



NEW WESTMINSTER

What We Heard: Budget 2021 Public Engagement Summary Report

November 2020



Budget 2021 Public Engagement Summary Report

November 24, 2020

Background

The City of New Westminster's Budget 2021 public engagement process was designed to build on what we heard from the community in our Budget 2020 process.

The community engagement process for the 2021 Budget kicked off on September 24, 2020 with the Budget 101 Webinar. The online session was organized by the Finance Department and Public Engagement staff in response to input received during the Budget 2020 engagement, where participants identified a need for more information to understand the City's budget.

The webinar included a presentation, followed by a Q&A with participants. A link to the webinar recording is available on the [Budget 2021 webpage](#).

The Budget 2021 survey was launched directly following the webinar and was open for more than three weeks. The purpose of the survey was to seek input from community members about priorities for the 2021 Operating and Capital budgets, and to understand preferences for the 2021 tax rate for consideration by Council and staff as one of the factors influencing the budgets for 2021. City staff across departments were asked to consider community input as they prepared their draft budgets.

Preliminary survey results were presented to Council and the community on October 26 and have been referenced in subsequent Council workshops on the draft 2021 City budget; however, additional time was required to analyze and theme the written responses, as well as conduct analysis of participant demographics.

The purpose of this more fulsome summary report is to share with City Council, engagement participants, and the New Westminster community:

1. [What engagement activities were completed](#)
2. [A summary of what we heard](#)
3. [Demographic information about participants & representation analysis](#)
4. [Next steps](#)

1. Engagement Process

The Budget 2021 Engagement process started on September 24, 2020 with a [Budget 101 webinar](#). An online survey was launched immediately following the webinar and was open until October 18, 2020.

- **Budget 101 Webinar**
 - September 24
- **Online Survey – 1,071 responses**
 - Of these, 732 participants completed the full survey (partial responses are also included in reporting)
 - Survey was open from September 24 through October 18, 2020

The survey opportunity was communicated through the following methods:

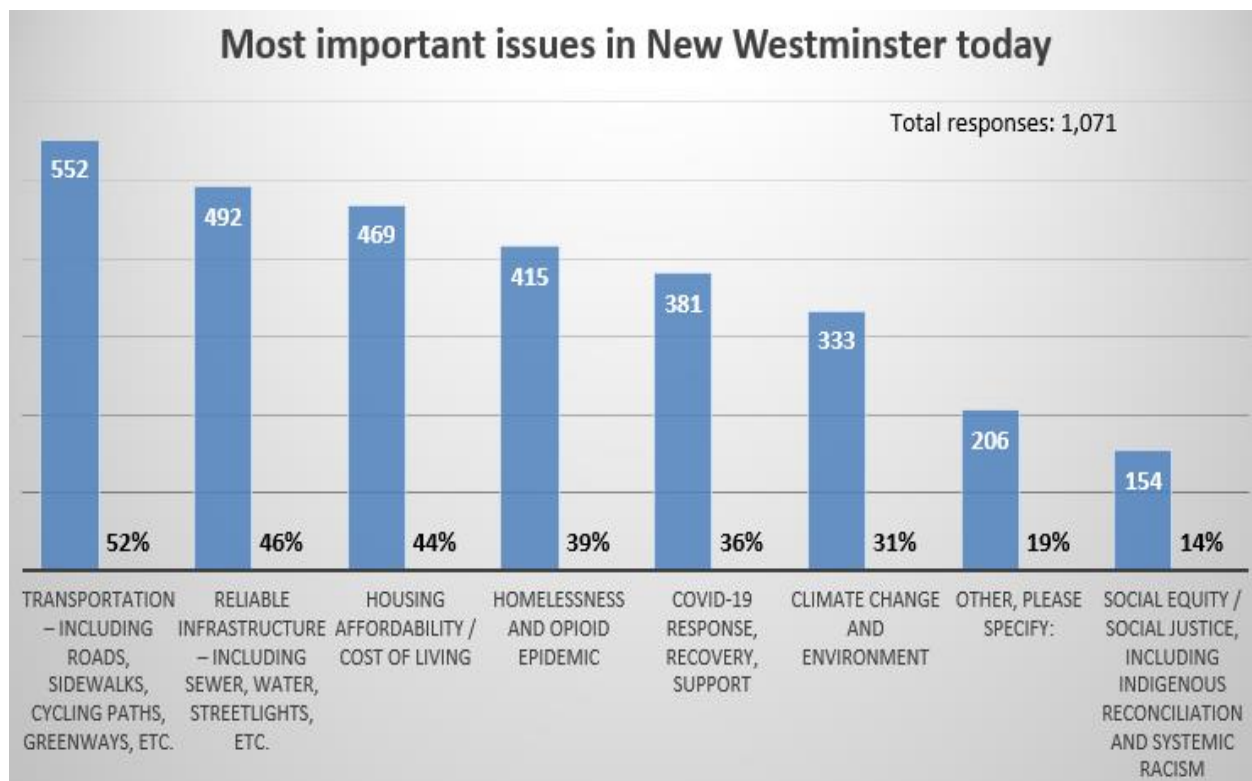
- Email notification to various City email databases:
 - Parks & Recreation subscribers
 - Invest New West business newsletter subscribers
 - CityPage online newsletter subscribers
 - City Committee members
- Social media posts (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)
- Social media advertising (sponsored posts - Facebook)
- Advertisement in the Record newspaper
- Notices in CityPage in the Record newspaper
- Posters in City facilities (library, community centres, etc.)

Important Note: this summary of engagement input does not reflect a representative sample of the New Westminster community. The input captured here reflects the views of those who self-selected to participate in the survey, and may not be representative of the views of other community members and stakeholders. Please see section four – About Participants, starting on Page 17 – for some demographic information and representation analysis.

2. What We Heard

The online survey was open from September 24 through October 18, 2020 and received 1,071 responses. Below is a summary of the results. For the full survey report, including all verbatim open-text input, please [visit the online project page](#) and look for the Documents menu on the right side.

Question 1: What do you feel are the most important issues in New Westminster today? Please select up to three top issues.



Of the 19% who selected "other," a total of 206 comments were provided.

Below is a summary of the key themes across the comments. In some cases, several themes can be applied to one individual response, based on the content; this means that a single response can be counted multiple times.

Theme	# of Mentions	Sample Comments
Public safety / crime / security / law & order	33	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Public safety" - "Police - resolve rising violent crime rates" - "Break-ins, Theft, Crime" - "Safety, security & crime."
Lower taxes / fiscal responsibility / cut spending	32	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Keeping municipal taxes equal or below the cost of living" - "Financial responsibility; budget adherence." - "Keeping labour costs down so that our taxes are kept reasonable." - "We need lower taxes"
Recreation facilities / parks & recreation	29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Sport venues - need a second turf, pool, ice arenas" - "Recreation and fitness" - "Focus on ten lanes Canada Games Pool and recreational facilities." - "Maintaining parks and recreational centers"
Parks & greenspace	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Put money into gardening and make our parks beautiful." - "Parks and open space deficiency (not enough)" - "improved greenspace"
Policing / police & fire / support police / maintain police funding	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Support the Police Department. They do a fantastic job, and it is so sad to see the scrutiny they are facing." - "Policing, fire department" - "Emergency services investment"
Economy / support local business / downtown revitalization	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Support for small businesses" - "Businesses/retail for us to support" - "Attracting businesses to the city - economic growth"
Schools / education	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Education – schools" - "Bigger schools to accommodate new housing developments especially in Queensborough" - "Schools are overlimit per classroom"

Additional themes with 5-7 mentions each include: traffic; garbage / trash; replace / rebuild the pier; childcare / daycare.

Question 2: When it comes to the Operating Budget, we recognize that all City services are important and that residents have unique needs and use City services differently. With reduced City revenues due to COVID-19 and competing demands for services, we also know that decisions will need to be made on what to prioritize and what should be reduced or deferred. Please rank the following core City services in order of relative importance to you:

Core City Service	Average Score (1=highest priority)	Overall Rank
Total responses: 779		
Emergency & protection services (police & fire)	3.63	1
Utilities (water, sewer, electrical)	4.02	2
Garbage & recycling	4.81	3
Parks, green spaces & open space maintenance	4.91	4
Road, sidewalk, greenways & bus stop maintenance	4.94	5
Operating recreation facilities & programs	5.76	6
Community planning (including land use, social, affordable housing and heritage)	5.84	7
Operating library facilities & programs	6.71	8
General government & administration (includes City finances and purchasing, IT, running Council meetings, etc.)	7.92	9
Operating cultural facilities & programs	7.97	10
Bylaw enforcement	7.99	11

A total of 50 comments were provided by those who chose “other, please specify.” Below is a summary of the key themes across the comments.

Theme	# of Mentions	Sample Comments
Reduce taxes / cut spending / financial responsibility	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "lower taxes" - "City needs to keep its operating costs in check. Salaries and benefits are starting to take up too much of the budget." - "Please keep our taxes down especially during these tumultuous times."
Police reform / defund police / too much emphasis on police	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Fire services is important; the police should be defunded" - "Work on making Police more trained for circumstances like dealing complaints from the people" - "Police system abolishment and reform."

Additional themes with three mentions each include: addressing homelessness; recreation facilities; recycling; everything is important / difficult to prioritize.

Question 3: In addition to the core services the City provides, additional priorities are identified through City Council's Strategic Plan, and a wide variety of guiding documents, strategies and policies – many of which received community review and input. Again, with competing priorities and limited resources, we need to consider trade-offs, priorities and what may need to move to a future year. Please rank the following Council Strategic Priorities in order of relative importance to you:

Council Strategic Priority	Average Score (1=highest priority)	Overall Rank
Total responses: 744		
Maintaining and enhancing facilities, infrastructure and public spaces	2.69	1
Advancing sustainable transportation and accessibility	3.32	2
Supporting delivery of affordable housing, and streamlining affordable housing development applications	3.78	3

Effectiveness as a City organization, including being visionary and innovative in use of resources and delivery of services	4.24	4
Supporting development of the local economy, arts and culture	4.27	5
Advancing climate action through the Seven Bold Steps	4.28	6
Advancing social inclusion and equity, including Reconciliation and community engagement	5.08	7

A total of 56 comments were provided by those who chose “other, please specify.” Below is a summary of the key themes across the comments. In some cases, several themes have been applied to one individual response, based on the content; this means that a single response can be counted multiple times.

Theme	# of Mentions	Sample Comments
Not municipal government jurisdiction / general opposition	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “most of those options aren't City Hall's responsibility, and shouldn't be listed” - “local government needs to focus on local needs, higher levels of government have greater resources” - “Council should focus on items that are the responsibility of municipal government rather than focusing on items that really are the responsibility of provincial and federal government.”
Lower taxes / balance the budget	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Everything should be done based on financial considerations” - “Provide a balanced budget and freeze all city staff wages” - “lower taxes”
Public safety / crime	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Your top priority should be the safety and protection of all your citizens” - “Public security”
Address homelessness & substance use	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Homelessness and drug abuse.” - “Creating neighbourhood houses and more safe spaces for disenfranchised individuals and families as well as streamlining substance use and

		treatment services and helping offset private pay costs for folks not on disability assistance"
Address traffic	4	- "...every year this city gets more and more congested because the city wants to block off streets and make it harder on everyone. We need to fix that." - "Drastically reduce truck traffic on McBride, Brunette and Front St."

Additional themes with three mentions each include: childcare / daycare; support for police / first responders; all are important / hard to rank.

Question 4: The City's Capital Budget is separate from service delivery (operating budget), and includes the purchase, construction, and investments in City facilities, infrastructure and physical assets. These are generally the larger projects that involve the construction and maintenance of physical structures, etc. Again, considering financial constraints and competing priorities, what areas of capital investment are most important to you? Please rank the following:

Capital Investment Priority	Average Score (1=highest priority)	Overall Rank
Total responses: 743		
Maintenance of existing infrastructure / replacement of aging infrastructure	1.97	1
Building new facilities and infrastructure	2.99	2
Prioritizing capital projects that advance sustainable transportation	3.00	3
Prioritizing building affordable housing	3.22	4
Prioritizing capital projects that contribute to climate action and advance the Seven Bold Steps	3.48	5

A total of 43 comments were provided by those who chose "other, please specify." Below is a summary of the key themes across the comments. In some

cases, several themes have been applied to one individual response, based on the content; this means that a single response can be counted multiple times.

Theme	# of Mentions	Sample Comments
Lower taxes / don't increase spending / efficiency	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Do what makes sense. New structures can wait on a healthy budget" - "this is not the time to increase budget, focus on clean streets and infrastrure" - "Property tax implications"
Transportation-related	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Safe roads and sustainable transportation" - "safe streets / traffic calming" - "SIDEWALKS"
Outside municipal jurisdiction / responsibility of other levels of government	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I don't see local government capital investment in affordable housing as a municipal responsibility" - "climate action isn't a City responsibility, stop spending tax dollars on it"

Additional themes with three mentions each include: recycle depot; maintain existing infrastructure.

Question 5: Thinking about the top priorities you have identified in the previous questions, if you had to choose only one priority, what is the one thing that's most important to you?

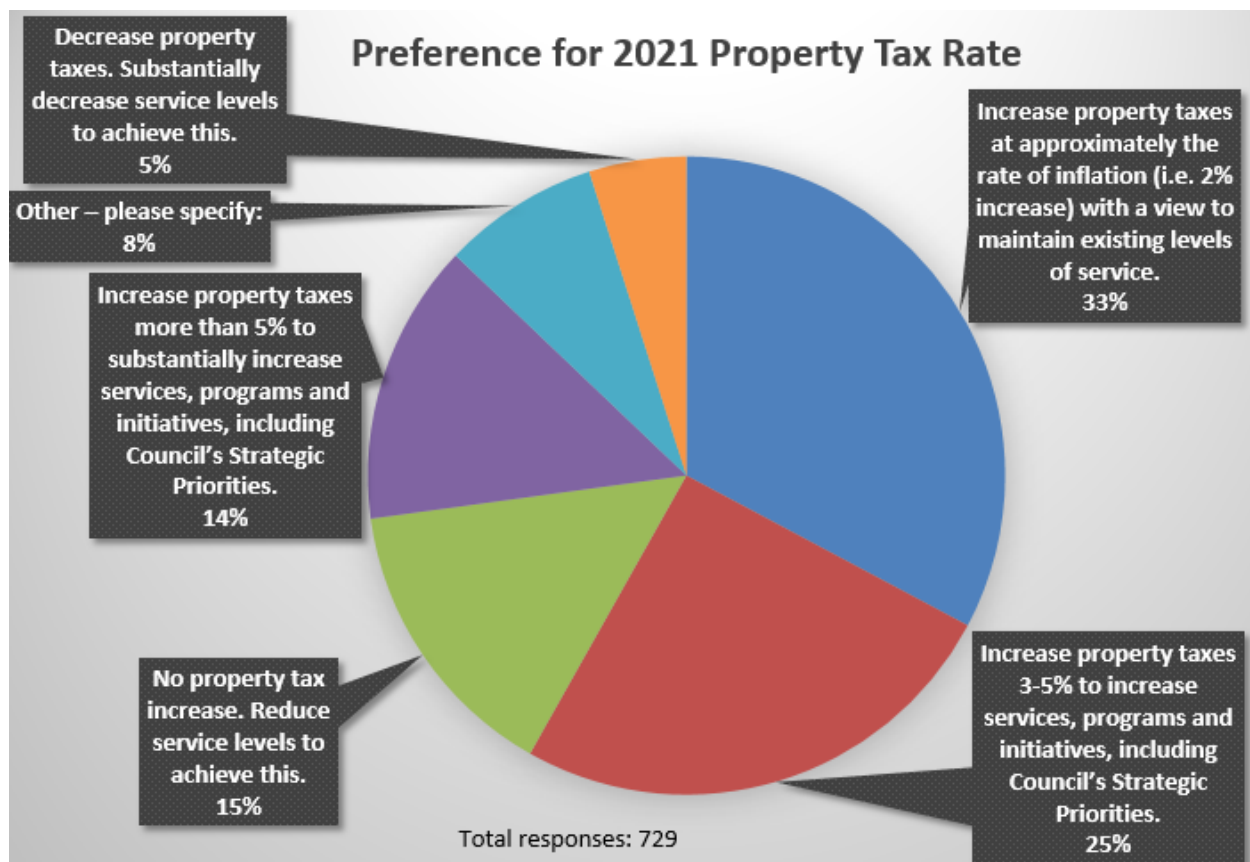
This was an open-text question, and a total of 603 comments were provided in response. Below is a summary of the key themes across the comments. In some cases, several themes have been applied to one individual response, based on the content; this means that a single response can be counted multiple times.

Themes with fewer than 20 mentions are not included for the purposes of this summary report. Additional themes with fewer than 20 mentions include: roads / traffic; reduce spending / cut taxes; childcare; support local economy.

Theme	# of Mentions	Sample Comments
Maintenance of existing infrastructure / replacement of aging	131	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "take care of city buildings and amenities so they last longer" - "Maintenance of existing infrastructure" - "Maintaining existing infrastructure....with priority on fiscal constraint" - "Efficient maintenance of existing assets"
Affordable housing / addressing homelessness	117	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Prioritizing the building of affordable housing." - "Housing affordability for those on social assistance and also for the working poor." - "Affordable housing" - "Affordable housing- dealing with new wests homeless and street problems"
Climate action / environment / sustainability	84	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Climate change and sustainability actions" - "Climate action is the most important for us and future generations." - "Anything and everything related to addressing climate change" - "Becoming a city with a negative carbon footprint"
Sustainable transportation / sidewalks / transit / reduce vehicle traffic	49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Sustainable transport projects" - "making sure people have reliable alternatives to cars for their transportation" - Affordable, reliable and accessible public transportation" - "Sustainable transportation. In particular all that goes into building out greenways"
Public safety / crime / support for police / first responders	43	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Police, fire and public safety" - "Community safety and support for first responders" - "More Law and Order, including bylaws." - "Fund and support your police department."
Infrastructure	38	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Infrastructure is most important. All initiatives depend on solid infrastructure, otherwise everything else can't be done." - "Improving infrastructure" - "Ensuring adequate infrastructure for an increasing City population."
Parks / Greenspace	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Public spaces like parks and repairing the pier" - "Looking after our parks, green spaces and outdoor areas, ... in a climate sustainable manner" - "Making our parks beautiful"

Transportation	24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "updating transportation routes." - "increasing effective transportation routes throughout the city" - "transportation"
Recreation facilities	22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "New sports facilities for our youth" - "Focus on improvement of recreational facilities and indoor community spaces and amenities" - "Operating recreation facilities and programs"
New pool / Canada Games replacement	22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Pool replacement project" - "Canada games pool replacement" - "New pool & community centre"
New facilities	21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "new facilities and infrastructure" - "Building new facilities and infrastructure" - "Maintaining and building new facilities and support job growth"

Question 6: Consider the top priorities you have identified above for City operations (services, programs, initiatives), and again keep in mind the financial challenges the City and many residents and local businesses are facing because of the pandemic. With these factors in mind, when it comes to property taxes what is your preference for the tax rate for 2021 as it relates generally to service levels?



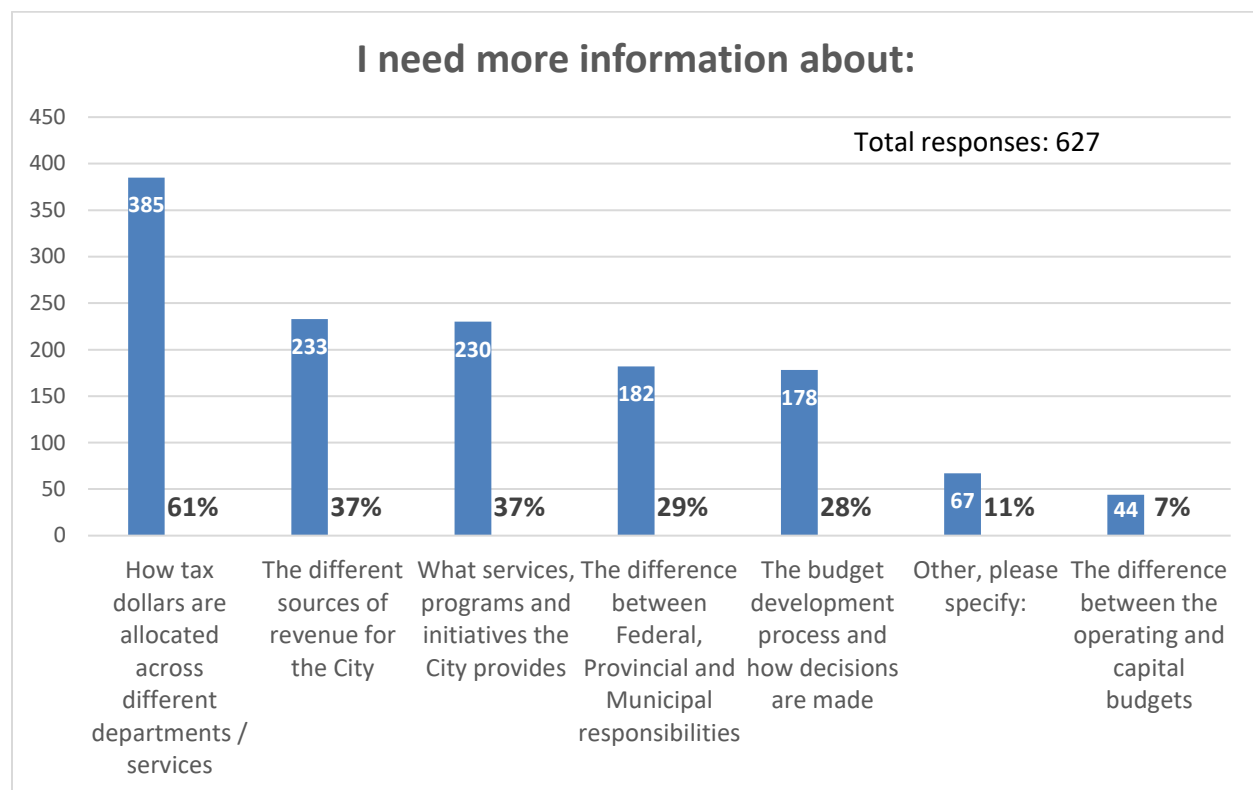
Of the 18% who selected “other,” a total of 58 comments were provided. Below is a summary of the key themes across the comments. In some cases, several themes have been applied to one individual response, based on the content; this means that a single response can be counted multiple times.

Theme	# of Mentions	Sample Comments
No tax increase / balance the budget	14	- “No property tax increase. No reduction in services. Emphasis on more efficiencies to keep service levels or improve them”

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "No increase because of Covid, and the high incomes of city hall staff." - "Leave property taxes alone for families and increase taxes and development charges for development companies!"
Review staff wages/salaries / cut wages/positions	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "no more than 4% increase - I think the city can find savings by reducing its headcount and keeping salaries/benefits in check - salaries are growing way too fast" - "... review the excess City positions making over \$100,000 in salary." - "Decrease city hall payroll"
Find efficiencies / reduce overhead	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Look for efficiencies within the City without increasing the Tax that is already too high" - "Improve Efficiency."
Decrease taxes	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "decrease property taxes, decrease non-essential, non-core service budgets to achieve" - "Decrease property taxes due to covid economic hardship."
Find new revenue sources / innovative ways to fund (i.e. public-private partnerships	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "in addition to raising taxes, apply for more federal/provincial grants and look at other revenue generation opportunities." - "Looking at different ways to generate money- ie anvil centre or FRDC"
Stick to core services / basics	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "If required , the rate of inflation is reasonable , if it is not needed don't raise taxes. Taxes should be to run the city , not solve the world problems." - "Considering the present situation of poor economic health and unemployment, I suggest stay to the basics without any increase this fiscal year."

Additional themes with three mentions each include: increase taxes to enhance police/fire/public safety; stop wasteful spending; OK with substantial increase (7%-plus).

Question 7: When it comes to the City's budget, what do you need more information about? (select all that apply)



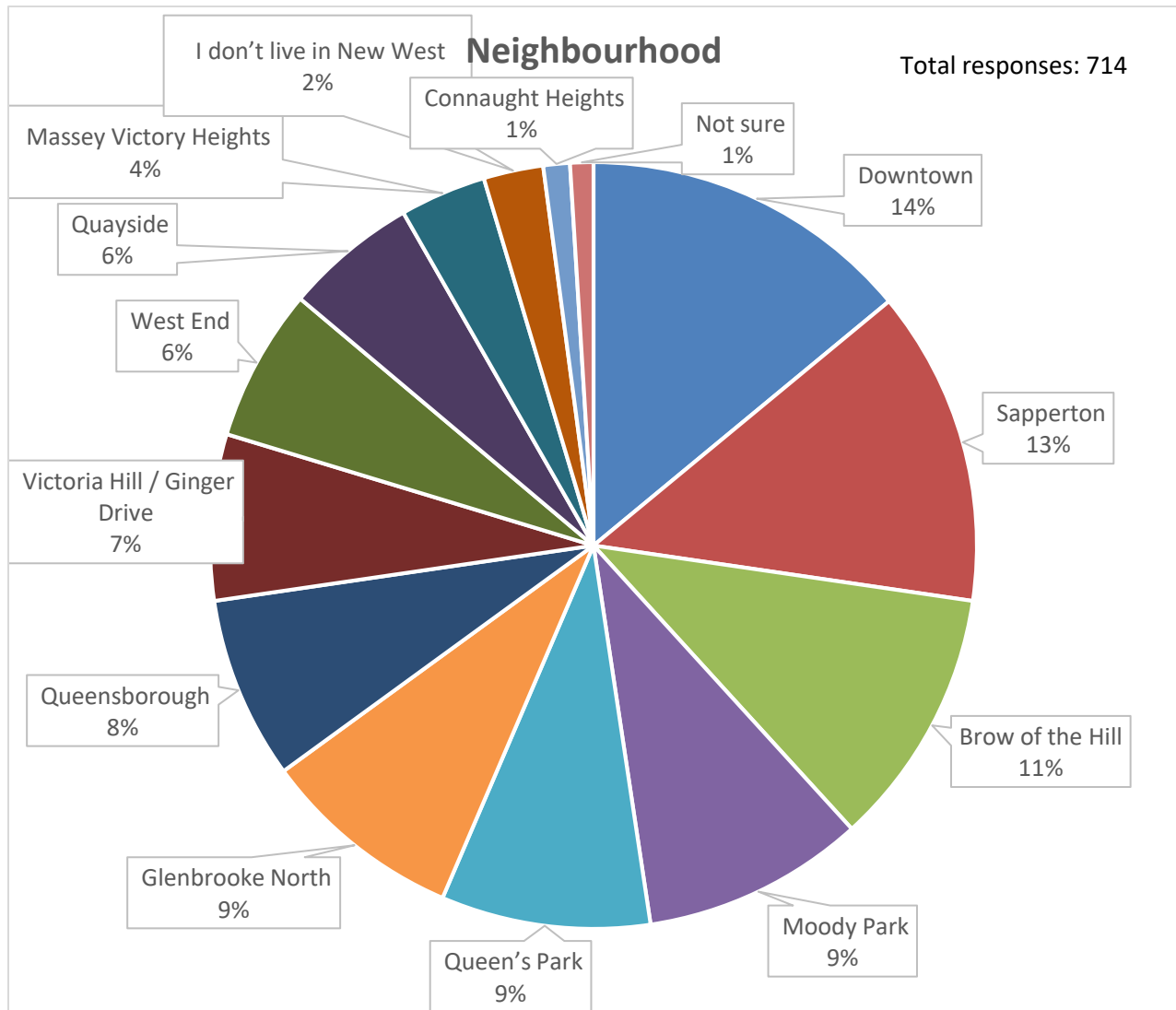
Of the 11% who selected "other," a total of 67 comments were provided. Below is a summary of the key themes across the comments. In some cases, several themes have been applied to one individual response, based on the content; this means that a single response can be counted multiple times.

Theme	# of Mentions	Sample Comments
Staff/Council salaries / wage increases	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "wages, benefits, and paid-for expenses for city government officials" - "How the salaries of city managers compare to other municipalities." - "Where does salary increases fall into this raise in taxes to support the City strategic plan, initiatives, services, programs, priorities."
Questions about Council strategic priorities	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "More information about how the Council's Strategic Priorities were determined"

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "How the 7 Steps affect other areas of the budget" - "more frequent public reporting throughout the year on implementation and costs of each strategic priority/initiative"
Opportunities for efficiencies	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "What is the city doing to cut costs, find efficiencies, kill low benefit programs, etc." - "how the city is being efficient with admin and operating costs"
How New West taxes compare with other cities	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Tax rates across different municipalities" - "Cost comparison with similar cities"
Jurisdictional questions	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "What are costs the City is assuming that should be the responsibility of other levels of government (ie. homelessness, climate change, etc)" - "the city needs to know the difference between federal, provincial & municipal responsibilities"

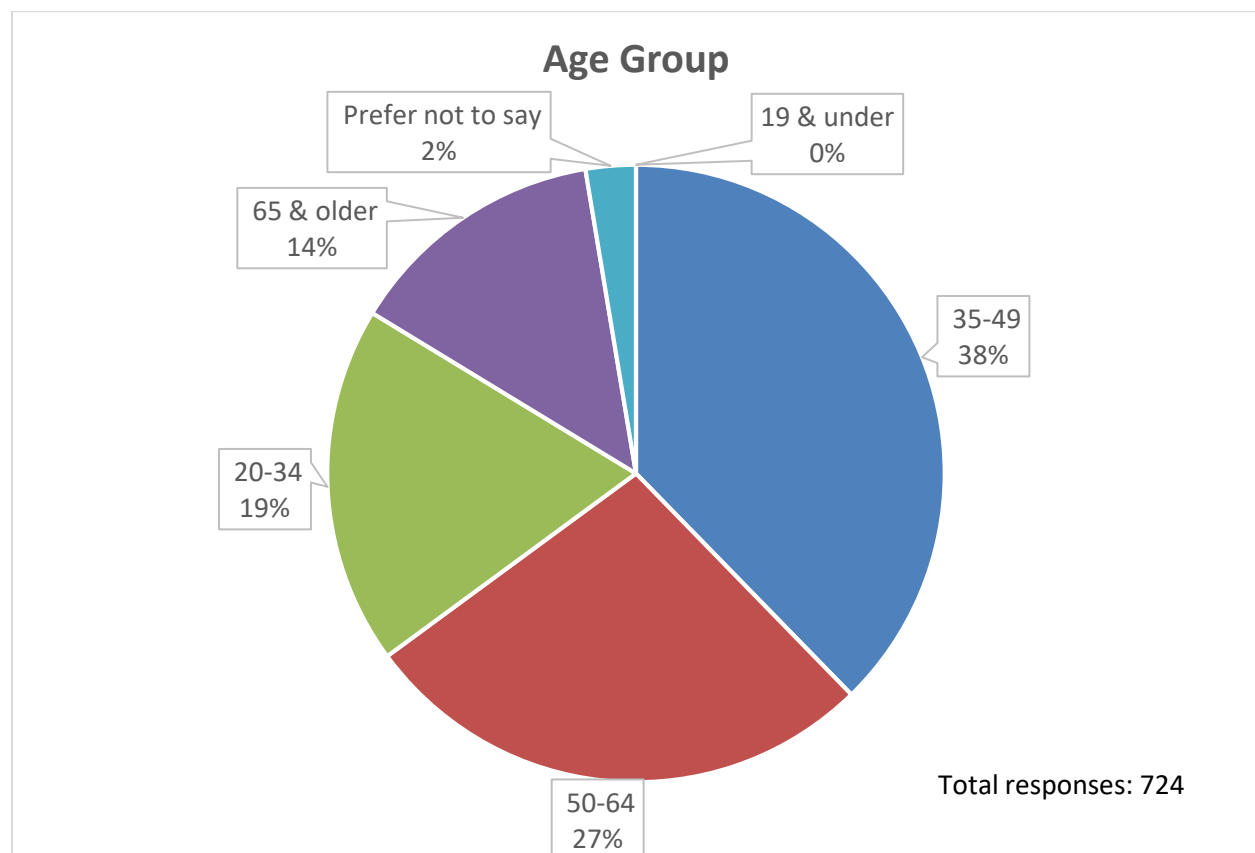
One additional theme with three mentions was more information about the police budget.

3. About Participants














Connections to the City (select all that apply)

Choice	Percentage	Count	
Homeowner in New West	70.08%	506	
Residential tenant in New West	27.42%	198	
Employee in New West	14.40%	104	
Business owner in New West	6.37%	46	
Other, please specify:	3.74%	27	
Student in New West	2.77%	20	
Commercial (including rental buildings) / industrial property owner in New West	1.52%	11	
Total	100%	722	



Additional Demographic Information (select any / all that apply)

Choice	Percentage	Count	
There are children (under age 18) in my household	30.75%	214	
I was born outside of Canada	20.26%	141	
None of the above	19.68%	137	
There are seniors in my household	19.54%	136	
I or someone in my household has a disability	10.92%	76	
Prefer not to say	9.34%	65	
I identify as LGBTQ2S+	9.34%	65	
I identify as a person of colour	9.20%	64	
Other, please specify:	5.60%	39	
I moved to Canada within the last 5 years	3.45%	24	
I identify as Indigenous	2.59%	18	
Total	100%	696	

Demographic Analysis

Compared to the demographic profile of New Westminster from the 2016 Census, most neighbourhood participation rates were proportional (less than 5% +/- Census). There were two exceptions: Brow of the Hill residents were underrepresented among survey respondents and Queen's Park residents were overrepresented.

As we see in most City of New Westminster surveys, residential property owners were overrepresented (70% of survey participants; 56% of residents according to Census), and tenants were underrepresented (27% of survey participants; 44% of residents according to Census).

For age ranges of survey participants, there were no responses from residents age 19 or younger, so this age group was highly underrepresented. Two age groups were overrepresented in the survey: 35-49 year olds and 50-64 year olds. Other age groups were proportionately represented.

In terms of other demographic information provided by survey participants, we can compare with Census data on Indigenous, immigrant, new immigrant (arrived within past five years) and visible minority proportions of the New Westminster community. Based on this comparison, immigrants and visible minorities were underrepresented among survey respondents. Indigenous people and new immigrants were proportionately represented.

4. Next Steps

Preliminary survey themes were presented to Council at its regular meeting on October 26, 2020, and have been referenced in the subsequent budget workshops with Council on November 16 and November 23. The engagement findings have also been shared with the community via the City's Be Heard New West online engagement platform and through the City's social media channels.

City staff across departments have been asked to apply the engagement findings in their draft budget submissions for 2021, and City Council has been asked to consider whether they see the draft budgets as addressing the priorities identified by engagement participants.

This more fulsome report will be presented to Council at its November 30 regular meeting, and posted on the [Budget 2021 webpage](#), along with the survey report that includes all of the verbatim feedback provided by participants. City staff will continue to reference the engagement input through Council's deliberations on the 2021 budget. The next Council workshop on the budget is scheduled for December 7, 2020 and is open for members of the public to watch online.