



# 2026 Budget Engagement Report

What We Heard: Community Feedback on Budget Priorities

Date: December 1, 2025

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## Introduction

The “What We Heard” report highlights the valuable feedback shared by our community on budget priorities, gathered through our recent public survey. Engaging with residents is an essential part of the municipal budgeting process, and public input plays a key role in shaping the Town’s decisions. These insights helped guide evidence-based planning for the 2026 budget and beyond. By working together and encouraging open participation, we continue to advance the Town’s 2022-2026 Strategic Plan, strengthening transparency and supporting our commitment to Organizational effectiveness.

## Engagement Overview

**Methodology & Participation:** The Town adhered to the IAP2 public participation framework, focusing on the initial two levels: **Inform** and **Consult**. IAP2, or the International Association for Public Participation, provides a globally recognized framework for engaging the public in decision-making. Its spectrum includes five levels: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, and Empower, each representing increasing degrees of public influence.

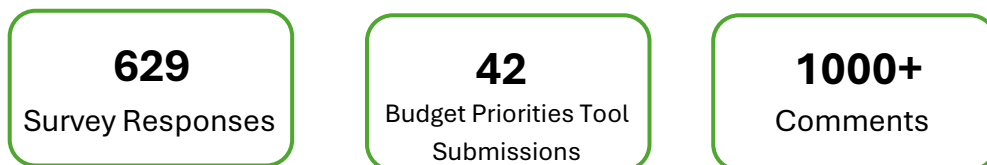
The Town’s approach began with **Inform**, sharing clear and accessible information through social media, On The Road magazine articles, printed materials, outreach events, roadside banners, and digital signage. The **Consult** phase invited public input via an online survey, paper copies at community locations, a custom budget priorities tool on the Town’s engagement platform, and the Mayor’s Budget Town Hall.

### Engagement timeline:

June 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Online Survey Opened</li><li>• Budget Priorities Tool launched</li></ul>
June 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meet the Budget team at Strawberry Festival</li></ul>
July 05	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meet the Budget team at Library Discovery Day</li></ul>
July 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meet the Budget team at Symphony Under the Stars</li></ul>
August 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meet the Budget team at Stouffville Farmers Market</li></ul>
August 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Online Survey Closed</li><li>• Budget Priorities Tool closed</li></ul>
September 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mayor's Budget Town Hall</li></ul>

## Participation Summary:

The infographic presents a snapshot of public engagement metrics for the Town of Stouffville's budget process. It highlights that **629 surveys** were completed, reflecting strong community participation. In addition to structured responses, the Town received approximately **1000 individual comments or open-ended responses**, offering rich qualitative insights beyond the multiple-choice format. The **Budget Priorities Tool**, hosted on the Town's website, **garnered 42 submissions**, providing targeted feedback on residents' spending preferences. Together, these figures illustrate a multi-channel engagement strategy that captured both broad and detailed public input.



As part of the campaign's public engagement strategy, social media played a critical role in informing, educating, and engaging residents. During the reporting period, **65 social media posts** generated **46,255 impressions**, with an average reach of **488 per post**. Content received a total of **775 engagements**, representing an engagement rate of approximately **1.7%**, indicating **strong audience interest** and interaction.

## Key Findings: What We Heard

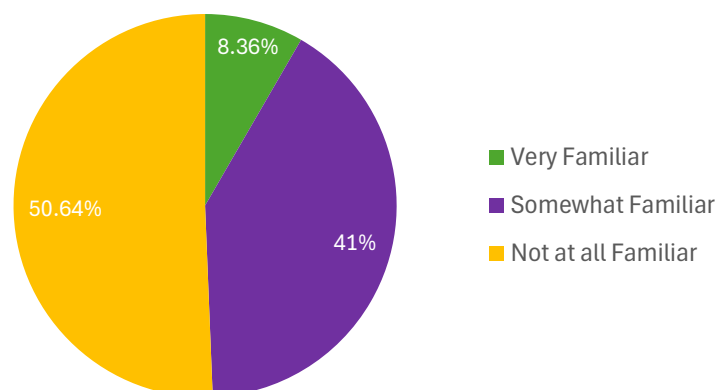
### Question 1: Familiarity with the Town's Annual Municipal Budget

Residents were asked to indicate how familiar they are with the Town of Stouffville's annual municipal budget. The question aimed to gauge the level of public awareness and understanding of the budgeting process.

#### What we heard:

- Just **8.36% of respondents reported being *very familiar***, stating that they review budget details annually.
- A larger portion, **41%, described themselves as *somewhat familiar***, indicating general awareness without engaging in detailed review.
- The majority, **50.64%, said they are *not at all familiar***, suggesting **limited or no knowledge of the municipal budget**.

## Familiarity with Budget Process



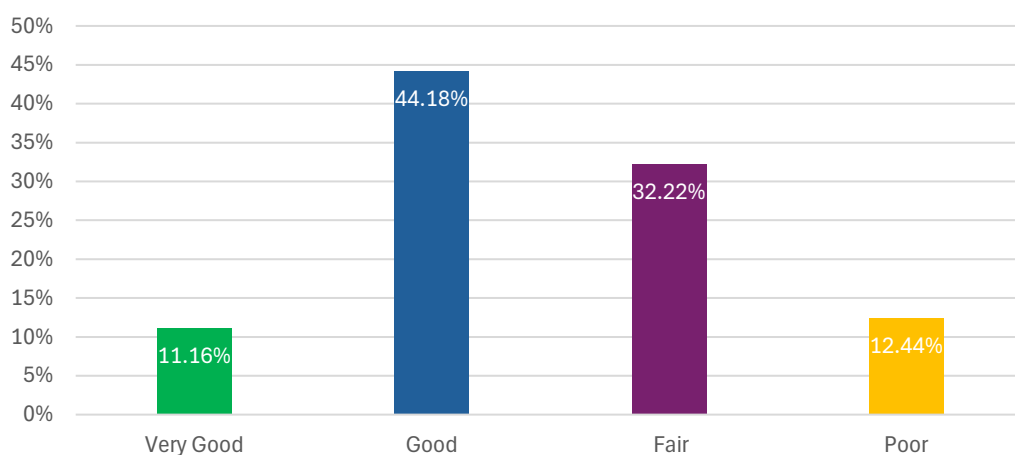
## Question 2: Assessing Value for Tax Contributions

Respondents were asked to evaluate the overall value they feel they receive from the portion of their property taxes retained by the Town. The question explained that in 2024, a typical residential property assessed at \$800,000 paid \$6,415 in property taxes, of which \$2,149 (33%) supported municipal services such as road and sidewalk maintenance, library services, snow clearing, fire protection, recreational facilities, parks, waste collection, and other amenities.

### What we heard:

- A majority of respondents rated the value **positively**, with **44.18% selecting “Good”** and **11.16% selecting “Very Good.”**
- **32.22% felt the value was “Fair,”** indicating room for improvement or mixed perceptions.
- **12.44% rated the value as “Poor,”** suggesting dissatisfaction with the services received relative to the tax contribution.

## Value for Tax Contributions





### Question 3: Most Important Outcome for Budget Spending

Residents were asked to identify the outcome they consider most important when it comes to how the municipal budget is allocated. This question aimed to understand community priorities and values in relation to public spending.

#### What we heard:

- The top two priorities were closely aligned: **25.68%** of respondents selected *maintaining or improving existing services*, while **24.24%** chose *investing in infrastructure* such as roads, utilities, and buildings.
- **15.63%** of participants emphasized *long-term sustainability and future planning*, indicating a forward-looking perspective.
- **13.88%** preferred *reducing taxes*, even if it meant cutting some services.
- Other priorities included *supporting local business growth and tourism* (**6.22%**), *improving environmental sustainability initiatives* (**5.26%**), and *addressing the housing crisis* (**3.67%**).
- An additional **5.42%** selected *Other*, providing custom responses that may reflect unique or emerging concerns.

#### Open-Ended Feedback: What Matters Most in Budget Spending

In addition to the multiple-choice options, respondents provided open-ended comments that revealed several recurring themes:

- **Service Maintenance:** Many respondents emphasized the importance of maintaining or improving existing municipal services, aligning with the top-ranked multiple-choice response.
- **Community Amenities:** There was strong interest in enhancing amenities such as parks, pools, community centres, recreational activities, and even beautification efforts like planting Sakura trees.
- **Infrastructure:** Several comments highlighted the need for investment in roads, utilities, and specific repairs, such as power lines and neglected streets.
- **Sustainability:** Respondents expressed support for long-term and environmental sustainability, though some raised concerns about how these goals are defined.
- **Accessibility:** A few responses advocated for improved accessibility, including support for disabled residents and wheelchair-friendly infrastructure.

- **Taxes:** Some participants voiced concerns about high municipal salaries and called for reduced taxes or more balanced budgeting.
- **Waste Management:** Comments included suggestions for better snowplow operations and support services for waste collection.
- **Other Priorities:** Additional feedback touched on homelessness, business retention, and general dissatisfaction with perceived inefficiencies.

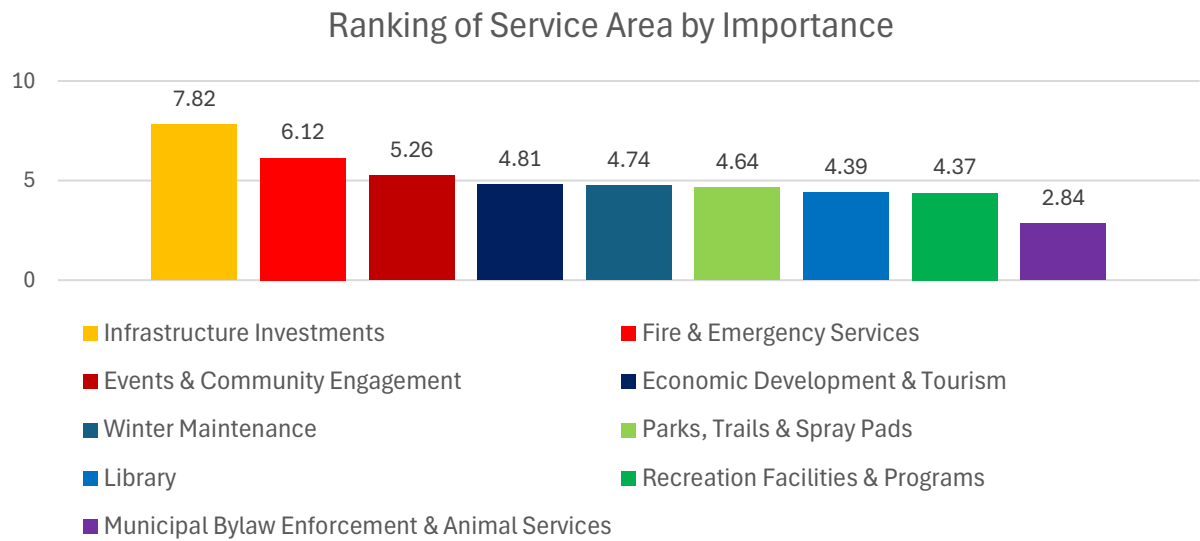
Overall, the open-ended responses reinforced the multiple-choice trends while adding depth to community priorities, especially around inclusivity, infrastructure, and quality of life.

#### Question 4: Ranking Service Areas by Importance

Residents were asked to rank various municipal service areas in order of importance to them. The average scores reflect how each area was prioritized across all responses, with higher scores indicating greater perceived importance.

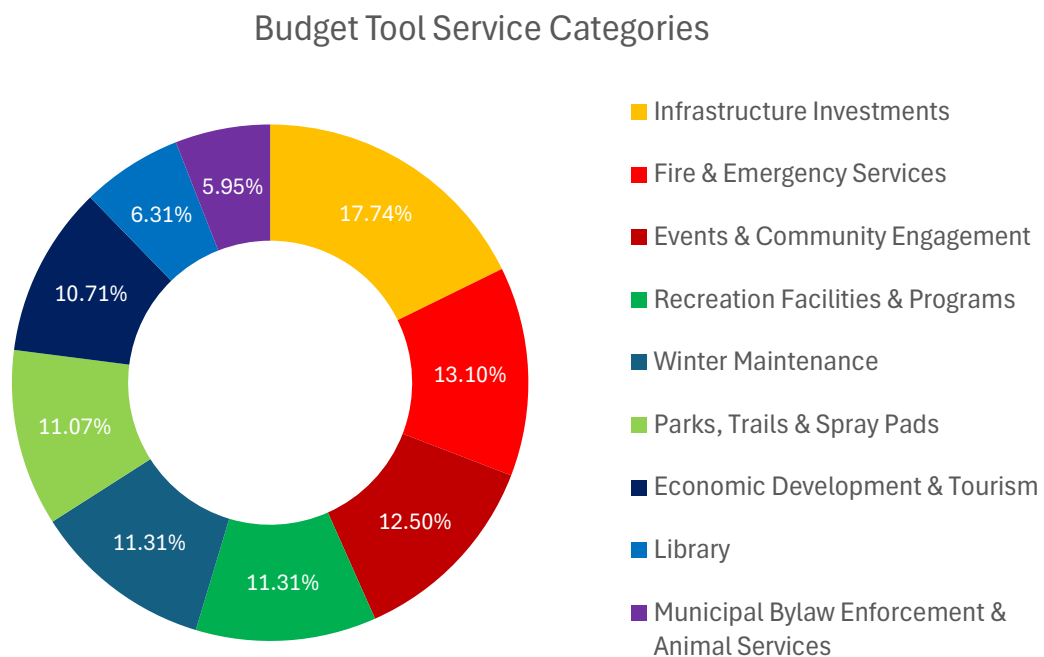
##### What we heard:

- **Infrastructure investments**, including roads, facilities, and water systems, emerged as the top priority with an average score of **7.82**, signaling strong public support for foundational services.
- **Fire and emergency services** followed with a score of **6.12**, underscoring the importance of safety and rapid response.
- **Winter maintenance** (road and sidewalk plowing, sanding, and salting) also ranked highly at **4.74**, reflecting seasonal service expectations.
- Other areas such as **parks, trails, and spray pads (4.64)**, **economic development and tourism (4.81)**, and **library services (4.39)** received moderate importance ratings.
- **Recreation facilities and programs** (including aquatics, camps, 55+ programming, fitness, and sports fields) scored **4.37**, indicating steady interest in community wellness.
- **Events and community engagement** received a score of **5.26**, showing appreciation for social and cultural initiatives.
- **Municipal by-law enforcement and animal services** were ranked lowest at **2.84**, suggesting these are viewed as less critical relative to other service areas.



### Budget Priorities Tool Insights

The **Budget Priorities Tool** received **42 targeted submissions**, offering a focused snapshot of residents' spending preferences. These results reinforce and complement the broader survey findings, particularly in the ranking of service areas.



These results **align closely** with the average rankings from the survey's Question 4, where **Infrastructure**, **Fire & Emergency**, and **Winter Maintenance** also emerged as top priorities. The tool's data provides **quantitative reinforcement** of the qualitative themes identified in open-ended feedback, such as the importance of community amenities, safety, and service quality.



## Question 5: Budget Adjustments in Response to Inflation

Residents were asked which budget adjustment strategies they would support in light of rising costs and inflation. This question allowed multiple selections to reflect the range of acceptable trade-offs.

### What we heard:

- The most supported option was **increasing user fees for specific services** (e.g., recreation programs, facility rentals), chosen by **49.19%** of respondents.
- **35.60%** were willing to support **reducing service levels in certain areas** to avoid tax increases.
- **31.23%** supported a **slight increase in property taxes** to maintain or improve services.
- **9.55%** selected *Other*, offering custom suggestions or expressing alternative views.

### Open-Ended Feedback: Budget Adjustments in Response to Inflation

In addition to selecting from predefined options, respondents shared a wide range of suggestions for how the Town might adapt its budget. Four key themes emerged:

- **Cost-Cutting** (18 mentions): Many respondents advocated for reducing expenses, including trimming salaries of senior staff and elected officials, cutting back on non-essential services and projects, and reassessing spending priorities.
- **Alternative Revenue Sources** (18 mentions): Suggestions included implementing new or increased fees (e.g., developer fees, parking charges, fines from speed cameras), introducing taxes on vacant properties or luxury assets, and leveraging tourism or sponsorships to fund services.
- **Efficiency Improvements** (8 mentions): Respondents called for better coordination between departments, strategic budget planning, and more effective use of taxpayer money to avoid waste and duplication.
- **Tax Fairness** (6 mentions): Several comments focused on equity, proposing progressive taxation models such as higher rates for wealthier residents and corporations, and emphasizing the need to consider residents' ability to pay.

These insights reflect a desire for a balanced approach that maintains service quality while exploring creative and equitable solutions to financial pressures.

## Question 6: Willingness to Pay More for Service Improvements

Residents were asked how much more they would be willing to pay annually in municipal taxes to support improvements to Town services such as better roads, enhanced recreation programming, and upgraded parks.

### What we heard:

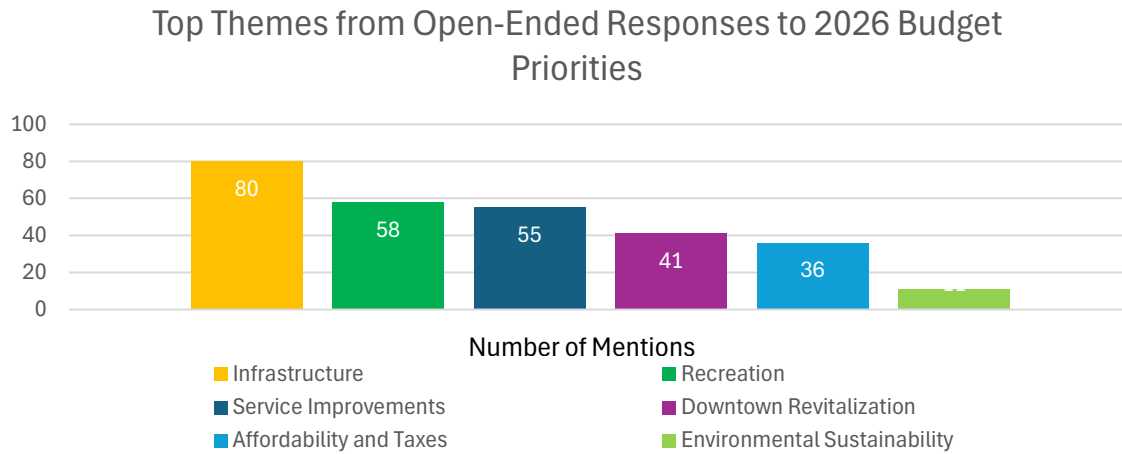
- **36.12%** of respondents indicated they are *not willing to pay more*
- **21.35%** were open to a *modest increase of \$1–\$50*, while **16.85%** supported a *\$51–\$100* increase.
- **11.56%** were willing to pay *\$101–\$200*, and **4.01%** supported increases of *\$201 or more*.
- **10.11%** selected *Unsure/Don't know*, indicating uncertainty or a need for more information before deciding.

## Question 7: Top Suggestions for 2026 Budget Priorities

Residents were invited to share their top three suggestions for the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville's 2026 budget. The responses revealed several recurring themes:

- **Infrastructure (80 mentions):** This was the most frequently cited priority, with residents calling for improvements to roads, water systems, power grid reliability, and sewer expansion. Many emphasized the need to address traffic congestion, potholes, and outdated infrastructure to support growth.
- **Recreation (58 mentions):** Suggestions included building new pools, expanding sports fields, improving parks and trails, and adding facilities for pickleball, soccer, and baseball. There was strong interest in enhancing leisure and outdoor activity spaces for all age groups.
- **Service Improvements (55 mentions):** Respondents highlighted the need for better library services, public transit, emergency services, waste management, snow removal, education, youth programming, and housing support. Accessibility and equitable service delivery were also noted.
- **Downtown Revitalization (41 mentions):** Many residents expressed a desire to improve the appearance and functionality of Main Street, suggesting upgrades to storefronts, streetscapes, retail options, and restaurant patios to create a more vibrant and inviting town centre.
- **Affordability and Taxes (36 mentions):** Concerns about rising costs and taxation were common. Suggestions included freezing salaries, reducing unnecessary spending, maintaining a balanced budget, and ensuring fair taxation practices.

- **Environmental Sustainability (11 mentions):** A smaller but notable group of respondents advocated for green initiatives, such as renewable energy, native landscaping, and preservation of natural areas like the Oak Ridges Moraine.



### Question 8: Importance of Public Involvement in Budget Decision-Making

Residents were asked how important it is for them to be involved in the decision-making process of the municipal budget. The responses reflect a strong desire for transparency and inclusion.

#### What we heard:

- A majority of respondents (**55.52%**) said it is *important* for their voice to be heard, even if they prefer not to be deeply involved.
- **20.43%** indicated it is *very important*, expressing a desire to *actively participate* in the budget process.
- **22.08%** were *neutral*, stating they are satisfied with how decisions are currently made.
- Only **1.98%** said it is *not at all important*, trusting the Mayor and Council to make decisions on their behalf.

When asked how they prefer to receive updates about the municipal budget, residents showed a clear preference for digital channels:

- The **Town website** was the most popular choice, selected by **52.57%** of respondents.
- **Social media platforms** such as Facebook and Instagram followed closely at **44.61%**, indicating strong interest in timely, accessible updates.

- **Email notifications (42.62%)** and the **Town e-newsletter (41.29%)** were also widely preferred, reinforcing the value of direct-to-inbox communication.

Traditional methods received less support:

- **On the Road Magazine** was chosen by **28.69%**, while **Public Town Hall Meetings (15.42%)** and **community open houses (14.76%)** were less favored.
- Only **10.28%** selected the **Budget Book**, and **2.99%** \* chose *Other*.

\*Respondents were permitted to select more than one answer, which is why the percentages do not total 100%.

These results suggest that residents want budget information delivered in formats that are easy to access, digest, and share, especially online. This insight can help guide future engagement strategies to ensure broader reach and participation.

## Conclusion

In summary, residents who participated in the 2026 budget engagement overwhelmingly prioritized **core infrastructure improvements**, including roads, water systems, and power reliability. There was also strong support for **maintaining and enhancing existing services**, particularly in **parks, recreation, and community amenities**. Safety, accessibility, and service quality were recurring themes, with many respondents calling for better snow removal, emergency services, and inclusive programming.

Participants also offered **creative ideas for revenue generation and cost savings**, such as developer fees, sponsorships, and more efficient use of resources. While opinions varied on tax increases, most respondents favored a **balanced approach** supporting modest user fees or service adjustments over significant tax hikes.

Importantly, residents expressed a clear desire for **transparency and meaningful involvement** in budget decisions. They want budget information to be accessible, digestible, and shared through digital channels like the Town website, social media, and email.

Earlier this year, the Town of Stouffville conducted a Resident Satisfaction Survey that identified several recurring themes in community priorities. These included concerns about **infrastructure quality, traffic congestion, overdevelopment, lack of entertainment and recreation options, downtown revitalization, and the need for more affordable housing and accessible services**. These findings align closely with the results of the 2026 Budget Engagement, where residents similarly prioritized **investment in infrastructure, recreation facilities, and service improvements**. Both surveys highlighted a desire to preserve the town's character while managing growth responsibly, improve Main Street's appeal, and expand amenities for youth and

families. The consistency across these engagements reinforces the importance of addressing these shared priorities in the upcoming budget and strategic planning efforts.

## How Community Feedback Was Used

The Town's 2026 Budget was directly informed by the priorities and suggestions shared by residents during the budget engagement process. Here's how public input translated into real decisions and investments:

### **1. Infrastructure Investments**

Residents overwhelmingly identified infrastructure as the top priority for budget spending. In response, the 2026 capital budget includes major investments such as the Main Street reconstruction, roads program, and many other projects in the Capital budget. These projects address recurring concerns about aging infrastructure, supporting both current needs and future growth.

### **2. Fire and Emergency Services**

Community feedback ranked Fire and Emergency Services as the second most important area for municipal investment. To strengthen public safety and emergency response, the 2026 budget provides for the addition of four new suppression firefighters. This enhancement ensures the Town can maintain rapid response times and meet the evolving needs of a growing population.

### **3. Service Maintenance and Long-Term Planning**

Residents expressed a strong desire to maintain high service levels and plan for the long term. The budget reflects this by prioritizing service maintenance across departments, investing in recreation facilities, parks, and community amenities, and diligent project prioritization to ensure resources are allocated efficiently. These measures help preserve the quality of life in Stouffville and promote sustainable, inclusive growth.

### **4. Transparency and Public Involvement**

Residents emphasized the need for transparency and meaningful involvement in budget decisions. The Town has committed to sharing budget information through various accessible channels, including the Town website and social media, and improving budget documents to make them easier to understand and interpret. The Town will continue to pursue budget engagement opportunities in the future to ensure that residents' voices continue to shape municipal priorities.

The 2026 Budget is a direct reflection of community priorities, focusing on infrastructure, safety, service quality, and fiscal responsibility, while fostering transparency and ongoing public engagement. These actions demonstrate the Town's

commitment to listening to residents and translating feedback into tangible improvements for all.

### **Acknowledgements**

We extend our sincere gratitude to all residents who took the time to participate in the 2026 budget engagement process. Your thoughtful feedback, suggestions, and commitment to our community have been invaluable in shaping the Town's priorities and investments for the coming year. By sharing your perspectives, you have helped ensure that our budget reflects the needs and aspirations of Whitchurch-Stouffville. Thank you for your continued involvement and for helping us build a stronger, more vibrant town for everyone.