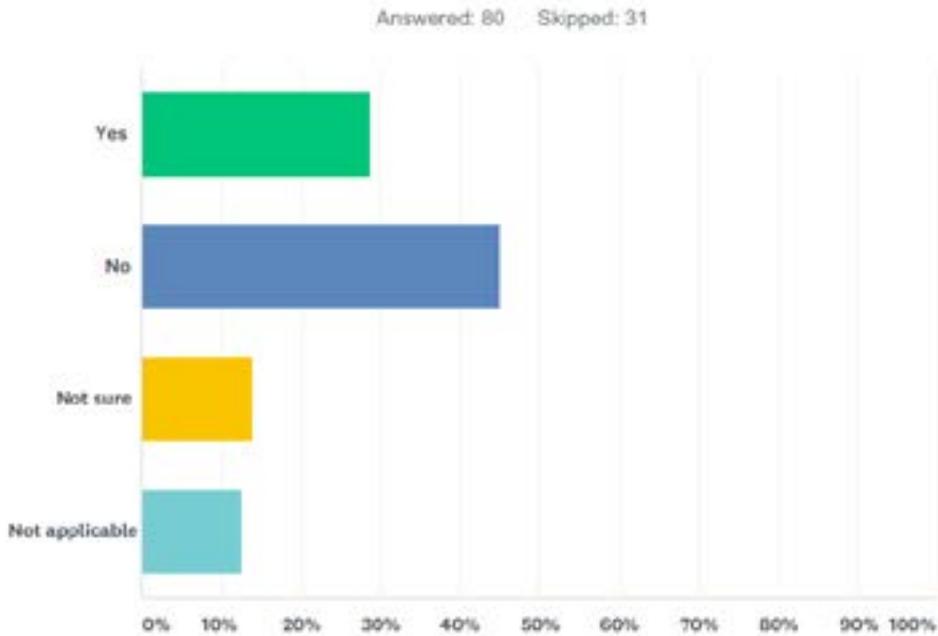


56% of respondents to this question would like to see the service maintained, while 25% indicated they would like to see an increase to this service.

Survey Results

Public Works- Calcium Base Stabilization

Q20. Are you realizing a direct benefit from the improvement to the Haul Routes?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	29%	23
No	45%	36
Not sure	14%	11
Not applicable	13%	10
TOTAL		60

45% of respondents indicated they are not realizing a direct benefit, and 29% indicated they are.

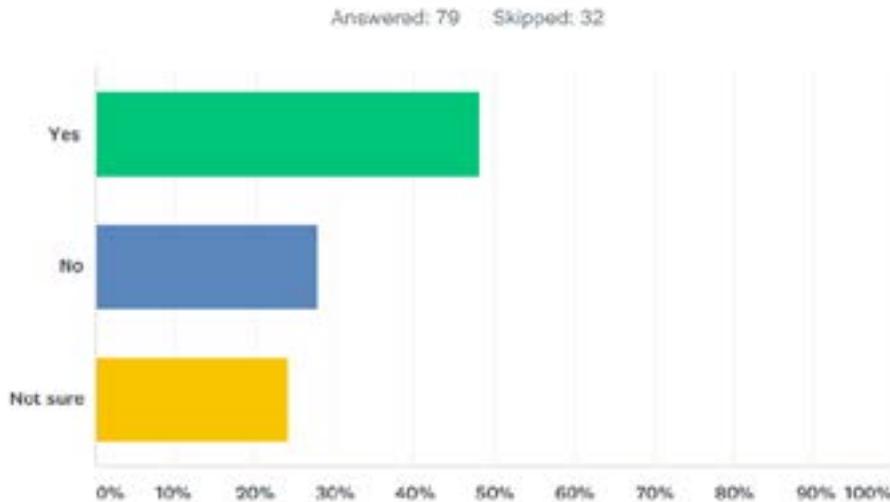
Survey Results

Council

As the elected officials for Lethbridge County, Council has many responsibilities. In accordance with the Municipal Government Act - Section 3, Council is the governing body and has the following mandate:

- Provide good government;
- Provide services, facilities or other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary or desirable for all or a part of the municipality;
- Develop and maintain a safe and viable community.

Q22. Are you satisfied with the current programs, services and policies as directed by Council?



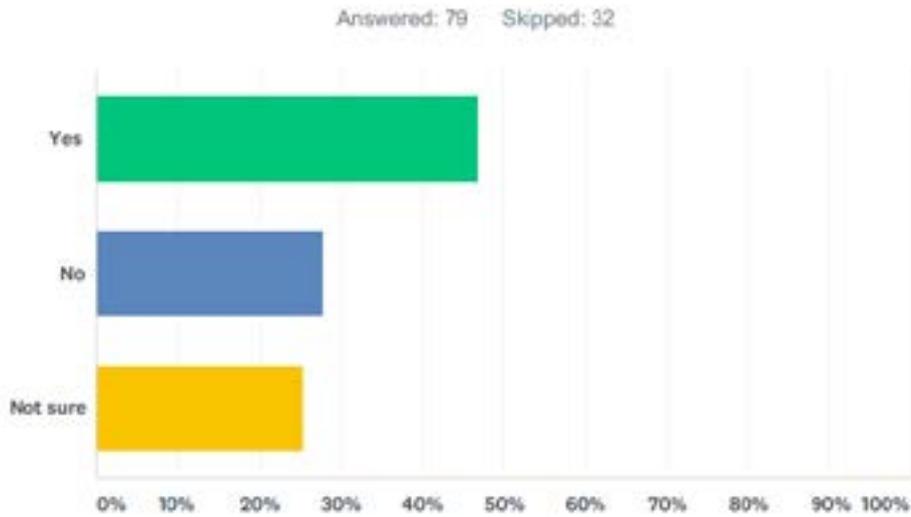
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	48% 38
No	28% 22
Not sure	24% 19
TOTAL	79

Almost 50% of the respondents indicated they are satisfied with the current programs, services, and policies as directed by Council.

Survey Results

Council

Q23. Are you satisfied with the current level of transparency from Council?



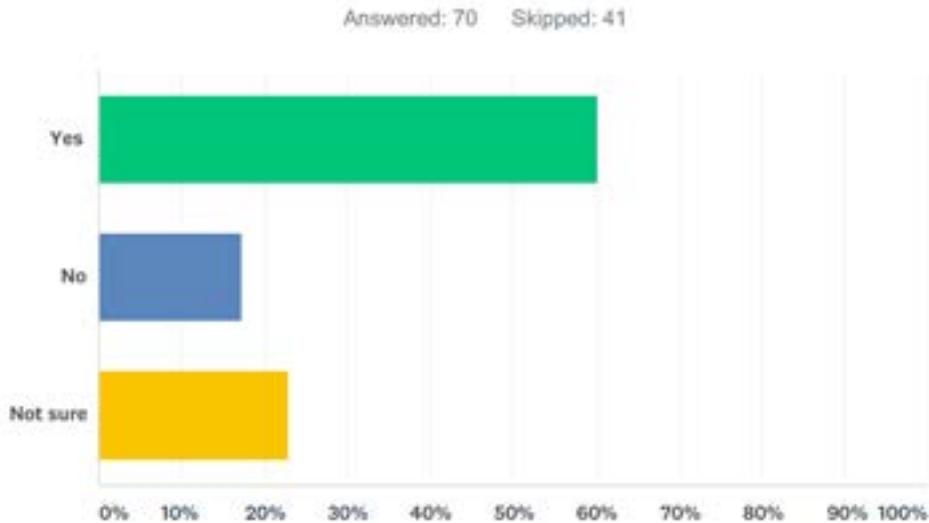
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	47%	37
No	28%	22
Not sure	25%	20
TOTAL		79

47% of respondents are satisfied with Council's level of transparency.

Survey Results

Other

Q26. Do you feel the County is providing adequate communications/information regarding the budget to the public?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	60%	42
No	17%	12
Not sure	23%	16
TOTAL		70

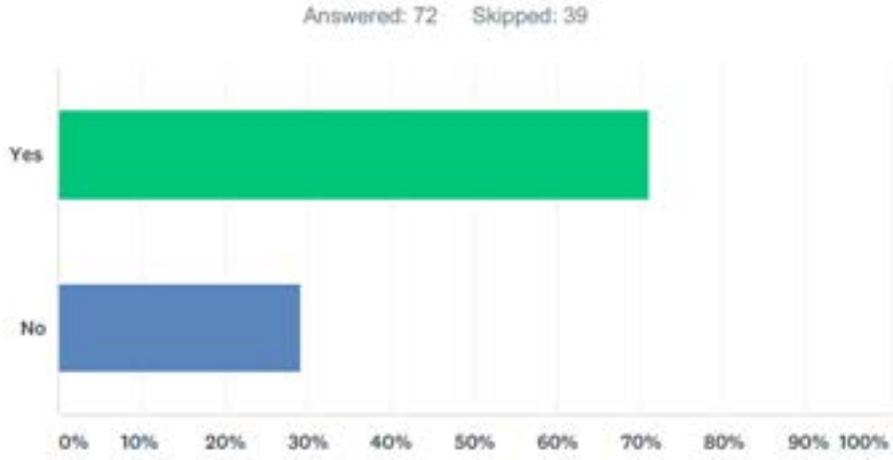
The majority of respondents indicated they feel the County is providing adequate budget information.

For comparison, in the 2018 Communications Survey, 74% of respondents indicated they felt they do not receive enough information overall from the County.

Survey Results

Other

Q27. Were you aware that the Budget Documents, Annual Reports and Popular reports are available on the County's website?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	71%	51
No	29%	21
TOTAL		72

The majority of respondents are aware that financial documents are available on the website.

Survey Summary and Recommendations as Approved by Council

The concept of creating the County's first-ever budget survey may have come later in the budget process than would be ideal for future surveys, however Administration is pleased with the number of responses and level of participation from citizens. The County received 111 responses to the survey and feels that overall the feedback was constructive and well thought-out. Below are recommendations from Administration based on the survey results. These will be reviewed and/or implemented in 2019.

General Recommendations

- 1) It was recommended that a follow-up report be prepared to provide the survey results to citizens and address some of the more common questions and comments in the survey, as well as to increase transparency and ensure the public feels they have been heard with regard to the County's budget.
- 2) Based on several comments throughout the survey, it was determined that the County could do a better job of informing and educating the public on our services, initiatives, and activity timelines. This includes working on open lines of communication to not only the citizens but also the business community and their needs. The County is responsive and transparent in its decision making that affects citizens, business owners, and potential commercial and industrial ventures.
- 3) It was recommended that a budget survey and community engagement be done annually to gather feedback from citizens and to ensure the County is providing adequate information on the budget process. In an effort to further increase citizen participation in future surveys additional notifications can be done. Including information or a paper copy of the survey in utility bills can ensure more citizens have access to the survey, and administration could attend community events with budget survey information to hand out.

Emergency Services

- 1) Based on several comments in the Emergency Services section, it appears that citizens may not be aware of the different legislated roles and duties of the Community Peace Officers and RCMP. Administration recommended that an article be written and included in newsletters and on the County website to educate the public on these roles.

Economic Development

- 1) Broadband internet- this has already been identified by Administration, who will continue to investigate options and determine a realistic model for broadband internet in rural areas.
- 2) Through the Economic Development department, the County will work to continue to praise, promote, highlight, and support our business community at every reasonable opportunity.
- 3) Ensure a long-term plan is in place when making commercial/industrial-related decisions for the County (Strategic Planning).

Agricultural Services (Parks)

- 1) The Diamond City Park was mentioned several times throughout the survey and has been identified as a capital project in the 2019 Budget. The 2019-2023 Capital Budget also includes a capital line item for future playground repairs and/or replacements for all County-owned parks.
- 2) Continue with ASB workshops/seminars and ensure the topics are relevant to producers, and continue with ongoing communications to promote sessions.
- 3) The Agricultural Services department would like to review, update, and distribute the mowing policy to ensure the public is aware of how and when the service is provided.

Public Works

- 1) Provide information to the public regarding road activities (ie. grading plan, base stabilization schedule, etc.).

Council

- 1) Based on some of the comments in the survey, Administration recommended that informal meetings between Council and the public be held quarterly. This could also be used as an opportunity for citizens to get familiar with Council, and become informed of projects and initiatives.

Citizen Questions and Comments- Answers to Common Themes

Based on the comments received throughout the survey, Administration would like to provide clarity to some of the issues raised, as well as responses to commonly mentioned budget items or County operations.

Emergency Services

- Several comments mentioned the **RCMP** in relation to the budget. The County does not have a contract with the RCMP and budget dollars are not allocated to this agency.
- There was some confusion as to the **roles and duties of the Community Peace Officers (CPO's)**. Lethbridge County's CPO's are not authorized to enforce the Criminal Code (this is the role of the RCMP), or investigate crimes that fall under the Criminal Code. The Community Peace Officers are authorized to enforce all County Bylaws and a number of Provincial Acts and Regulations including the Traffic Safety Act, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, the Animal Protection Act and the Highways Development and Protection Act, amongst others. The CPO's are not 911 emergency responders. Emergencies, including rural crime, are to be reported to the RCMP. A Q and A with the CAO was done on November 21, 2018 to clarify these roles. The document is available to view on the County website at <http://lethcounty.ca/departments/emergency-services/regulatory-services>
- **Protection of County infrastructure** is a primary focus for CPO's. Overweight commercial vehicles traveling on County roads and over County bridges can cause severe and costly damage to these transportation routes. CPO's travel with portable scales for on-the-spot verification of commercial vehicle weight checks. They will enforce all laws related to weights and measurements, load security, transportation of hazardous materials and commercial vehicle certification.

Economic Development

- **Internet connectivity/broadband capacity** was mentioned as a priority by respondents and the County recognizes this. Our businesses have clearly identified this as critical to their success, and something that will only grow in importance in the future. The County will continue investigating options and a realistic model for broadband internet in rural areas.
- Many comments mentioned **taxes** (keeping taxes as low as possible) The County will continue to work on keeping our tax rate for commercial/industrial entities competitive to the region.
- Another topic addressed in the survey comments was the importance of **supporting small business and attracting new business** to the County. The County will continue to promote and support our business community at every reasonable opportunity, and aims to maintain open lines of communication and listen to the business community and their needs. Lethbridge County and Community Futures Lethbridge Region have partnered in a business improvement loan program for eligible County businesses (more information here <http://lethcounty.ca/business/business-improvement-loan-program>). The County is also actively participating in regional initiatives such as the Highway 3 Agri-Food Corridor and Plant Protein Supercluster Initiative to attract new business and opportunities to the area. Additionally, part of the County's Strategic Plan includes ensuring a long-term plan is in place when making commercial/industrial-related decisions.

Agricultural Services (Parks)

- **Park structures** were mentioned in several comments. This has been addressed in the proposed 2019-2021 budget.

Citizen Questions and Comments- Answers to Common Themes

Public Works- Utilities

- Some comments mentioned the **availability of potable water**, particularly in subdivisions. The water co-ops in the area (Lethbridge County Rural Water Association and Lethbridge County North Potable Water Co-op) decide where water services will be available, not Lethbridge County. The County's 2018 Strategic Plan indicates that the County will "encourage water cooperatives to provide potable water on request to those that demonstrate an interest".
- Another topic discussed was **user fees for utility services**, in particular water services. Lethbridge County receives water from the City of Lethbridge to supply to its hamlets and truckfill stations. The fees for the truckfill stations are set in part by the City's fees for delivery, and also include the County's costs, such as insurance, repairs, etc. Truckfill locations and fees can be found here: <http://lethcounty.ca/departments/municipal-services/utility-services> (the Schedule of Fees and Utility Rate Bylaw are updated annually in January).

Public Works- Roads

- Some respondents mentioned **paving gravelled roads** to save money on grading. With the County's current roads budget this is not feasible.
- To compare, the cost to pave one mile is approximately \$1.5 million (full reconstruction of the road- not just overlay or mill and inlay). The cost to do calcium base stabilization on one mile of road is approximately \$138,000 (includes reconditioning as this is normally required prior to base stabilization. \$25,000/mile for reconditioning, \$113,500/mile for stabilization).

Public Works- Dust Control

- Due to the completion of the 138 miles of haul roads, there will be cost savings in the dust control budget as these roads will no longer require dust control. The dust control program will remain in effect as in previous years for those not on haul routes.

Public Works- Calcium Base Stabilization

- Calcium Base Stabilization was identified in 2015 as the most appropriate and economical solution to repairing and rebuilding the County's deteriorating roads within the haul route network. Changes in transportation and agriculture have greatly increased the demand on the County's gravel road network, requiring heavy-use roads to be repaired frequently. The Calcium Base Stabilization process provides a smooth surface with minimal dust and gravel loss. It also increases the load bearing capacity of the roadways which are then less susceptible to failures, minimizing annual maintenance costs.

Council

- There were some comments on the **in-camera/closed sessions** during Council meetings. Under Alberta's Municipal Government Act (Section 197), "Councils and council committees may close all or part of their meetings to the public if a matter to be discussed is within one of the exceptions to disclosure in Division 2 of Part 1 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act". The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act outlines the items that would allow a council to close a council meeting, which include matters where a public disclosure could be harmful to:

- Third party business interests; (s. 16)
- Individual or public safety; (s.18 and 19)
- Intergovernmental relations; (s.21, 22, 23 & 24)
- Other items addressed in Division 2 of Part 1 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act
- Third party personal privacy; (s. 17)
- Law enforcement; (s. 20)
- Economic or other interests (s.25, 26, 27, 28 and 29)

Closed Sessions are noted in the Council Agenda, with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act section number pertaining to the issue discussed.

- Other comments in the survey asked for Council to be **more accessible**. Administration has recommended that a quarterly information session with Council be held at the Lethbridge administration office, where citizens can meet their Councillor and have informal discussions. Specific topics will also be addressed at these sessions that are focused on current programs and initiatives, beginning in 2019.

Lethbridge County would like to thank all who took part in the Budget 2019 Survey. Your feedback has provided valuable insight into the priorities of citizens and business owners in the County.

With these recommendations, Lethbridge County Council and Administration has taken steps to prepare the most effective budget possible.

For questions on the budget or budget process, please call (403) 328-5525.

